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Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide

Pluralist Philosophy in the Twenty-First
Century

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2 The Emergence of the Concept of the Analytic Tradition as a Form of Philosophical Self-Consciousness

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1. ON THE VERY IDEA OF AN ANALYTIC TRADITION IN PHILOSOPHY

It is not uncommon for people to speak of something called “analytic philosophy.” We will worry in a moment about what sort of philosophy this label is supposed to single out. Let us begin just by noting one of the most straightforward ways in which people will sometimes try to pick out analytic philosophy from other sorts of philosophy—perhaps the most superficial way of all of trying to do this—namely by trying to say something about where on the planet analytic philosophy has and has not flourished. For example, we are apt to be told that analytic philosophy has been comparatively dominant for much of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom and, since the middle of that same century in the United States, as well as in other English-speaking countries, and even in many of the Scandinavian nations. Conversely, we are equally likely to be told that various forms of non-analytic philosophy—sometimes termed “continental philosophy”—at least until very recently, have been no less dominant in France, in most parts of Germany, and in many of the remaining parts of Continental Europe. Anyone who makes statements such as these must be relying upon some principle other than a merely geographical one for distinguishing the two sorts of philosophy at issue here.

Whatever that further principle is, in recent years many have taken offense to the very idea of such a distinction. Through such ways of speaking, we are told, countless diverse strands of the Western philosophical tradition since Kant are shoehorned into a pair of intellectually uninformative rubrics—one of them turning on the supposedly crucial “analytic” aspect of the philosophical work in question, the other on the arguably even more awkward geographical rubric of the supposedly “continental” feature of the philosophy in question. Surely there is much to sympathize with in such a complaint. A host of difficulties necessarily attend any effort to deploy a pair of classificatory terms that are as orthogonal to one another as are the categories “analytic” and “continental.” On the surface, this would appear

to be no more promising a principle for classifying forms of philosophy into two fundamentally different kinds than would be the suggestion that we should go about classifying human beings into those that are vegetarian and those that are Romanian.

There are other reasons to be suspicious of the classificatory categories at work here. The employment of the term “continental philosophy” arguably evolved historically in order for there to be some single thing to which analytic philosophy as a whole could be opposed—while leaving unclarified (and, without implicit reference to analytic philosophy, unclarifiable) wherein the unity of the contrasting category of (“continental”) philosophy is supposed to lie.¹ As a matter of practice, this meant that the unity of “continental” philosophy was in fact construed by most analytic philosophers through recourse to a *via negativa*: analytic philosophers specified for themselves what continental philosophy was, in effect, by thinking of it as an enormous garbage bin into which any outwardly apparently non-analytic form of post-Kantian philosophy was to be dumped. As with the contents of any garbage can, so too with this one: after a great many items came to be tossed into the can, it was no longer possible to discern what united them all, without reference to something not to be found among the contents of the can—namely, an appreciation of the aims and interests of those doing the tossing.

Whatever original appearance of neatness and appropriateness may have attached to the respective geographical locations of the two traditions has largely dissipated over the past several decades. There are many philosophy departments in the United States and the United Kingdom now specializing in so-called “continental” philosophy. Some of the leading academic positions in the Francophone world are held today by French analytic philosophers, and the German Society for Analytic Philosophy now attracts a level of attendance at its conferences of which it can and does proudly boast. These and other developments have rendered it increasingly difficult to specify these two traditions via anything as superficial as a principle of geographical location.²

For these and other reasons, it has come to seem clear to some that the very idea of a distinctively analytic tradition in philosophy should be abandoned. This is not the conclusion that I shall wish to draw from the above considerations. Nevertheless, it is a matter of some delicacy and difficulty to say with any accuracy what is distinctive about the tradition in question—at least if one wishes to do so in a manner that is both historically informed and philosophically non-partisan.³ With these caveats in mind, I propose to address the following question: what would it be to characterize what is distinctive about the analytic mode of philosophy from within, rather than from without? Specifically, what are analytic philosophy’s own answers to the following two questions: (1) What is analytic philosophy? and (2) what is an analytic philosopher? We shall call these our *guiding questions*. If we wish to make progress with our guiding questions, we need to look at very

different sorts of statements from analytic philosophers regarding what philosophy is—ones that are better suited to bringing out what is distinctively *analytic* about the sort of philosophy in question. But there now is a further difficulty we encounter here. Philosophers concerned to issue anything resembling such a proclamation often also take the occasion to try to *prescribe* what analytic philosophy *should* be, as they conceive it, as a matter of philosophical doctrine. Consider the following three representative cases:

- (1) At the outset of the tradition, the early Moore and Russell each understood what was distinctive in their new philosophical point of departure to lie not just in their new method of analysis, but equally in the power of that method to demonstrate that the philosophical doctrines of holism and idealism, which they opposed, were false and that philosophical doctrines of atomism and realism, which they sought to champion, were true.
- (2) In a second major phase of the tradition, Carnap thought that the analytic philosophy of his day partly reached its maturity not only by practicing a new method of philosophical elucidation, but by showing, through its application, that a comparatively resolute form of empiricism (according to which most truths were a posteriori) was true, while also revealing that the empiricist must make one crucial concession to the rationalist (namely, that the truths of logic and mathematics were a priori, after all).
- (3) In its most recent phase, many a representative of the analytic tradition today thinks that anyone who has appropriately internalized the canons of rigor that analytic philosophy seeks to uphold ought to concede (even if it requires one to issue a great many philosophical promissory notes that we at the moment have no idea exactly how to cash) that some form of scientific naturalism is the only intellectually respectable position open to a serious analytic philosopher.

Despite the predominance of these very specific doctrinal commitments at each of these three phases, at that very same moment in the history of the analytic tradition there were other philosophers (whom we today regard as belonging no less to that tradition) who were determined to contest these very doctrines. Moreover, even if one restricts oneself to the three phases of the tradition mentioned above, it is worth noticing how dramatically different the supposed doctrinal upshot of a commitment to (something nominally referred to at all three of these phases in the tradition as) “the analytic method in philosophy” was taken to be. What this shows is that doctrinal categories such as realism, empiricism, scientific naturalism, etc., are simply inadequate terms for specifying what unifies and distinguishes the analytic tradition as a whole. The nature of analytic philosophy simply cannot be captured in terms of a shared assent to anything having the form of a philosophical “-ism.”⁴ What it is to be an analytic philosopher has more

to do with a certain conception of *how* one ought to do philosophy than it does with *what* one ought to conclude on the basis of so doing it—with *the character of the activity* of philosophizing rather than with *the body of doctrine* in which it issues.

Attempts by analytic philosophers to articulate their conceptions of what is distinctive about analytic philosophy generally also express a particular attitude toward the traditional questions of philosophy and which of them are worth answering—thereby usually also furnishing clues regarding how this particular analytic philosopher would go about answering some of these questions and why she would reject others (or, in the case of certain figures, why she is determined to unmask them all as based on either confusion or nonsense). So in the cases of a great many authors, it would be artificial to attempt to separate what they deem to be matters of method from matters of doctrine. But even if these two aspects of what they consider analytic philosophy to be are often inextricably intertwined, it remains possible to select representative quotations that help to highlight what various of them at their particular junctures in the tradition take to be distinctive about the manner in which they think philosophy ought to be practiced.

Such statements tend to be produced under the felt pressure to ward off some alternative conception of how philosophy ought to be practiced. Thus they are akin to *bulletins from the front*—statements written in the heat of a contest to determine what analytic philosophy is to be, in which each contestant attempts to carry the day for what she is seeking to initiate, or inherit, or redirect, in undertaking to do analytic philosophy in her own distinctive way. Here are some characteristic statements of this sort:

A proposition is composed not of words, nor yet of thoughts, but of concepts. . . . They are incapable of change; and the relation into which they enter with the knowing subject implies no action or reaction. . . . It seems necessary, then, to regard the world as formed of concepts. These are the only objects of knowledge. . . . From our description of a judgment, there must, then, disappear all reference either to our mind or to the world. . . . The nature of the judgment is more ultimate than either, and less ultimate only than the nature of its constituents—the nature of the concept or logical idea. (G. E. Moore)⁵

Modern analytical empiricism [. . .] differs from that of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume by its incorporation of mathematics and its development of a powerful logical technique. It is thus able, in regard to certain problems, to achieve definite answers, which have the quality of science rather than of philosophy. It has the advantage, as compared with the philosophies of the system-builders, of being able to tackle its problems one at a time, instead of having to invent at one stroke a block theory of the whole universe. Its methods, in this respect, resemble those of science. I have no doubt that, in so far as philosophical knowledge is possible, it is by such methods that it must be sought. (Bertrand Russell)⁶

Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. (The word “philosophy” must mean something which stands above or below, but not beside the natural sciences.) The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions”, but to make propositions clear. Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred. (Early Wittgenstein)⁷

In most cases future philosophers will have to be scientists because it will be necessary for them to have a certain subject matter on which to work—and they will find cases of confused or vague meaning particularly in the foundations of the sciences. . . . I am convinced that our view of the nature of philosophy will be generally adopted in the future; and the consequence will be that it will no longer be attempted to teach philosophy as a system. We shall teach the special sciences and their history in the true philosophical spirit of searching for clarity and, by doing this, we shall develop the philosophical minds of future generations. (Schlick)⁸

Logic is the method for doing philosophy. [. . .] There is no such thing as philosophy in the shape of a theory, i.e. a system of distinct propositions separate from science. Doing philosophy means nothing else but this: to clarify the concepts and propositions of science through logical analysis. (Carnap)⁹

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically ‘that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such’—whatever that may mean. . . . And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (Later Wittgenstein)¹⁰

This book offers what may with reservations be described as a theory of the mind. But it does not give new information about minds. We possess already a wealth of information about minds, information which is neither derived from, nor upset by, the arguments of philosophers. The philosophical arguments which constitute this book are intended not to increase what we know about minds, but to rectify the logical geography of the knowledge which we already possess. (Gilbert Ryle)¹¹

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In view of the prevalence of the slogan ‘ordinary language’, and of such names as ‘linguistic’ or ‘analytic’ philosophy or ‘the analysis of language’, one thing needs specially emphasizing to counter misunderstandings. When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or ‘meanings’, whatever they might be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena. For this reason I think it might be better to use for this way of doing philosophy, some less misleading name than those given above—for instance, ‘linguistic phenomenology’, only that is rather a mouthful. (J.L. Austin)¹²

Metaphysics has been often revisionary, and less often descriptive. Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world. . . . How should it differ from what is called philosophical, or logical, or conceptual analysis? It does not differ in kind of intention, but only in scope and generality. Aiming to lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure, it can take far less for granted than a more limited and partial conceptual inquiry. Hence, also, a certain difference in method. Up to a point, the reliance upon a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy. But the discriminations we can make, and the connections we can establish, in this way, are not general enough and not far-reaching enough to meet the full metaphysical demand for understanding. For when we ask how we use this or that expression, our answers, however revealing at a certain level, are apt to assume, and not to expose, those general elements of structure which the metaphysician wants revealed. The structure he seeks does not readily display itself on the surface of language, but lies submerged. (P.F. Strawson)¹³

I have . . . an unswerving belief in external things—people, nerve endings, sticks, stones. . . . I believe also, if less firmly, in atoms and electrons and in classes. How is all this robust realism to be reconciled with the barren scene that I have just been depicting? The answer is naturalism: the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described. (W.V. Quine)¹⁴

The first of these statements is from Moore’s aforementioned essay, “The Nature of Judgment.” Though it expresses the essential conviction that Moore took to distinguish his philosophical project from that of his predecessors and it seeks to show how that conviction is to be secured through a different approach to philosophical problems, it still retains much of the flavor of traditional philosophy. The second quotation is one of the later of Russell’s many attempts to define and call for the continuation of the movement that he considered Moore, Frege, and himself (among others) to

be initiating. At the center of this conception of it is the idea that philosophy should take the mathematical and natural sciences as a model. Russell's original conception of the way in which this was to proceed took it for granted that, even while doing so, philosophy would remain in some respects importantly distinct from science. The third quotation is from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*—the first of many influential works within the analytic tradition concerned to take up a position toward the prior chapters of that tradition akin to that which Kant had assumed with regard to the early modern tradition. Like Kant, early Wittgenstein sought to show how the entire collective enterprise had taken a wrong turn and hence why a new beginning is now required. Here, as with Kant, an insistence on the sharp difference between the character of the questions treated by the philosopher and those treated by the natural sciences comes again to play a central role.

The fourth and fifth quotations—from Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap respectively—are representative of a number of the thinkers in the succeeding generation who struggled to incorporate the critical edge of Wittgenstein's apparently devastating, tradition-exploding ideas into an undertaking retaining the overall outline of Russell's programmatic, tradition-inaugurating ambitions—thereby introducing considerable internal tension into their conception of philosophy. They are eager to retain Russell's idea that philosophy has a special kinship with the natural sciences, and yet also want to agree with Wittgenstein that the propositions of philosophy must be sharply distinguished from those of the natural sciences—and indeed from empirical propositions in general.

In the second half of the above collection of quotations, we have to do with reactions to the first generations of analytic philosophy. The task at that point had become one of redefining an ongoing tradition. In the sixth quotation, we have a characteristic reflection on the nature of philosophy by the later Wittgenstein. Here we encounter a thinker who is in equal measure concerned, first, to repudiate the inheritance of his early work by Schlick and Carnap (and thus to insist that philosophy must be conducted in a spirit completely alien to that of the natural sciences); second, to move beyond that work itself, on the grounds that it failed to live up to its aspiration to fully break with the preceding tradition (and thus to repudiate that work in a very different way from that of its most outspoken critics); and third, to retain and extend the philosophical aspirations at the heart of that early work (and thus to emphasize that the later work can be understood only against the background of the earlier).

In the final four quotations, we encounter four alternative proposals for alternative new beginnings for analytic philosophy—each of which seeks to offer a new form of positive program for philosophy, and each of which draws inspiration from sources that come from outside analytic philosophy. The first three of these quotations (from Ryle, Austin, and Strawson) share with the later Wittgenstein the idea that philosophy ought to do justice to the most fundamental aspects of our everyday understanding of

ourselves, the world, and the medium-sized dry goods (as ordinary objects were nicely referred to) and other persons we find there. Ryle harks back to Frege and Wittgenstein; Austin especially to Moore. Both Ryle and Austin were trained as scholars of ancient philosophy and both strove, albeit in very different ways, to reincorporate into the analytic tradition certain neglected insights they find in Plato and Aristotle. Austin, Ryle, and Strawson all belonged to a generation of analytic philosophers who had begun to become suspicious of an overreliance on technical tools in philosophy. Paul Grice later offered a diagnosis of the waning enthusiasm among certain members of the postwar generation for inventing new forms of logical notation (along with an increasing interest in ordinary language) in the following terms:

I have little doubt that a contribution towards a gradual shift of style was also made by a growing apprehension that philosophy is all too often being squeezed out of operation by technology; to borrow words from Ramsey, that apparatus which began life as a system of devices to combat *woolliness* has now become an instrument of *scholasticism*.¹⁵

Others, however, in that same postwar generation strongly dissented from this burgeoning consensus and deplored the depreciation of formal logic that had become so fashionable in the work of many of their contemporaries. Perhaps the most influential of these dissenters was W. V. O. Quine. Carnap and others had viewed the tools of logic as providing the instruments for an articulation of the aim of philosophy that would allow it to continue to differentiate itself from natural science. Quine championed the position that philosophy and science should be regarded as two aspects of a single enterprise—intertwined partners caught up in a single form of pursuit: the pursuit of truth. While his contemporary Strawson looked back especially to Kant for philosophical stratagems designed to vindicate our ordinary conceptual scheme, Quine looked sideways to developments in empirical psychology and physics to overturn that scheme. Whereas Strawson sought to recover the Kantian project of reconciliation in philosophy (making room again for the idea that we can, without contradiction, conceive of ourselves as both material bodies and free agents), Quine sought to revivify the Humean project of debunking the ordinary man's view of the world (breathing new life into something akin to the very sorts of naturalism that Frege and the early Wittgenstein sought to exorcise from philosophy). Indeed, much of postwar twentieth-century analytic philosophy can be seen as involving a contest between this standard analytic conception of what it is to be a Humean (debunking our ordinary view of the world in the light of a properly naturalized understanding of what it *can* contain) and the opposed standard analytic conception of what it is to be a Kantian (seeking to respect *both* the natural-scientific understanding and our everyday understanding of the world).

Each of the ten statements on the list above was made by an important analytic philosopher at a very particular point in his career. Each gives expression to a conception of analytic philosophy that proved to be influential for a time, thereby affecting the trajectory of the analytic tradition as a whole. When taken together, they bring out certain characteristic features of the tradition. No one of them, however, suffices as a summary of what “analytic philosophy” as such is. None of them articulates a conception of philosophy—let alone of what makes a particular sort of philosophy *analytic*—that they would have expected the other nine authors and most of their contemporaries to endorse, at least not without considerable qualification. Each is speaking for himself, attempting to give voice to his own distinctive conception, at the time of writing—a conception that, in many of their cases, underwent one or more dramatic shifts over the course of their careers. Thus each statement offers a characterization of what philosophy is that is simply far too distinctive, too idiosyncratic, and too historically indexed to a particular moment in the unfolding of the analytic tradition to serve as a blanket characterization of what makes analytic philosophy as a whole something that might plausibly be considered a unitary intellectual movement.

The statements above appear in roughly chronological order. With respect to at least the first five of them, at the time of their writing, there was not yet anything they were aware of (and to which they could have thought of themselves as contributing) that could have been designated as “the analytic tradition.” The very possibility of discerning anything of the sort requires the attainment of some historical distance from its beginnings, hence of a standpoint from which one is able to compare and contrast an extended stretch of this development in philosophy with other philosophical traditions, such as those to which the early analytic philosophers were reacting—such as German Neo-Kantianism, Austrian Realism, British Idealism, and American Pragmatism.

The history of the relations between analytic philosophy and these neighboring traditions is no less tangled than that of analytic philosophy itself. Analytic philosophy arose partly as a reaction to these other forms of philosophy—and, yet, as so often in the history of philosophy, it bears deep traces of the very traditions it sought to resist and replace. No less significantly, some later practitioners in the analytic tradition sought to incorporate insights from those same traditions—insights they thought their analytic predecessors had either unduly neglected or over-hastily rejected. This subsequently gave rise to the emergence of developments in the analytic tradition that would have astonished many of its earlier figures—bearing such labels as Analytic Kantianism, Analytic Hegelianism, and Analytic Pragmatism. Russell and Moore understood the tradition they were seeking to inaugurate in philosophy to be a revolt against Idealism—and against Kant, Hegel, and the British Idealists in particular. A half-century later, Sellars and Strawson saw themselves as trying to recover insights from Kantian

Idealism and to reincorporate them within the analytic tradition; while some contemporary analytic philosophers, such as John McDowell and Robert Brandom, in the generation thereafter, have become no less concerned to recover and revive what they regard as philosophically valuable and vital in Hegel. While Russell and Moore sought to distinguish themselves sharply from American Pragmatists like William James and John Dewey, and while the pragmatists of the next generation (such as C.I. Lewis) often tended to distinguish themselves sharply from their analytic contemporaries (such as Hans Reichenbach and Carnap), many recent analytic philosophers (notably Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty) see no essential tension between the best insights of analytic philosophy and Pragmatism, and seek to develop philosophical syntheses of elements drawn from each.

But these are all relatively recent developments, of which an early analytic philosopher could not have had any inkling. It is a historical truism to say that the early analytic philosophers themselves did not yet have (because they could not have had) a historical consciousness of their own work as forming the first chapter in a more extended intellectual adventure—an adventure that would eventually become what we now call “the analytic tradition.” Thus they could hardly have reflected on that tradition, or compared and contrasted it with other equally sustained philosophical traditions. Such a perspective on the significance of their own accomplishment would have required of the early analytic philosophers that they be able to step outside of their own moment in time and travel to a moment in the philosophical future from which they could assess how their own chapter in the history of philosophy formed the first chapter of something on the order of a tradition. This important point, upon a moment’s reflection, is an obvious one, but it is often overlooked or at least underappreciated: The founding fathers of analytic philosophy did not take themselves, and could not have taken themselves, to be founding what we today think of as the analytic tradition. In thinking of them as analytic philosophers, we think of them in a way that they could not have thought of themselves.

This is not to say that the authors of our first five quotations—G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, the early Ludwig Wittgenstein, Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap—had no interest in opening up a new chapter in the history of philosophy. They each wanted to change philosophy in a way that would affect how everyone after them who might venture to practice it would (or at least should) do so. Each sought to transform philosophy, and each ended up figuring in a cumulative development that, as a whole, did transform philosophy—or at any rate philosophy as practiced in the Anglophone mainstream of the discipline—into something new. So, in one sense, each can be said to have contributed materially to a revolution in philosophy. But, in another sense, none of them can simply be said to have authored that revolution, not only because the transformation in question was a collective effort to which they all contributed, but also because none of them would have regarded most of what followed as realizing their original conception

of what they sought to initiate. The so-called “founders of analytic philosophy”, in this sense, did not know what they were actually founding. They could not have foreseen—nor, at least in some instances, would they even have been willing to endorse—many subsequent developments within that tradition. In some cases, they would have had difficulty even comprehending how what followed could be supposed to represent an inheritance and continuation of their own endeavors.

The experience of being unable to comprehend a later stage in the development of the tradition is something that a number of major figures experienced in a fashion that was devastatingly immediate and personal. The sense of having been betrayed by a member of the next generation, or even of one’s own, sometimes played out very painfully between pairs of individuals who were initially as intellectually close to one another as one can imagine—sometimes standing to one another in the relation of teacher to student, or that of master to disciple, or that of comrades in arms. Indeed, a pattern of this sort, of initial intellectual proximity giving way to subsequently unbridgeable tradition-splintering differences, came to be a recurring feature of the analytic tradition. Some of the most dramatic cases included such pairs as Russell and Wittgenstein, Carnap and Quine, Quine and Donald Davidson, Austin and Paul Grice, and Putnam and X (where, to mention only some of the important instances, X at different points equaled Reichenbach, Quine, Fodor, and Rorty). Ideological statements about the nature of analytic philosophy often seek to give the impression that philosophical personality plays a much lesser role in the practice of this sort of philosophy and that the respective temperaments of its practitioners are fully subordinated to shared philosophical methods and canons of argument. In point of fact, however, some of the most riveting moments in its history have involved dramatic clashes of personality—between initially apparently likeminded individuals, starting out with common sets of aims and concerns and ending up gravely at odds with each other, at least philosophically and sometimes even personally.

Some might contend that this historical fact is merely a bit of trivia having no real significance for an understanding of the nature of the analytic tradition in philosophy. Others might want to claim that it is an important fact that reveals something fundamental about the nature of analytic philosophy. We need not decide this question here. Its relevance to our present purpose is simply that the early analytic philosophers themselves were in no position to have a view about the matter, for in order to be able to assess the possible significance of any such factual feature of a tradition, the larger shape of that tradition must already be in view. None of the first five philosophers cited above were in any position to assess how their own contributions would bear on and be further subsumed by the efforts of the later five authors quoted above—let alone to be able to apprehend the cumulative efforts of these ten philosophers, each of whose work makes up only a single stone in the overall mosaic of the analytic tradition.

That overall image at least begins to come into view with the addition of the contributions of the generation of mid-century thinkers who are the authors of our five later quotations. They were writing at a time when something like our contemporary idea of this tradition was beginning to emerge. There was at that point already a substantial tradition of some sort well underway—one whose physiognomy could be discerned in any number of overlapping yet divergent ways. Nevertheless, as in the case of the first five quotations, we do not take these five later quotations, either individually or collectively, to stand as or add up to a characterization of “analytic philosophy as such” (whatever that might mean). Rather, we see them each and all to be expressions of particular conceptions of philosophy, each of which stands in some sort of significant continuity with some of the statements presented in our first five quotations. That is a difference; for unlike the first set of authors, these authors all see themselves as continuing something inaugurated by at least some (though not necessarily all) of our five earlier authors. Yet each such instance of significant continuity is folded within a discontinuity, which each author takes to be potentially transformative for the tradition that they all seek to continue.

None of the ten quotations can serve as an adequate or satisfactory answer to our guiding questions. Yet this collection of partially overlapping, crisscrossing, occasionally sharply diverging statements, taken together, does begin to reveal some of the shape of the tradition. It certainly displays some of the most characteristic features of the tradition’s images of itself—self-images that have vied with one another over the course of its history. The sheer diversity of these statements, however, may still (rightly) leave the reader feeling that we have yet to arrive at anything like a useful (let alone succinct) answer to either of our guiding questions. Where else might one look for such answers?

2. SOME ASPECTS OF THE IDEOLOGY OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

There are countless philosophy textbooks and encyclopedias in which members of the discipline deemed qualified to do so undertake to tell their reader just what analytic philosophy is. These accounts are often written by the sort of author one might call an *ideologue of analytic philosophy*. The sorts of answers such texts provide are not without interest. They, too, in a rather different way, tell us something about what analytic philosophy has been, or is now, or at least is now declared to be and to have always been.

In the account of an ideologue of analytic philosophy, we typically are confronted with the views of an author who is reasonably well acquainted with analytic philosophy and has an interest in practicing it (according to a certain understanding of what that means), but who on this occasion is standing back from this practice and delivering a programmatic statement

regarding its nature. The sort of programmatic statement here in question purports to provide a valid general description not simply of one individual's own ongoing practice of philosophy, but of something much broader, namely, the conception of philosophy that animates an entire tradition.

Such programmatic statements of what analytic philosophy is tend to take the form of persuasive definitions. On the one hand, they purport to define what analytic philosophy is; on the other, they seek to recommend the very way of doing philosophy that they purport to describe. In recent years, a great many cases in point have appeared in print. If one seeks to take one's bearings from this array of ideological pronouncements made by analytic philosophers on behalf of analytic philosophy regarding what analytic philosophy really is, the first thing that ought to strike one is how profoundly their pronouncements differ from one another.

One recurring theme is the idea that analytic philosophy bears a close relation to the natural sciences, or should take the natural sciences as its model, or perhaps even should come to regard itself as just one more—albeit unusually self-reflective and abstract—branch of natural science. This aspect of the ideology of analytic philosophy has had a number of very concrete institutional effects that have, in turn, occasioned various sorts of heated disagreement among analytic philosophers about the shape their own discipline should strive to assume. As analytic philosophers have self-consciously adopted methods of publication and other forms of institutionalization that characterize the sciences, it has inevitably developed in the ways those forms of publication and institutionalization promote. In particular, it has become increasingly stratified into ever multiplying subdisciplines of philosophical research (such as the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of perception, and the philosophy of action). Each of these, in turn, has spawned its own increasingly esoteric sub-literature of puzzle cases and niche controversies, published in professional journals addressed to an increasingly exclusive form of professional readership.

This has led to a situation in which, if someone wishes to claim professional competence in a given “area” of philosophy, she has to wonder whether this requires that she forfeit the better part of her philosophical life to staying on top of the growing body of journal literature devoted to that “area.” On a certain conception of what it is to have a suitably developed professional conscience, such a narrowing of one's philosophical focus has come to appear to be a compulsory feature of what it now means to be a serious analytic philosopher. This has significant consequences. The sheer amount of time and energy required thus “to professionalize oneself” in one of these sub-disciplines increasingly precludes the possibility of a single philosopher contributing significantly to several areas of philosophy at once. Yet the capacity to do just this was frequently held up, throughout much of the history of the tradition, as one sign of a genuinely philosophical mind.

These forms of institutionalization and professionalization within analytic philosophy have provoked a variety of counter-reactions. They have

led some major figures during their later years—perhaps most notably, Hilary Putnam—to push back against this development and to press the argument that the very possibility of doing path-breaking work in philosophy requires (what the Germans call) an *Übersicht*—a synoptic overview—of the whole of the subject.¹⁶ Others have argued that this tendency towards an ever-increasing speciation of sub-disciplines obscures from view something essential to the very nature of the philosophical enterprise itself: its underlying *unity*. Paul Grice, in the last phase of his career, became a forceful advocate for this point of view:

[I]t is my firm conviction that despite its real or apparent division into departments, philosophy is one subject, a single discipline. By this I do not merely mean that between different areas of philosophy there are cross-references, as when, for example, one encounters in ethics the problem whether such and such principles fall within the epistemological classification of *a priori* knowledge. I mean (or hope I mean) something a good deal stronger than this, something more like the thesis that it is not possible to reach full understanding of, or high level proficiency in, any one department without a corresponding understanding and proficiency in the others; to the extent that when I visit an unfamiliar university and (as occasionally happens) I am introduced to, ‘Mr Puddle, our man in Political Philosophy’ (or in ‘Nineteenth-century continental philosophy’ or ‘Aesthetics’, as the case may be), I am immediately confident that either Mr Puddle is being under-described and in consequence maligned, or else Mr Puddle is not really good at his stuff. Philosophy, like virtue, is *entire*. Or, one might even dare to say, there is only one problem in philosophy, namely all of them.¹⁷

We find ourselves increasingly in a situation today in which some analytic philosophers view Grice’s remarks above as getting at something essential to the very nature of the philosophical enterprise (something that is in danger of being lost through its present form of institutionalization and professionalization), while others look upon them as vestigial traces of a vanishing philosophical era (which we can leave behind without great intellectual cost to anything in philosophy about which we should care). This disagreement itself constitutes a significant crossroads at the heart of contemporary analytic philosophy, at which the very soul of analytic philosophy—what it is, what it wants to be, and what it shall become—is itself at stake.

Some ideologues of analytic philosophy who have wished to be able to sum up what analytic philosophy is in a slogan, while also doing justice to the internal diversity of the tradition, have sought to do so by speaking of a characteristically analytic *style* of philosophy—a single consistent style that supposedly cuts across the many differences in analytic philosophers’ conceptions of philosophical method. Here, again, the attempt to capture the entire breadth of analytic philosophy in a single formula—in this case one

pertaining to its style—runs into problems not unlike those we have encountered above. This way of trying to get at the essence of analytic philosophy is no less beset than the others by the twin dangers of total vacuity or inaccurate partiality. A full unpacking of what any such a conception of the supposed style of analytic philosophy comes to would require an in-depth exposition of what the philosophers who extol the virtues of analytic philosophy in the above ways are concerned to shy away from or shun—of what it is of which they are *afraid*. This is a topic upon which some figures in the analytic tradition have been moved to reflect (perhaps most notably, in their somewhat different ways, the later Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch, Bernard Williams, Stanley Cavell, and John McDowell). Those who have so much as broached this topic thoughtfully and judiciously (rather than abruptly or polemically), however, have been a distinct minority.

3. RITUALS OF EXCOMMUNICATION

The roots of the distinction between two kinds of philosophy—of which the rigorous and respectable sort is of the analytic variety and the other sort is one which bears the philosophical shortcomings characteristic of certain French or German thinkers—like so much else in the analytic tradition, arguably can be traced back to Russell. His 1912 essay on “The Philosophy of Bergson” represents possibly the earliest attempt within the tradition to represent the contemporaneous intellectual landscape as presenting us with a fundamental choice between the intellectual virtues and vices of these two philosophical types. This, in turn, gives rise to an implicit conception of the character of those who belong within the community of genuinely serious philosophers and those who should be excommunicated from any such community. In that essay, we find passages such as the following:

There are in Bergson’s works many allusions to mathematics and science, and to a careless reader these allusions may seem to strengthen his philosophy greatly. As regards science, especially biology and physiology, I am not competent to criticize his interpretations. But as regards mathematics, he has deliberately preferred traditional errors in interpretation to the more modern views which have prevailed among mathematicians for the last half century. In this matter, he has followed the example of most philosophers. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the infinitesimal calculus, though well developed as a method, was supported, as regards its foundations, by many fallacies and much confused thinking. Hegel and his followers seized upon these fallacies and confusions, to support them in their attempt to prove all mathematics self-contradictory. Thence the Hegelian account of these matters passed into the current thought of philosophers, where it has remained long after the mathematicians have removed all the difficulties upon

which the philosophers rely. And so long as the main object of philosophers is to show that nothing can be learned by patience and detailed thinking, but that we ought rather to worship the prejudices of the ignorant under the title of “reason” if we are Hegelians, or of “intuition” if we are Bergsonians, so long philosophers will take care to remain ignorant of what mathematicians have done to remove the errors by which Hegel profited.¹⁸

Characteristically for Russell, much is made to turn here on a proper understanding of developments in mathematics and science—an understanding that he finds sorely lacking in Bergson. For our present purpose, however, the more interesting theme present here is the idea of there being a fundamental opposition—one that structures the terms of a choice forced upon the contemporary reader: a choice between Russell and Bergson, between mathematical thought and unreflective intuition, between logic and mysticism, between reason and unreason. This opposition eventually assumes an increasingly strident shape in Russell’s thinking. What Russell is especially concerned to ward off in his later writings is that any undue element of anthropocentrism be permitted to slip into our metaphysical view of the nature of the universe and man’s place in it. We must be on guard against any form of philosophy that fails to appreciate how very puny we really are, when viewed from the perspective of the larger scheme of things. Misguided forms of philosophy attempt to provide us with an image of the very nature of reality in which the aims and purposes that we happen to have at the present moment would appear to have a proper place in the universe such as it is: “In this way they interfere with that receptivity to fact which is the essence of the scientific attitude towards the world” (Russell 1917). This sentence of Russell’s can still serve helpfully to sum up a certain inchoate distinction between appropriately hard-headed philosophers and comparatively soft-headed philosophers—a distinction which has played a role both in shaping analytic philosophy’s understanding of its other and in shaping certain controversies that have in recent years increasingly come to dominate the internal discourse of analytic philosophy itself.

Many analytic philosophers today might well be willing to admit that they are in no position to specify the conditions that philosophical work must satisfy in order to count as “analytic” or genuinely “hard-headed,” while also being passionately concerned to retain their right to enter the charge that the work of some particular author be deemed unworthy of an analytic philosopher—as being insufficiently rigorous or overly soft in some respect. On what basis is this sort of judgment made? Those who make it are likely to insist that they simply can tell a work of analytic philosophy when they see one. Conversely, they can just tell when someone is no longer producing analytic philosophy, even if the work in question is authored by someone who was previously considered (and still considers herself) to be

an analytic philosopher. That is, they can tell when a certain tipping point has been reached: when too many of the virtues of such philosophy have fallen away, or when too many of the vices characteristic of the writings of French or German “Continental” luminaries obtrude themselves, or when there is a bit of both. This can lead to impassioned denunciations—episodes in which one analytic philosopher accuses another putative member of the guild of having betrayed a communally shared conception of the philosophical calling.

Yet even when such intramural denunciations are made (and they are no longer as infrequent as they once were), questions naturally arise about whom the denouncer is speaking for and how the legitimacy of the charge is to be adjudicated. Consider the following remarks by Crispin Wright, made in the context of the closing remarks of a review of John McDowell’s *Mind and World*:

If analytical philosophy demands self-consciousness about unexplained or only partially explained terms of art, formality and explicitness in setting out of argument, and the clearest possible sign-posting and formulation of assumptions, targets, and goals, etc., then this is not a work of analytical philosophy. . . . At its worst, indeed, McDowell’s book—more extreme than in any of his other writings to date—will unquestionably color the influence it will exert . . . [T]he fear must be that the book will encourage too many of the susceptible to swim out of their depth in seas of rhetorical metaphysics. Wittgenstein complained that, “The seed I am most likely to sow is a certain jargon.” One feels that, if so, he had only himself to blame. McDowell is a strong swimmer, but his stroke is not to be imitated.¹⁹

Crispin Wright is one of the leading analytic philosophers of the present day. John McDowell’s *Mind and World* is arguably one of the single most influential works of analytic philosophy of the past quarter of a century. Or, perhaps we should say, in order not to beg a question here: It is arguably one of the single most influential works of the past quarter of a century written by someone who, at least for most of his career, was deemed, by at least most of his contemporaries, to be a practicing analytic philosopher. Perhaps, with the publication of this book, John McDowell suddenly ceased to be an analytic philosopher; perhaps Crispin Wright was the first to publicize the fact of McDowell’s exodus from the community. Yet the relevant passages in Wright’s text read less like a report of an astonishing discovery (news flash: McDowell has emigrated to a different philosophical continent!) and more like a plea for an edict of excommunication (proposed motion: respect due to a member of our community no longer to be accorded to McDowell!).

But on what grounds is such a charge entered and before which tribunal? And how is its validity to be determined?

Wright need not have had a clear view of how such questions are to be answered in order to feel that he is, nonetheless, in the right—and about something important. He is evidently writing, even here in this part of this review, as someone who is not without considerable admiration for McDowell's abilities as a philosopher. Yet he is also writing from a sense that some line has been crossed in McDowell's latest work, so that this product of philosophy, by this erstwhile analytic philosopher, is one which has gone too far. It is important to make clear that, once a work of philosophy has reached the point where it looks and sounds like *this*, then (as Wright bluntly puts it) "this is not a work of analytical philosophy."

Notice that the fundamental ground of the criticism, at least in the above passage, appears in the first instance not to lie in a charge directed against either the character of the doctrines McDowell upholds or the method of philosophy that he practices. The charge is quite explicitly directed at the *style* of the work. Apparently a work that courts such a style may no longer be counted as analytic philosophy. Some of the vices of style are linked by Wright to features that analytic philosophers in the past have often regarded as characteristic of "continental" efforts at philosophizing (fuzziness of thought, liberal employment of metaphors, extravagance of expression). Other aspects of the vicissitudes of McDowell's style are linked by Wright to more time-honored complaints—familiar already to Socrates—leveled against forms of philosophy that are feared because of their potential to win a following (to corrupt the youth, inspire imitation, and lead the next generation astray).

This can readily lead to a situation in which two sets of readers, equally familiar with the philosophical temperament of the reviewer, are drawn to opposite conclusions: One set, upon reading such a review, concludes that the work is one with which they need not bother further (given that it permits itself such forms of stylistic license), whereas the other concludes, against the reviewer's own intentions, that the work might well be of philosophical interest (just because the danger it appears to pose to *this* reviewer is of this sort). It is a noteworthy feature of analytic philosophy in its most recent Anglophone phase that increasing numbers of philosophers who regard themselves as members of "the analytic tradition" have in this way often become more concerned to differentiate themselves from certain others who also so regard themselves than they are to differentiate themselves from any current species of non-analytic philosopher. Just as in the aftermath of the Russian revolutions both Stalin and Trotsky were far more able to tolerate a temporary truce with Churchill or Roosevelt than either was to tolerate one between themselves, so, too, there are now subcommunities of analytic philosophers who find it far easier to enter into non-aggression pacts with those who are simply outsiders to their internecine quarrels than they are to make peace with those within their community whom they view

as having placed themselves beyond the pale of respectability through the character of their thought or writing.

The remarks in the preceding paragraphs about certain features of the most recent phase of Anglo-American analytic philosophy are far less true of the current dispensation of analytic philosophy on the European Continent. On that side of the English Channel, where the position of analytic philosophy as a dominant tradition of philosophizing has been far less secure, one still encounters frequent attempts (undertaken by figures on either side of the mutually contested terrain) to draw bright red battle-lines between the analytic and non-analytic ways of doing things. A visiting Anglo-American analytic philosopher suddenly finding herself amid a diverse gathering of European philosophers may be left with the impression that she has stepped into a time machine; the dominant ideological struggles (along with other aspects of how the respective German, French, or Italian dispensations of analytic philosophy currently define themselves) may strike her as a surreal recapitulation of a whole series of episodes from the past of her own tradition, only now all compressed into a single episode.

One particular recent development within the Anglophone analytic tradition has therefore been greeted with particular dismay in such combatively minded Continental European analytic circles: a minority of influential figures within the Anglo-American analytic community have become increasingly vocal in their expressions of annoyance (by both proponents and critics of the analytic tradition) to make too much of the idea that there is a philosophically significant contrast to be drawn between analytic and other kinds of philosophy. Bernard Williams is an example of a major figure in the analytic tradition whose later writings manifest a leaning in this direction—and thus also a concern to deny that the differences in question reflect anything philosophically deep. In a characteristic passage, he writes:

The contrast between ‘analytic’ philosophy and ‘continental’ philosophy is not at all an opposition of content, of interest, or even of style. Indeed, there are some differences, some of which are important, between typical examples of philosophical writing to which these terms could be applied, but these differences do not rest upon any significant basic principles. It could even be said that these terms mark a difference without a distinction.²⁰

The terms “analytic” and “continental” mark a difference without a distinction, for Williams, if the purpose to which they are to be put is to provide a *philosophical* account of how the very essence of the analytic way of doing philosophy must of necessity differ from that of any other way of doing philosophy if it is to retain its integrity qua analytic philosophy. If, however, the point of using this terminology is merely to mark a difference between the sorts of writing more typically found in one tradition than in another, then he is perfectly willing to grant that the terms in question may helpfully

be employed to indicate characteristic differences in forms of philosophical prose. What he is most concerned to deny is that the differences thereby indicated are in any way a function of a *philosophically* significant opposition between two fundamentally different kinds of philosophy.

4. ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY'S RELATION TO THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Analytic philosophers have differed markedly amongst themselves in their attitudes with respect to the history of philosophy. Some major figures have wanted to understand what is essential to analytic philosophy as requiring a sharp break with the entire past of philosophy. For them, there is no longer any need or reason for philosophers to occupy themselves with the writings of figures belonging to the prehistory of analytic philosophy. Others have spoken (only slightly less immodestly) of a form of philosophical inheritance of the past in which our understanding of the very nature of the activity undergoes radical transformation. Their view is that we may continue to be concerned with the philosophical writings of the past, but in a sufficiently novel manner that we will, in effect, introduce (as later Wittgenstein put it) "a kink" in the history of philosophy. Yet others have seen their own philosophical projects as directly inheriting those of the great figures in the past. Our relation to them need not require any specifically historical form of understanding of the past; it should involve nothing more than direct philosophical engagement with the writings of these "mighty dead." Analytic philosophers today, for a variety of reasons, are increasingly inclined to regard the very idea of a department of philosophy lacking capable historians of philosophy as existing in a condition of impoverishment. One set of concerns that play a role here comes from those practitioners of analytic philosophy (and there have always been some) who look upon their philosophical questions as stemming directly from those of a broader philosophical tradition. They have good reason to regard those who seek to acquire a broader and deeper understanding of that tradition as colleagues engaged in a form of inquiry continuous with their own.

This sort of connection to the community, however, can still leave the historian of philosophy (rightly) feeling that the reigning conception of the distribution of labor presupposes a historically parochial perspective on the philosophical bearing of the past on the present. For even among analytic philosophers who have in this way been open to the philosophical importance of cultivating such forms of familiarity with ancient, medieval, or early modern texts, there sometimes still lingers a tendency to regard the proper purview of the professional historian of philosophy as coming to an end at that moment in the history of the subject when the analytic tradition begins. On this way of looking at things, philosophers such as Frege, Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, and Quine are to be regarded as forming a part

of “our” analytic-philosophical present in a way that no merely “historical” figure could. One is thus thought to be doing a special sort of philosophical violence to such authors if one treats them as fit subjects of “historical” inquiry.

Conversely, it has not been uncommon for those trained as professional “historians of philosophy” to view the manner in which even their comparatively sympathetic analytic colleagues take up the ideas of the great figures of the past as evincing a peculiarly *ahistorical* relation to the history of philosophy. This quarrel, which has been conducted throughout the history of the analytic tradition, between card-carrying analytic philosophers and their historically scrupulous professional colleagues, has involved a number of different aspects. There is something to be said for and against each of the parties in this quarrel.

Speaking first in defense of the analytic philosopher, it should be noted that it is by no means evident that these tensions are to be traced solely to an unusual degree of hostility on the part of analytic philosophers towards the philosophical past. They may be a function of very different ways of engaging with the past—among which the attitude of the typical analytic philosopher towards prior tradition may in fact represent the more time-honored alternative, far more closely resembling the ongoing philosophical activity of past historical epochs than is generally conceded by the contemporary working historian of philosophy. On this account of the matter, the source of tension enters into the practice of philosophy not through what is strange in the analytic philosopher’s attitude towards the history of philosophy, but rather through what is in fact historically quite parochial in the attitude of the *contemporary historian* towards the history of philosophy, namely, an insistence on the cultivation and maintenance of a certain form of historical self-consciousness. The form of self-consciousness at issue here was first introduced into the history of philosophy, now itself understood as a form of philosophy, comparatively recently—arguably beginning with Hegel—in any case not much over two centuries ago. Its arrival on the analytic scene is a far more recent—and hence all the more unsettling—event. The irony underlying this line of defense is that the source of the conflict is thus attributed to a respect in which analytic philosophy is actually more *traditional* in its approach to philosophical problems (precisely in its *not* requiring the cultivation of historical self-consciousness in order to get down to philosophical business). Or, at any rate, it is far more traditional in its mode of philosophizing than the contemporary historian of philosophy hostile to analytic philosophy has usually been prepared to acknowledge.

There has been, and still is, a strongly cultivated tendency within analytic philosophy to approach the writings of the great figures of the past, as nearly as possible, as if they were attempting to make direct contributions to current debates and to treat “the mighty dead” not just as philosophical equals but as *philosophical contemporaries*. Grice famously remarked that we “should treat great but dead philosophers as we treat great and

living philosophers, as having something to say to *us*.” Such an approach to the history of philosophy hardly constitutes an unprecedented form of philosophical engagement with the past. In commenting on how *best* to understand Plato’s concept of an Idea, Kant sums up a longstanding method of engaging with the great figures of philosophy’s past—which he takes to permeate the writings of his great predecessors, such as Aristotle (in his relation to Plato), Aquinas (in his relation to Aristotle), and Leibniz (in his relation to all three). Here is how Kant puts it:

I shall not engage here in any literary enquiry into the meaning of the expression. I need only remark that it is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed in regard to his subject, whether in ordinary conversation or in writing, to find that we understand him better than he understood himself. As he has not sufficiently determined his concept, he has sometimes spoken, or even thought, in opposition to his own intention.²¹

The interpretive ideal here is to understand a philosophical author better than he understood himself. On the modern historian’s conception of what it is to grasp a philosophical author’s intention, the first order of business is to overcome hindrances introduced by intervening episodes in the history of philosophy—episodes that necessarily obstruct our view of the original intention. On the traditional understanding of the interpretive ideal—to which Kant here gives eloquent expression—the intervening history of philosophy is an indispensable aid in fully determining the author’s concept. (For that might well require forms of philosophical proficiency unknown to the original author.) There is much in the contemporary analytic philosopher’s way of inheriting this traditional ideal that might be irritating to the working historian of philosophy. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the prevalence among contemporary analytic philosophers of a version of this mode of engagement with past philosophy cannot be attributed solely to an unprecedented benightedness in analytic philosophy’s relation to the philosophical past.

Williams puts the point well in the following passage, regarding the relation that almost all philosophy has had to at least certain portions of its past—most notably, to Plato and Aristotle:

The involvement of Greek philosophy in the Western philosophical tradition is not measured merely by the fact that ancient philosophy originated so many fields of enquiry which continue to the present day. It emerges also in the fact that in each age philosophers have looked back to ancient philosophy—overwhelmingly, of course, to Plato and Aristotle—in order to give authority to their own work, or to contrast it, or by reinterpretation of the classical philosophers to come to understand them, and themselves, in different ways. The Greek philosophers

have been not just the fathers, but the companions, of Western philosophy. Different motives for this concern have predominated in different ages. . . . But from whatever motive, these relations to the Greek past are a particularly important expression of that involvement in its own history which is characteristic of philosophy and not of the sciences. . . . [W]e might say that the classical philosophers Plato and Aristotle are classics in the sense that it has been impossible, at least up to now, for philosophy not to want to make some living sense of these writers and relate its positions to theirs, if only by showing why they have to be rejected.²²

Nevertheless, it is one thing to view certain philosophers as having the status of *living classics* in this sense (so that it is impossible for the practicing philosopher not to want to make some living sense of their writings). It is another and much more problematic matter to insist that the terms in which that task of making sense is to be achieved are fully specifiable prior to such a philosophically sustained encounter with the past. Williams's target here is the attitude towards the history of philosophy famously summarized in Ryle's frequent injunction to treat something written by Plato as though it had just come out in the most recent issue of *Mind*.²³ The advocate for the professional historian of philosophy might well be able to argue that the attitude towards the past expressed in that injunction is at best naïve and at worse historically obtuse.

One reason this quarrel is no longer quite as heated as it once was is because there has recently been a surprising amount of fruitful intellectual interchange between the original parties to the dispute. Some of the recent attempts on the part of scholars trained within the analytic tradition to read major figures of the philosophical past—and, in particular, to read them as far more sympathetic to some particular contemporary analytic project than one might have supposed possible—have occasioned fascinating and influential monographs. They have given rise to further historical scholarship on these figures, which, in turn, has been shaped by these monographs—which, in turn, have led these analytic philosophers to rethink aspects of their original readings of these figures. Indeed, this tradition of analytic historical writing is arguably as old as the analytic tradition. One might even argue that it was initiated by Russell himself, in his lively book, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*,²⁴ and that the first fruitful instance of an interchange of the aforementioned sort (between analytic philosophers and historians of philosophy) was the one that occurred, immediately after the publication of this work, between Russell and the distinguished French historian of philosophy and Leibniz specialist Louis Couturat.

Many of these more recent analytically minded historical monographs have sought to contest the roles in which prior tradition (including the prior analytic tradition) has sought to cast various central *personae dramaticis* in the stories that philosophers have kept repeating to themselves, their

students, and each other. They have challenged the standard analytic conception of what it is to be a Humean, for example, as well as the standard analytic conception of what it is to be a Kantian. Whereas the Humean was once understood by the analytic philosopher to be the figure who debunked our ordinary view of the world in the light of a properly naturalized account of what it might contain, some analytic historians now cast Hume as seeking, by the end of *The Treatise on Human Nature*, to vindicate much of what we are pre-theoretically disposed to believe in our everyday commerce with the world. Whereas the Kantian was once understood by the analytic philosopher to be the figure who sought to maintain a lasting peace between our everyday and scientific images of the world, some analytic historians now cast Kant as the precursor of modern cognitive science, seeking to show how a properly reconceived form of philosophical psychology furnishes us with a fully naturalized account of the human mind. This has had an effect not only on how the history of philosophy is done, but also on how analytic philosophy understands what it is doing. For many of the major figures in the history of philosophy have become unmoored from the fixed positions once assigned to them in analytic philosophy's own narrative about how the previous history of philosophy is supposed to have led up to its philosophical present.

These analytically informed revisionist readings and re-readings of the history of philosophy have played a part in the analytic tradition's gaining an increasingly historically informed perspective on its own place within the broader sweep of the history of philosophy. It is now more widely acknowledged than it once was that the analytic tradition is in fact one philosophical tradition among others—rather than a development that culminates and so stands above and beyond the history of philosophy. Contemporary analytic philosophers have begun to recognize that their tradition has nourished stereotypes about its differently minded (non-analytic) neighbors that were as uninformed as they were dismissive, regarding them as, for example, sloppy and overwrought. Their disparaged counterparts have been only too ready to return the disfavor, with equally uncomprehending and dismissive slurs (of which “fussy” and “boring” have been among the more polite).

Encouraged by individual efforts at perestroika stemming from each side, there are signs of a gradual thaw in this philosophical cold war. These stereotypes have increasingly come to be regarded as equally prejudicial and uncomprehending on both sides. There has, non-coincidentally, come to be a surge of historical scholarship investigating the ways in which, throughout the history of the analytic tradition, there have been important junctures at which analytic philosophers sought to engage in fruitful dialogue with interlocutors outside their tradition. (To name only three notable examples that have attracted recent scholarly attention on both sides of the Atlantic: Frege's influential correspondence with Husserl, Ryle's sympathetic early review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and Rawls's late dialogue with Habermas.) The tendency to view such episodes as merely momentary

thaws in the cold war has now given way to an interest in the various ways in which the two traditions may have repeatedly cross-fertilized one another in the past—and (even more importantly) how they may continue to do so, for as long as their philosophical identities remain sufficiently distinct to permit such forms of intellectual commerce to be mutually enriching.

As the analytic tradition entered the last quarter of the twentieth century and moved into the twenty-first, its resistance to the idea that it represents only one continent in the larger world of philosophy (rather than a movement with a rightful claim to dominate the whole of that world) began to fade. This has helped to transform not only its attitude toward its neighbors as a matter of contemporary philosophical practice, but also its attitude toward itself. A correlative shift has taken place within analytic philosophy in recent decades in the way in which the relation between its philosophical past and its present is conceived. This shift has taken place along a number of dimensions. One aspect of it is the present frequency with which analytic philosophers now seek to enrich their own tradition, and contribute to its further evolution, by working self-consciously to incorporate this or that philosophical line of thought or intellectual strategy drawn from another tradition—in some cases, a contemporaneous one, in others an early modern one, or one that goes back as far as Plato and Aristotle. The beginnings of this development were already occurring in the 1950s (in the work of figures such as Sellars, Strawson, Elizabeth Anscombe, and Peter Geach). By the 1980s, it had become a commonplace to speak of movements and strands within analytic philosophy, such as those of analytic Aristotelianism, Thomism, Pragmatism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, and even analytic Marxism.

As we have noted, Bertrand Russell, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, was happy to combine the terms “analytic” and “empiricism” into the novel compound “analytic empiricism,” using the first term to designate what was new in the form of philosophy he was championing and the second term to identify an older strand in the broader philosophical tradition that he sought to inherit, transform, and carry forward. If one had told him that soon there would be philosophers who purported to belong to a tradition that was built in part upon his own early work, but who would describe their philosophical outlook using compound expressions such as those just mentioned, he would have been mystified—and, in some cases, dismayed. For Aristotelianism, Thomism, and the rest were among the very movements in philosophy he was vigorously fighting to displace in favor of his own conception of philosophy as logical analysis. The early Russell would have had difficulty comprehending how the term “analytic” in these different compounds could have anything to do with what he had originally meant by it, and so could amount to anything more than a mere homonym in relation to his own use of it. He could not have foreseen the development of a tradition that would both draw inspiration from the analytic philosophers of his generation and also seek to reincorporate so much

that he himself was determined to eliminate. More generally, from that early vantage point, it would have been impossible for anyone to make out how a tradition might develop out of the work of Russell and the other early analytic philosophers that would be robust and capacious enough to be able to retain its distinctive identity, while reincorporating so many aspects of the previous strands of philosophy that the founders had sought to vanquish.

Of the labels mentioned above, the most baffling to Russell himself would have been “analytic Hegelianism.” If there was anything that Russell and Moore in the early years of the twentieth century had been against, and that the first phase of the tradition had succeeded in freezing out as a philosophically respectable option, then it was Hegelianism. This aspect of the thaw was certainly very gradual in coming. Figures (such as Wilfrid Sellars) sympathetic to German Idealism in the generation of analytic philosophers who came of age after World War II, even when outspoken in their enthusiasm for Kant, tended to remain circumspect and guarded in their expressions of admiration for Hegel. It is a mark of how far the situation has evolved since then that, in an omnibus review of five recent works of Anglophone Hegel scholarship, all published in the year 2012, one finds a leading Hegel scholar, Robert Pippin (himself once a student of Sellars’s), reflecting on a robust ongoing tradition of analytic Hegelianism.²⁵

These two forms of interest in the philosophical past—first, the long-standing interest on the part of analytic philosophers in the classic authors of the philosophical tradition (such as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant), and second, the far more recent resurgence of interest in figures previously excluded from the canon (such as Hegel and Marx)—have been further nourished by, as well as themselves, in turn, contributing to, the cultivation of yet a third kind of interest in analytical philosophy’s relation to the past, more specifically a new kind of interest in *its own past*.

5. THE HISTORY OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AS A NEW FORM OF PHILOSOPHY

This new kind of interest fully matured with the gradual emergence of something called “the history of analytic philosophy”—where the phrase in question refers to an area of philosophical research in its own right within the ongoing pursuit of contemporary analytic philosophy. The aforementioned quarrel between analytic philosophers and professional historians of philosophy—epitomized in Gilbert Ryle’s notorious remark about how one ought to go about approaching a text by Plato—is presently further altering its shape, partly owing to pressures exerted on it by this new form of professional subspecialty within analytic philosophy. As this field has gradually developed, so, too, has a new form of philosophical self-consciousness on the part of many analytic philosophers with respect to the nature and extent of that which is historically local in their own philosophical tradition. It

has given rise to the possibility—for practitioners and students of analytic philosophy alike—of encountering aspects of analytic philosophy’s own history as something remote and even alien, so that a confrontation with that history can itself become an occasion for philosophical reflection.²⁶

The writings of *the historian of analytic philosophy* provide yet another perspective upon our topic than those of its practitioners and ideologues—one that may likewise serve as a resource in seeking answers to our two guiding questions. In this case, it would be rather more difficult to compile a comparably perspicuous list of statements representative of the various outlooks harbored by practitioners of this newly emerging discipline. For our purposes, it will suffice to remark briefly upon some of what an examination of exemplary instances of their work would bring to light that is relevant to our task here.

One thing it would quickly reveal is that a good historian of analytic philosophy is not merely a historian of ideas. She is also a philosopher—and necessarily so, for several reasons. First, the task of grasping the philosophical power of a way of thinking that is occluded by our present pre-conceptions is always a philosophical as well as a historical one. Second, many a historian of analytic philosophy is moved in part by philosophical motives—sometimes seeking to make something in the analytic past that has become alien to many today an available resource for understanding what analytic philosophy might or ought to be in the future, and sometimes simply desiring to recover some bit of lost treasure from an earlier stratum of the tradition.

When practiced with an eye to changing the present of philosophy, the discipline of the history of analytic philosophy can become saddled with difficulties that do not as obstinately beset scholarship on the history of other philosophical traditions—at least not in the same way and to quite the same degree. Correlatively, the pronouncements of the historian of analytic philosophy can meet with visceral forms of resistance from contemporaries in the discipline who are deeply invested in certain entrenched narratives of how the tradition unfolded. A convincing unmasking of these narratives requires the attainment of a form of self-understanding that is in equal parts historical and philosophical.

The claim by a historian of analytic philosophy that the early Russell’s or Frege’s conception of “logic” or “analysis” is quite different from the manner in which these terms have come to be construed by contemporary analytic philosophers, for example, may be received by some with bitterness and resentment. This form of historical claim can seem to threaten certain essential aspects of a contemporary analytic philosopher’s sense of her own philosophical identity.

Analytic philosophy, throughout much of its history, has been extraordinarily resistant to the very idea that it so much as *has a history* (in the relevant sense of what it means to say that a tradition “has a history”). Of course, no one denies that some authors lived before others and influenced

successors who in turn lived and worked at some later point in time. In this trivial sense of what it means to “have a history,” analytic philosophers are happy to regard what they do as participating in an ongoing enterprise that has a history. Indeed, they tend to be deeply committed to a certain tidy account of what that history *must* have been—who the founding fathers were, what the defining statements of the tradition were, which pieces of writing count as paradigms of philosophical analysis, and the like. This potted account of the history of the tradition—now enshrined in numerous introductory textbooks and encyclopedia articles—often plays a constitutive role in various analytic practitioners’ respective understandings of the very enterprise that they themselves seek to continue in doing (what they themselves still want to call) “analytic philosophy.”

What analytic philosophers tend to resist is the far more unsettling idea that the tools of the historian’s trade are relevant for getting at the truth about those very philosophical episodes—those that play a tradition-defining role in this internally propagated narrative. What is unsettling is the idea that those tools might turn out to be essential for achieving a faithful understanding of what prior generations of analytic philosophers actually meant when they employed terms that continue to circulate widely throughout the writings of analytic philosophers today—terms such as “logical constant,” “syntax,” “semantics,” “proposition,” “concept,” “meaning,” “reference,” “language,” “judgment,” “inference,” “justification,” and the like. Analytic philosophy has tended to want to imagine that it does not have a history in just this sense; it has wanted to believe that its philosophical past is fully *transparent* to its philosophical present.

For example, contemporary analytic philosophers have been prone to assume that they can just pick up an early classic of the tradition (such as Frege’s essay “On Sense and Reference” or Russell’s essay “On Denoting”) and fully unpack its intended upshot simply by drawing on *their* (present-day) understanding of the terminology used, without needing first to examine how their assumptions about how philosophy ought to be done relate to those of these earlier authors. They likewise tend to assume that such a text may simply be placed into the hands of their students to be read and understood by them, without any prior effort on their part to properly orient the students in relation to a way of thinking that may well be philosophically foreign to them. The assumption that analytic philosophy’s past must be transparent to its present goes together with the supposition that there is no special need for analytic philosophers, when reading a text from an earlier moment in their own tradition, to seek out the expertise of the historian of analytic philosophy. There is no sense that forms of historical sensitivity might be cultivated that would enable them to attain a perspective on what is going on in that text, which, in turn, could open up a further perspective on their own practice of philosophy—vastly expanding their sense of the philosophical distance that separates analytic philosophy’s present from its past.

The problem here is not only that a certain obliviousness tends to prevail among analytic philosophers regarding what such a historically informed perspective might disclose. It is that there often is a positive *repression* of the possibility of such disclosure—for the very reason that many a potentially liberating insight is repressed—namely because it threatens to unsettle our fantasies regarding who we are and what we can do. When the analytic philosopher confronts the historian of analytic philosophy's way of reading one of the tradition's cherished classics, an enormous chasm can suddenly appear to open up between what the text has always officially been held to have said and what it now actually seems to be concerned to say. The text suddenly takes on the double-aspect of a duck-rabbit figure—with two mutually occluding aspects. It can come into view under its familiar and reassuring aspect, induced by the reading encouraged by a certain tidy canonical account of how analytic philosophy's past is related to its present. Or an entirely new aspect can dawn, once the reader's entire experience of the figure/ground relation in the text (between its sentences and the thoughts they express) is framed in an entirely new way. One of the methods historians of analytic philosophy have effectively employed to trigger such gestalt-shifts is through revealing the extent of the gulf that looms between what the key terms in the text once meant (when understood against the background of the no longer easily visible philosophical assumptions of the original author) and what they—or, in important instances, the English words used to translate them—are generally understood to mean today (when read against the background of the often invisible and thus generally unexamined philosophical assumptions of the present).

In order to be able to survey the overall topography of such a gulf, one must also possess the particular philosophical capacities required to survey the fine structure of both backgrounds: both its historically proximate edge (such as the unexamined philosophical assumptions against which contemporary analytic philosophers approach their problems and those of their interlocutors) and its historically distal one (such as the shifts in meaning that a shared philosophical terminology may undergo over the course of several intellectual generations). Such forms of recognition of what is intellectually consequential in “what goes without saying” are forms of philosophical achievement: they serve to render visible much that otherwise remains invisible in contemporary analytic philosophical discussion, precisely because the discussants themselves are wont to regard those ways of thinking that come most naturally to them as those that are philosophically least problematic and most self-evident.

The vocation of the historian of analytic philosophy can appear to both the contemporary analytic philosopher and the contemporary historian of philosophy to fall between two stools. It can seem, on the one hand, to be too committed to and involved in historical scholarship to count as genuinely analytic philosophy, and yet also to be too narrowly preoccupied by the methods, concerns, and aims peculiar to the analytic tradition to count

as serious history of philosophy. What the good historian of analytic philosophy can do, however, is to demonstrate that this pursuit is an integrated form of inquiry that requires the cultivation of the virtues and competences of both a scrupulous historical-philosophical scholar and a sophisticated participant in contemporary analytic philosophical practice. Good historians of analytic philosophy can show where and how the assumptions and concerns of contemporary analytic philosophers are not those of their analytic forebears only if they have attained a fully integrated mastery of these two forms of philosophical competence. Such a twofold fluency is essential, if they are to be able to reveal how methods and aims (and, along with them, the meanings of many a familiar piece of philosophical terminology) have shifted over the course of the history of the analytic tradition, and to identify and illuminate cases in which forms of philosophical statement employed by contemporary analytic philosophers belong to frameworks of thought very different from those that conferred meaning on the apparent linguistic twins of those statements in the writings of their analytic predecessors.

As noted above, there are some respects in which the difficulties faced by a historian of analytic philosophy resemble those that beset a historian of science more than those typically encountered by the philosophically minded scholar of other chapters of the history of philosophy. Correlatively, the forms of resistance the historian of analytic philosophy faces can resemble those encountered by, say, the historian of twentieth-century physics. Contemporary physicists often find themselves disturbed by the accounts of major revolutions in the history of physics—especially some involving comparatively recent episodes (such as those that led to the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics)—advanced by historians of science. The practicing physicist, like the practicing analytic philosopher, is wedded to a narrative in which the achievements of figures such as Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr are presented in a very particular way, namely, as responses to challenges and difficulties that are describable in terms equally intelligible to both the past and the present practitioner of the subject. It is this transparency of past physics to the present that a sensitive historian's account often threatens to undo—thus apparently depriving contemporary physicists of their working understanding of the place their own contributions assume in a single ongoing enterprise.

The historian of science seeks an entirely different order of intelligibility in the past than that which is conferred on it by an official textbook-level narrative of how the innovations of the mighty dead led to our contemporary understanding of the topic under consideration. What the historian of science wants to understand is *not* the reason that, with the hindsight of later development, now seems to a contemporary physicist to be the obvious basis for adopting our contemporary understanding of what Einstein's, or Bohr's, original conclusion must have been. The historian rather is concerned to uncover and sort out the tangle of now forgotten, but back then nagging (and—but only for those who had eyes to see—deeply significant)

puzzles and anomalies that moved an Einstein or a Bohr, at that particular moment in the history of physics, to draw what could only seem to his contemporaries to be an altogether surprising (and not at all easily intelligible) conclusion. From the point of view of the historian, this requires doing full justice to every nuance of the many large and small differences between our present and (sometimes even only slightly) earlier ways of thinking about physical reality—nuances that are all simultaneously erased from view in Whiggish textbook accounts of the history of science. From the point of view of the physicist, such a historically nuanced account—with its seemingly myopic preoccupation with theoretically and experimentally secondary considerations—is heedless of the substantial extent to which our contemporary understanding of physical reality is able—indeed, *must* be able—to encompass and comprehend the point of view of an Einstein or a Bohr.

In the cases of both contemporary physics and contemporary analytic philosophy, an investment in a similarly deeply entrenched and internally institutionalized narrative plays a parallel role in the quarrel with the historian. It is no accident that, in each case, this same narrative plays a pedagogical role in initiating students into the subject. And these are narratives that the conscientious historians of both subjects may well feel they must at least question and complicate (if not altogether subvert), if the actual contours of the relation between the present and the past—recent as well as more distant—are to come into view. These internally propagated disciplinary narratives of how past achievements led up to the present—in both theoretical physics and analytic philosophy—tend to represent the terminology, methods, and aims of the past as essentially homogeneous in intellectual form and content with those of the contemporary practitioner. They present the original problems, concerns, and aims of the founders as versions of current ones in the disciplines.

To observe that the historical soundness and adequacy of such narratives cannot simply be taken for granted is not to deny that they have any legitimacy or usefulness. Indeed, they may have an essential role to play in helping to articulate and promulgate a certain widely shared (albeit often largely inchoate) understanding of the ongoing practice. We encountered various versions of such understandings in the statements presented above as representative of putatively authoritative stances taken by (those whom we referred to as) ideologues of analytic philosophy. And we suggested that collections of statements of that sort, when appropriately arranged and displayed, can serve to bring out significant features of analytic philosophy's own multifarious self-image. What we have seen now, however, is that the history of analytic philosophy, if it is to perform its office as a serious branch of the discipline of history, must call into question and be prepared to contest such disciplinary self-images and related proclamations. But, unlike the case of the history of science, this is not its only office—nor is it anything like the primary reason why analytic philosophers are generally moved to

become serious historians of their own tradition (while usually also seeking to remain analytic philosophers). Its most important function is arguably to enhance, deepen, and further orient analytic philosophy's own ongoing *philosophical* understanding of itself—upon which its developing practice depends.

What this suggests is that the history of analytic philosophy's most important function is not one that it shares—or even could share—with the history of science. For there is an absolutely crucial difference between the history of a science (like theoretical physics) and that of analytic philosophy—a difference that is clearly visible in the very different ways in which these two disciplines are generally practiced. Competent historians of physics are not out to make (and do not see themselves as seeking to make) contributions to contemporary physics. They think of themselves as historians rather than as physicists. As we have already noted, however, good historians of analytic philosophy tend to be (and to *want* to be) practitioners of the very discipline of which they also undertake to be historians. In non-analytic philosophical circles, there is seldom any presumption that these two forms of identity and inquiry (that of the historian and that of the philosopher) must exclude each other (even though they may be recognized to stand in a certain productive tension with each other, requiring careful negotiation), whereas among analytic philosophers—as among physicists—there has, until recently, often been such a presumption. Thus the capacity to fuse—or otherwise juggle—these two forms of identity within the space of a single philosophical life has until recently remained a comparatively rare achievement in the analytic tradition, exemplified in the work of only a handful of figures. This is gradually beginning to change: leading figures in the tradition now find themselves not only increasingly pushed but also naturally inclined to articulate their own respective plausible readings of just what it was that Carnap, Ryle, or Anscombe might originally have wanted to mean in this or that frequently quoted (but previously seldom carefully read) remark, article, or book.

While historians of physics have no stake in the outcome of ongoing disputes in the current cutting-edge of theoretical physics, historians of analytic philosophy generally do have such a stake in contemporary philosophical disputes—not necessarily in their minutiae, but in larger questions prompted by their ongoing conduct. These often involve questions such as whether a current controversy is a repetition (albeit in a different guise) of a prior one, or whether (its novelty notwithstanding) the present game is worth the candle, or whether (in dominating the contemporary horizon) it obscures from view promising avenues for philosophical reflection.

Motives such as these often enter into the historian of analytic philosophy's particular way of reframing and narrating a carefully selected episode from the history of the tradition. The misunderstood or neglected aspects of the philosophical past thereby displayed are therefore almost never selected with the mere scholarly aim of setting the historical record straight, but

with a further specifically philosophical aim. That motive may be just to display the sheer provinciality of the philosophical present, or the power of a philosophical idea of the past, or the unwitting faithfulness with which the present recapitulates the past due to ignorance of it—but, most likely, it will be a combination of all three, along with yet others. The historian of analytic philosophy's motives are thus generally mixed, springing no less from a desire to show how certain—often unduly neglected—aspects of the past *can* still speak to us (thereby holding open the promise of enriching the subject as we know it) than from a desire to show how certain—often wrong-headedly celebrated—aspects of the past *cannot* any longer speak to us (thereby allowing us to appreciate what is philosophically and historically specific to our present moment of philosophy).

Conscientious historians of analytic philosophy tend to be cautious in approaching the central terms analytic philosophers have continually employed over the course of the tradition to characterize their topics, problems, or methods (including terms that have occurred frequently in the preceding pages—such as “formal,” “logic,” and “analysis”). They probe carefully to ascertain the extent to which these terms have or have not retained their original significance across their successive occasions of use. They are uniquely positioned—and needed—to bring out the character and structure of certain sorts of moments that occurred at significant junctures in the development of the tradition—moments in which two major figures inspired by the same philosophical texts and teachers, apparently pursuing a common project within a shared framework of philosophical endeavor, employing the same terms and declaring allegiance to the same intellectual paradigms, nonetheless utterly fail to engage one another philosophically—talking by or otherwise misunderstanding one another—despite the appearance of their pursuing a single common project and working within a single shared framework of philosophical endeavor.

The good historian of analytic philosophy may bring out how two philosophers who appear to agree on fundamentals are only apparently in agreement with one another, as well as how two philosophers who appear to disagree actually do not—either because they really agree when they take themselves not to or because they are philosophically so far apart that their positions are not even sufficiently aligned to permit of disagreement in the first place. Finally, the good historian of analytic philosophy can reveal how two figures in the history of philosophy—perhaps only one of whom is an analytic philosopher—may actually have far more in common with one another than either one of them would have been willing to allow or could have been in a position to comprehend. This requires showing how the underlying projects of these two philosophers, belonging to different movements of thought (outwardly characterized by utterly different intellectual styles and temperaments), are inwardly bound together by profound affinities. In more extreme cases, the good historian of analytic philosophy may

even be concerned to reveal how an entire episode of analytic philosophy is to be seen as significantly related to some prior moment in philosophy's past.

Gilbert Ryle has figured in some of our remarks above as typifying a certain sort of somewhat dismissive analytic attitude towards the philosophical past. Yet he, too, in his own way, was deeply concerned to make contributions to this genre of analytically informed history of philosophy. For example, we may see Ryle's work on the relation between Plato and logical atomism as animated by such a concern. This work was concerned to reveal how six figures in the history of philosophy, four of whom (Moore, Frege, Russell, and early Wittgenstein) were analytic philosophers and two of whom (Plato and Meinong) were not, may have had more in common with one another than at least several of them could possibly have been in any position to comprehend. Ryle argues that Moore's 1899 essay on "The Nature of Judgment" provides an account of the distinction between propositions (in a non-linguistic sense of that term) and concepts (taken to be the elements of propositions) that doesn't work and that runs into essentially the problem that is expressed in the *Theaetetus* (as how we can think that which is not). He also argues that what we find in Meinong's treatment of "objectives" and Russell's treatment of facts (especially in his *Lectures on Logical Atomism*) are unsuccessful attempts to resolve this problem by continuing to frame it in the manner in which Moore takes it up. He contrasts this with the approach to the problem we find first in Frege and then, to an even clearer degree, in the *Tractatus*—one which in various respects resembles that proposed by Socrates in the dialogue to a surprising degree. Ryle then summarizes what he has shown thus far as follows:

I now urge that it is pretty clear that the issue that Socrates was discussing is the same as or at least overlaps with the issue that was being discussed fifty to thirty years ago by, among others, Meinong, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein; and that Socrates at least adumbrated certain ideas very much like those which were rendered necessary by some of the inherent defects of the theories of objects or concepts originally put forward by Meinong and Moore.²⁷

To defend a claim of this form requires making clear the affinities between the philosophical preoccupations of those who are traditionally counted as analytic philosophers and those who are not. To the extent that one judges Ryle's attempt to do this to be successful, one must also concede that it permits one to see the form of a widely shared philosophical problem more clearly than one had before. Once affinities of this sort between the analytic and the non-analytic past are brought sharply into view, this may enable us to discern more clearly not only the historical landscape, but also the philosophical landscape. For it can enable a clear apprehension of the very form of a philosophical problem for the first time—allowing us to separate the real form of the problem from the superficial guises through which

it simultaneously manifests itself in the work of apparently very different thinkers. In this and other ways, the work of the good historian of analytic philosophy—utterly unlike the work of the historian of science in its relation to contemporary science—can, indeed, contribute to the achievement of new and surprising modes of philosophical progress.

The analogy between the history of physics and the history of analytic philosophy breaks down in a further—equally instructive—way. The analogy, as framed above, encourages one to think that the primary misrepresentation of the past the historian must seek to undo is one that arises from an institutionalized tendency to represent the problems, concerns, and aims of earlier heroes in the discipline as if they were immediately recognizable as versions of contemporary ones. Yet some analytic philosophers have been drawn to re-narrate episodes from the history of their tradition out of a desire to correct a roughly opposite form of misrepresentation of the past. Consider the following three texts—each of which marked at the time of its publication a significant transformation in the tradition's self-image: (1) G.E.M. Anscombe's 1959 book *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, (2) James Griffin's 1964 book *Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism*, and (3) Peter Hylton's comparatively recent 1990 book *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*.²⁸ The internally propagated narratives that these three authors aim to subvert, in their three remarkably different books, stand in a different sort of relation to each of the then dominant self-understandings of analytic philosophy.

Anscombe and Griffin aimed in different ways to subvert an account of early Wittgenstein's place in the history of analytic philosophy advanced in numerous contemporaneous narratives—perhaps none more influential at the time than J.O. Urmson's 1956 book *Philosophical Analysis: Its Development between the Two World Wars*.²⁹ Like many others writing at that moment, Urmson wanted to bring out the radical nature of a recent shift in analytic philosophy (and hence to minimize its discernible continuity with even the quite recent past). On Urmson's telling of the story, the author of the *Tractatus* fully shared his teacher Russell's stridently empiricist, atomist, and largely Humean philosophical orientation. Urmson (along with his likeminded philosophical cohort) did not regard the common thread he discerned throughout the early analytic tradition (epitomized by Russell and early Wittgenstein) to be anything like a version of his own generation's central philosophical concerns and aims. That was his whole point: we have broken with even the very recent past of analytic philosophy. He spoke for a generation eager to see themselves as beneficiaries of a mid-century philosophical revolution that had effectively separated and liberated them from the concerns and aims of their earlier analytic forebears.

The larger historiographical point here is that the shape of the target of the historian of analytic philosophy is sometimes roughly the opposite of that of the historian of science—Urmson's account was to be exposed as insufficiently, rather than excessively, Whiggish—as overstating, rather

than understating, the seismic character of the revolution. His work sought to disseminate an account of how very sharp the break with the past really was—to make palpable the extent to which it had issued in forms of philosophical practice unimaginable to the original founders of the analytic tradition. Anscombe and Griffin, in their respective books, were challenging an account of this form (though each took issue with very different aspects of the then prevailing narrative). Their work thus offers an example a very different kind of philosophical motive a historian of analytic philosophy may have for seeking to overturn an institutionalized narrative. The concern may be to show the depth of philosophical discontinuity where seamless continuity is the prevailing assumption of the day, but it may equally well be the reverse.

One of the many interlacing philosophical motives of Hylton's superb book on Russell bears a certain resemblance to an aim of Anscombe's and Griffin's, namely, to shake us free of an account of the thought of a central figure in the analytic tradition in which that figure is cast as a representative of a tradition of philosophy involved in a fairly direct inheritance of the central assumptions of British empiricism. Whereas Anscombe and Griffin were primarily concerned to overturn a Humean reading of early Wittgenstein, Hylton is concerned to complicate a reading of Russell's philosophy as developing too simply and too directly out of a set of philosophical commitments he supposedly shares with a figure such as Hume.

Though such exercises in the history of analytic philosophy are driven by philosophical motives, this does not necessarily mean that they come with explicit methodological reflections on the forms of philosophical insight that the history of analytic philosophy can afford. Neither Anscombe nor Griffin in their aforementioned books offers anything like a self-conscious statement of what the historian of analytic philosophy can or should do. In this respect, they are typical of even the most philosophically original contributors to the history of analytic philosophy prior to the 1980s. In this respect, Hylton's book is more representative of the best recent work, displaying forms of self-reflexivity seldom found in earlier work in the genre. In a particularly eloquent passage from the Introduction to the book, we find the following set of remarks:

Philosophy cannot, as the natural sciences perhaps can, absorb what is correct in its past and conclusively refute what is incorrect, for the difference is unsettled. There is as little finality in our views as to what is correct in the philosophies of Plato or Hume or Kant or Russell as there is in our views on the most contemporary issue. . . . Philosophy thus always has the hope of learning neglected lessons from its past. It also, and perhaps more characteristically, is always in a state of potential rivalry with its past, defining itself against its past, and threatened by it. It is for this reason that the history of philosophy often has an evaluative and judgmental tone—precisely *not* the tone of one who has a

secure understanding of the matters at issue, but the tone of one whose understanding is threatened. The deliberately ahistorical character of much history of philosophy seems to me not accidental, but a product of this insecure relationship between philosophy and its past. We approach the past ahistorically in order to refute it—as if the past of philosophy will not stay in the past, but constantly threatens to come back to life. Our uncertainty over the history of philosophy—whether it is history, whether it is philosophy, whether it can be both—seems to correspond to the uneasiness of the relation between philosophy and its past, and to our unease about the status of the subject as a whole.³⁰

This is as thoughtful and penetrating a set of opening remarks regarding the relation between philosophy and its past as one is likely to find at the outset of any work on a topic in the history of philosophy. Or, to put the point the other way around, it is thoroughly unrepresentative of what one finds, throughout most of the history of analytic philosophy, in writing devoted to furnishing a historical overview of some major period or figure or movement within analytic philosophy.

The topic of Hylton's own book (the development of Russell's philosophy, his early revolt against British Idealism, and his ongoing responses to the resulting internal tensions in his thought) is a classic topic in the genre of the history of analytic philosophy—as classic as you can get. Most of the work done on this topic—and, indeed, in this whole genre—is written in just the tone Hylton mentions above, and for the reason he gives. The unacknowledged unease in the tradition's relation to the past at issue here is due in no small part precisely to a desire to have that relation be an *easy* one—one of total continuity or sharp discontinuity—as long as it allows analytic philosophers to look back upon their tradition simply with a view to absorbing what is correct in it and conclusively refuting what is false in it.

The ensuing unease in the relation to the subject as a whole is therefore nourished by a desire to rid our relation to the past of the very dimensions of complexity and ambivalence that form constitutive aspects of philosophy's ongoing encounter with its past. Indeed, analytic philosophy's ambition to free itself from certain forms of preoccupation with history—an ambition characteristic of so many of the founding projects of the tradition—is part of what has given rise (at this much later stage in the history of the tradition) to the present felt need for a particular sort of philosophically sensitive work in the history of analytic philosophy—a specifically historical-philosophical form of exercise in remembering, repeating, and working through—able to undo specific forms of philosophical repression induced by the original founding ambition.

Hylton's official topic in the above quotation is the relation between philosophy as such and the entirety of its past—not our present and narrower topic, namely, *analytic* philosophy's relation to that tiny chapter in the history of philosophy that is its *own* past. Yet what Hylton shows in his book

bears directly on our topic. For the book brings out any number of ways in which analytic philosophers have become invested in narrating the past of their own tradition in ways that repress to an extraordinary degree any consciousness of the forms of difficulty that (as the passage above suggests) necessarily attend philosophy's relation to its past. Viewed from this angle, one of analytic philosophy's most characteristic features would appear to be one that failed to show up on our three collections of statements above, namely, the tradition's sustained investment in trying to rid itself of the awareness that it (like any other form of philosophy) is subject to the vicissitudes of philosophy's relation to its history. And it is no accident that it failed to appear there—not only because it is a more subtle sort of feature than any of those we have discussed. It is a sort of feature that can come properly into view only once the tradition's prior retrospective relation to itself is viewed through the lens of the sort of philosophically sensitive work in the history of analytic philosophy discussed in the previous paragraphs. This, in turn, suggests that—as the history of analytic philosophy practiced as a form of analytic philosophy itself comes to be an increasingly significant and respectable subspecialty within the discipline—this characteristic feature of the tradition (like so many others) must gradually mutate, eventually coming to be an ever less definitive mark of the tradition as a whole.

That this particular subspecialty has come to be conducted with an eye to transforming the shape of ongoing contemporary philosophical debate is non-accidentally related to the way in which it has also gradually come to be regarded as itself constituting a self-standing form of philosophically inquiry in its own right. This is a genuine and significant development within the analytic tradition. It involves the emergence of a philosophically self-conscious form of historical inquiry in the history of analytic philosophy conducted by analytic philosophers writing primarily for an audience of analytic philosophers. It is a form of historical inquiry not subordinated to any particular philosophical agenda, but open to the whole range of forms of understanding that may be afforded when analytic philosophy's present is confronted with the sort of philosophically informed selective focus on aspects of its past discussed above. Hylton's book, for example, seeks simultaneously to make some aspects of Russell's philosophy seem far stranger than they had been taken to be, while revealing other aspects to have far more bearing on the fundamental difficulties that plague the present moment of analytic philosophy than might previously have seemed possible. Russell's thinking is thus shown to be, in some ways, far more surprising than the tradition's self-image had been willing to allow, while other supposed historical platitudes about the tradition are shown to cover up the most interesting ways in which his concerns are far more philosophically akin with our own than had previously been recognized.

Good historians of analytic philosophy will by no means simply converge upon some single alternative to the currently institutionalized account of the

history of analytic philosophy. Here, as elsewhere in the practice of history, uncovering the historical past involves appreciating the revelatory powers of different forms of account. But for all of their differences, they would not be good historians if they were to take as their point of departure any particular definition of what analytic philosophy or the analytic style as such is—unless their purpose in doing so is to call it into question or employ it to illustrate how misleading such blanket statements prove to be. They will seek instead to characterize the historical episode of thought at issue precisely as part of an ongoing and internally evolving *tradition*—with all of the internal complexity and disagreement that is apt to characterize any interesting historical tradition of thought, be it literary, mathematical, or philosophical.

Thus the historian of analytic philosophy is far more likely than the ideologue of analytic philosophy to see the history of analytic philosophy as consisting in a series of successively mutating conceptions of philosophy, rather than as the grand unfolding of a unitary something called “analytic philosophy” that can be aptly summed up in the form of a definition or summary statement of its aims, commitments, or style. But if that is true, then what is the history of analytic philosophy a history of? What unifies the diverse, evolving, and contested enterprise that the historian of analytic philosophy seeks to display? To answer this question as well as it can be answered, we must have recourse to the concept of a *tradition*.

The unity and identity of a tradition is not explicable in terms of a collection of features each of its members fortuitously happens to instantiate. It is explicable only through a form of understanding that seeks to grasp a specific sort of historical development—one in which each moment is linked to the others in a significant way. Reflection on the significance of each such moment possesses the power to illuminate that of any other—but only when they are collectively considered in the light of their partially overlapping and mutually intertwining relations with one another. The concept of a tradition shows its worth when, through concerted attempts to engage in such reflection, we actually do find our appreciation of each of the elements in a series of historical episodes coming to be deepened in this mutually illuminating way. When such acts of reflection bear fruit in this manner, what they uncover is revealed to be not merely a “series of historical episodes,” but, rather, the successive moments of the internal unfolding of a tradition. The unity of analytic philosophy here at issue is to be sought not at the level of the doctrines, or the conception of philosophy, or the style of the writing of its practitioners, but rather in the manner in which it forms a distinctive tradition of thought. Once the concept of the analytic tradition comes to function in this sort of way in shaping the self-understanding of practicing philosophers seeking to inherit and develop the tradition in question, it becomes—not merely the concept of a certain philosophical ideology or sensibility, but rather—the concept of a form of philosophical self-consciousness.³¹

NOTES

- 1 For an illuminating discussion of this point, see Simon Glendinning's provocative editor's introduction to *The Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy* (Glendinning 1999).
- 2 This is not to say that a merely geographical principle for distinguishing between the traditions of philosophy here at issue was ever of much merit. (Michael Dummett has pointed out its limitations as a way of distinguishing the early history of the two traditions in question; see Dummett (1993). It is only to say that the time has come when it is now a genuinely comical way of distinguishing them.
- 3 It should be noted that, if my remarks below do go any way in illuminating how the term "the analytic tradition in philosophy" might pick out something with a certain sort of unity, this does not thereby show wherein the unity might lie in something genuinely deserving of the name of a Continental *tradition* in philosophy.
- 4 This point is forcefully argued by Peter van Inwagen; see van Inwagen (2006).
- 5 Moore (1993).
- 6 Russell (1945), p. 834.
- 7 Wittgenstein (1922), §§4.111–2.
- 8 Schlick (1927), p. 223.
- 9 Carnap (1959), §§1 & 9.
- 10 Wittgenstein (1953), §§109.
- 11 Ryle (2002), p. 1.
- 12 Austin (1961), p. 182.
- 13 Strawson (1964), p. 9.
- 14 Quine (1981), p. 21.
- 15 Grice (1986), p. 61.
- 16 One way to summarize the point here at issue is to say that Putnam holds, along with Kant, that the *Schulbegriff* of philosophy must be brought into equipoise with its *Weltbegriff*; for further discussion, see my editor's introduction to Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Conant 1990), pp. xxiv–xxxii.
- 17 Grice (1986), p. 64.
- 18 Russell (1912), p. 345.
- 19 Wright (1996), p. 252.
- 20 These remarks form part of a text that Williams specially wrote for a francophone audience—namely, the Preface to *L'éthique et les limites de la philosophie* (Williams 1990), the French translation of his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Related remarks, developing his thoughts on this subject at greater length, can be found in English in his "What Might Philosophy Become?" included in his collection *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline* (Williams 2008).
- 21 *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 371–372.
- 22 Williams (2006a), p. 9.
- 23 In his "An Essay on Collingwood," Williams (2006b) discusses the conception of the history of philosophy he takes to be implicit in Ryle's injunction; see especially p. 344.
- 24 For a forerunner to the later fashionable distinction between two essentially opposed ways of doing the history of philosophy—merely historically and genuinely philosophically—see the opening pages of Russell's Preface to the First Edition of *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Russell 1900). For further discussion, see Ayers (1978) (see especially pp. 42–46).

- 25 Pippin remarks: “Given the origins of analytic philosophy in anti-Hegelianism, perhaps the most surprising new Hegel is the Anglophone Hegel . . . show[ing] that Hegel could make a living contribution to contemporary debates in philosophy, in the way that Anglophone philosophy has long done for philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Kant.” (Review of Andrew Shanks, *Hegel and Religious Faith*; Peter Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom: Hegel’s Philosophy of History in Theological Perspective*; Sally Sedgwick, *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*; Christopher Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection*, in *Times Literary Supplement*, Spring 2013).
- 26 I am indebted to the discussion of this topic in Michael Kremer’s “What is the Good of Philosophical History?” (Kremer 2013)), as well as to Kremer’s review of Scott Soames’s *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.
- 27 Ryle (1990), p. 42. This article was published posthumously.
- 28 Anscombe (1959), Griffin (1964); Hylton (1990)
- 29 Urmson (1956).
- 30 Hylton (1990), pp. 6–7.
- 31 The present essay was extracted from a longer manuscript and overlaps at diverse points with material originally written for various sections of *The Norton Anthology of Philosophy, Volume V. After Kant: The Analytic Tradition* (Conant and Elliott 2016). I am indebted to Cora Diamond, Jay Elliott, and Richard Schacht for comments and suggestions on the original manuscript, as well as to the assistance of Jeffrey Bell, Andrew Cutrofello, and Paul Livingston in helping me to trim the material down to its present comparatively reasonable length.

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