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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY:
WITTGENSTEIN AND AFTER

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My aim is to chart and critically assess the development of analytic philosophy from roughly the 1930s onwards. The most striking feature is the transformation of the self-assured (if distinct) programs of logical atomism and logical positivism into highly diverse strands which come to question and undermine the very idea of analysis and finally of analytic philosophy itself. To begin with, I recount the linguistic turn of the early Wittgenstein and the logical positivists, and then turn to the emergence of two branches of analytic philosophy: logical construction (“ideal language philosophy”) led by Carnap and conceptual analysis (“ordinary language philosophy”) inspired by the later Wittgenstein. Next I describe the collapse of positivism under the impact of Quine and Kuhn, and after that the rehabilitation of metaphysics through Strawson, Quine, and Kripke. The subsequent sections look first at the reversal of the linguistic turn in the philosophy of language and mind in the 1970s and after, and then at the conception of moral and political philosophy within the analytic movement.

In the remainder, I consider some more recent issues that are important to the self-image and to the practice of analytic philosophy. I defend conceptual analysis against the accusation of indulging in a cult of common sense and ordinary use, and I insist, against naturalism, that it is both feasible and necessary to distinguish between factual, conceptual, and moral issues. The next sections favorably contrast the pragmatist approach to language epitomized by Wittgenstein with the mentalist and Platonist alternatives, and then explore the connections between meaning, use, and rules. I end by asking whether at the beginning of the twenty-first century there is still a distinctive analytic movement, by pronouncing on its philosophical legacy and by speculating about its future.
The linguistic turn

To some commentators, anyone who addresses philosophical problems in a discursive and rational fashion qualifies as an analytic philosopher. On this construal, the vast majority of philosophers have been analytic. But on a more discerning and fruitful construal analytic philosophy is a distinctive historical movement that flourished in the twentieth century (see Glock 2008). This movement had two interconnected roots. One was the interaction between logic and mathematics. The foundational crisis of mathematics in the nineteenth century spawned Frege's and Russell's logicist project of setting mathematics on secure logical foundations (see “The birth of analytic philosophy,” Chapter 1). This first led to the technical development of the new function-theoretic logic, next to the application of logical analysis for the purposes of avoiding ontological commitment to entia non grata in Russell's theory of descriptions, and finally to the philosophical reflections on the nature of logic in Wittgenstein's Tractatus. The other root is Moore's and Russell's revolt against the idealism and monism of the British neo-Hegelians. On the one hand this led to Moore's attempt to break down concepts into their ultimate constituents. On the other it led to reflections on the nature of propositions, concepts, and facts that culminated in Wittgenstein's picture-theory.

Certain ideas in Frege, Russell, and Moore implied that language plays a more important role in philosophy than it had been accorded since John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). Frege's context-principle suggested that the way to understand certain concepts lies in analyzing the sentences in which they occur. Similarly, Russell's theory of descriptions suggested how traditional philosophical problems concerning existence and intentionality might be solved by paraphrasing sentences in the idiom of formal logic. And Moore's program of conceptual analysis breathed new life into the Socratic ambition of defining terms like “good” or “knowledge” that give rise to philosophical problems. Nevertheless, all three early pioneers of analytic philosophy explicitly stated that philosophy is essentially concerned with reality rather than either thought or language. Both logical and conceptual analysis were attempts to parse abstract entities – thoughts, propositions, facts, or concepts – which were treated as non-linguistic in character (see Hacker 1996: chs. 1–2).

It was the Tractatus which took the linguistic turn for which analytic philosophy remains famous – or notorious – in many quarters. Whereas his predecessors were largely inspired by Platonist ideas – in Russell's case combined with a hefty dose of empiricism – Wittgenstein pursued a Kantian project (see “Kant in the twentieth century,” Chapter 4). Echoing Kant's ambition to draw the bounds between possible knowledge and illegitimate speculation, the Tractatus aimed to “draw a limit to thought.” At the same time, Wittgenstein gave a linguistic twist to the Kantian tale. Language is not just a secondary manifestation of something non-linguistic. For thoughts are neither mental processes nor abstract entities, but themselves propositions, sentences which have been projected onto reality. Thoughts can be completely expressed in language, and philosophy can establish the limits and preconditions of...
thought by establishing the limits and preconditions of the linguistic expression of thought. Indeed, these limits must be drawn in language. They cannot be drawn by propositions talking about both sides of the limit. By definition, such propositions would have to be about things that cannot be thought about and thereby transcend the limits of thought. These limits can only be drawn from the inside, namely by delineating the “rules of logical grammar” or “logical syntax” (Tractatus 3.32–3.325). These rules determine whether a combination of signs has sense, whether it is capable of expressing a thought and hence of representing reality either truly or falsely. What lies beyond these limits is not unknowable things in themselves, as in Kant, but only nonsensical combinations of signs, e.g. “The concert-tone A is red.”

Many philosophers of the past have disparaged the theories of their predecessors as false, unfounded, or pointless. But according to Wittgenstein metaphysical theories suffer from a more basic defect, namely that of being “nonsensical” in the sense of being meaningless or unintelligible. It is not just that they provide wrong answers, but that the questions they address are misguided questions to begin with (what the logical positivists later called “pseudo-questions”). They are based on a misunderstanding or distortion of the rules of logical syntax, and must hence be rejected. Legitimate philosophy is not a doctrine but an activity, namely a “critique of language” to be pursued through logical analysis. Without propounding any propositions of its own, it brings to light the logical form of meaningful propositions which, according to the Tractatus, are confined to the propositions of empirical science. This positive task is complemented by the negative task of demonstrating that the statements of metaphysics are nonsensical, since they violate the rules of logical syntax.

With engaging modesty, Wittgenstein felt that the Tractatus had solved the fundamental problems of philosophy and abandoned the subject after its publication in 1921. Meanwhile, the book had come to the attention of the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle. The logical positivists aimed to develop a “consistent empiricism.” They agreed with British empiricism and Ernst Mach (1838–1916) that all of human knowledge is based on experience, but tried to defend this position in a more cogent way, with the help of modern logic, a point they stressed by using the label “logical empiricism.” Inspired by Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein they employed logical rather than psychological analysis to identify the elements of experience, reality, and language (Carnap et al. 1929: 8). Moreover, they invoked the Tractatus to account for the propositions of logic and mathematics, without reducing them to inductive generalizations (Mill), lapsing into Platonism (Frege), or admitting synthetic a priori truths (Kant). Logic and mathematics, they conceded, are necessary and a priori; but they do not amount to knowledge about the world. For all a priori truths are analytic, that is, true solely in virtue of the meanings of their constituent words. Logical truths are tautologies which are true in virtue of the meaning of the logical constants alone, and analytical truths can be reduced to tautologies by substituting synonyms for synonyms. Thus

(1) All bachelors are unmarried

is transformed into
a tautology of the form \( \forall x \((Fx \& Gx) \rightarrow Gx\),\) or in words: “for all \( x \), if \( x \) is a man and if \( x \) is unmarried, then \( x \) is unmarried.” Necessary propositions, far from mirroring the essence of reality or the structure of pure reason, are true by virtue of the conventional rules governing our use of words (e.g. Ayer 1936: 21–4 and ch. 4). Nowadays the logical positivists are best known for verificationism, the view that the meaning of a proposition is its method of verification (the “principle of verification”), and that only those propositions are meaningful which are capable of being verified or falsified (the verificationist “criterion of meaningfulness”). On the basis of this criterion, they condemned metaphysics as meaningless, because it is neither a posteriori – by contrast to empirical science – nor analytic – by contrast to logic and mathematics. Metaphysical pronouncements are vacuous: they neither make statements of fact that can ultimately be verified by sensory experience, nor do they explicate the meaning of words or propositions.

Legitimate philosophy boils down to what Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) called “the logic of science” (1937: 279). Its task is the logico-linguistic analysis of those propositions which alone are strictly speaking meaningful, namely those of science. To complete this linguistic turn, Carnap reformulated philosophical problems and propositions from the traditional “material mode” – concerning the nature or essence of objects – into the formal mode – concerning linguistic expressions, their syntax and semantics.

The logical positivists took over the analytic methods of logical atomism while repudiating the (diverse) metaphysical rationales given for them by Russell and Wittgenstein. From the latter they inherited the linguistic turn, from the former the ambition to vindicate empiricism by means of reductive analysis. They were committed to the “unity of science,” the idea that all scientific disciplines, including the social sciences, can be unified in a single system with physics as its foundation. The theoretical terms of science are defined through a more primitive observational vocabulary and this makes it possible to break down all significant propositions into propositions about what is “given” in experience.

These so-called “protocol-sentences” or “observation-sentences” occasioned the first major split within the positivist movement. According to the “phenomenalists,” led by Moritz Schlick (1882–1936), these sentences are about subjective sense-experiences; according to the physicalists, led by Otto Neurath (1882–1945) and later joined by Carnap, they are about physical objects rather than mental episodes. The physicalist option does justice to the fact that the objects of science must be intersubjectively accessible. The price to be paid is that even the propositions which constitute the empirical foundations of science are fallible, a view which was also supported by Karl Popper (1902–94), an associate of the Vienna Circle.

Another controversy arose over the status of philosophy vis-à-vis science. All logical positivists believed that philosophy should emulate not just the rigor of the formal and empirical sciences but also their cooperative and technological spirit. But whereas Schlick and Carnap held fast to a qualitative distinction between the
empirical investigation of reality and the philosophical analysis of the propositions and methods of science, Neurath adopted a naturalistic stance according to which philosophy itself dissolves into a unified physicalist science.

Carnap had originally been impressed by Wittgenstein’s strictures against any attempt to talk about the relation between language and reality, and he had therefore restricted the analysis of language to logical syntax, the intra-linguistic rules for the combination of signs. In 1935, however, Alfred Tarski (1902–83) published a seminal paper that defined the central semantic notion of truth in a way that avoids semantic paradoxes like that of the liar. This persuaded Carnap to drop the restriction to syntax, and his subsequent attempts to explicate semantic notions have had a profound influence on analytic philosophy of language.

Verificationism also came under pressure. The principle of verification was attacked by conceptual analysts influenced by Wittgenstein and Austin, who pointed out that linguistic meaning attaches not just to declarative sentences capable of being true or false and hence of being verified or falsified, but also, for example, to interrogative, imperative, and performative sentences. In response, logical positivists restricted the principle to what they called “cognitive” as opposed to emotive (for example) meaning (Carnap 1963: 45; see Stroll 2000: 84–6).

This concession deprives the principle of verification of its central semantic role, unless it can be shown that even non-declarative sentences must have a truth-apt and hence verifiable component (see below). It does not threaten the verificationist critique of metaphysics, since metaphysics purports to provide descriptions of reality with cognitive content. But traditional metaphysicians objected that the criterion of meaningfulness is self-refuting, since it is neither empirical nor analytic, and hence meaningless by its own light (e.g. Ewing 1937). In response, some logical positivists presented it as a heuristic maxim on how to use the term “cognitively meaningful,” which is justified by its usefulness (Carnap 1937: 51). Alas, its usefulness lies mainly in serving as a stick with which to beat metaphysics, which leaves open the crucial question of whether the latter deserves such punishment. A more promising response is to present the criterion as a non-trivial analytic proposition, a consequence of the term “meaning” (Ayer 1936: 20–1). The trouble is that plenty of sentences which competent speakers count as perfectly meaningful do not allow of conclusive verification. As logical positivists such as Carl Hempel (1905–97) came to realize (see Hempel 1950), the verificationist critique of metaphysics faces a dilemma. If it insists on conclusive verifiability or falsifiability, it rules out sentences which are part of science (“All quasars are radioactive” cannot be conclusively verified and “There are unicorns” cannot be conclusively falsified). If it insists merely that a statement should allow of some kind of confirmation or disconfirmation, it is too liberal, in that it allows back in metaphysical sentences like “Only the Absolute is perfect.”

**Logical construction vs. logical analysis**

Meanwhile in Cambridge there emerged a new generation of logical analysts, Ramsey pre-eminent among them. The Cambridge analysts shared neither the anti-
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metaphysical fervor of the logical positivists nor their verificationism. They did, however, share with them Wittgenstein’s “thesis of extensionality” (simple propositions occur in complex ones only in such a way that the truth-value of the latter depends solely on those of the former) and Russell’s empiricist aspiration of analyzing propositions and concepts into constructions referring exclusively to the contents of experience. Alas, their attempts to reduce all meaningful propositions to truth-functional constructions out of elementary propositions referring to sense-data were no more successful than Russell’s fledgling attempts and Carnap’s heroic effort in Der logische Aufbau der Welt, 1928 (The Logical Structure of the World).

Analysis worked well enough when it came to showing that – grammatical appearances notwithstanding – we are not committed to the existence of the present king of France, the round square or the average Briton. Such “logical” or “same-level analysis” aims to present the actual logical form of a proposition and thereby its logical implications or inferential role. It contrasts with “new-level” or “metaphysical analysis,” a reductionist procedure supposed to eliminate things of one kind in favor of things of an ontologically more basic kind (Stebbing 1932; Wisdom 1934). The flipside of new-level analysis was logical construction. This procedure can be pursued in the material mode, as in Russell’s elimination of allegedly fictional entities like numbers in favor of classes of classes and propositional functions. Or it can be pursued in the formal mode. Thus Carnap and Quine sought to replace linguistic constructions that refer to problematic entities by constructions that refer only to entities of a less problematic kind. New-level analysis seemed to have succeeded in mathematics, by reducing numbers to sets. However, it failed in other areas. Even the prima facie undemanding analysis of propositions about nation-states into propositions about individuals and their actions proved tricky. When it came to the phenomenalist reduction of propositions about material objects to propositions about sense-data, the difficulties were insuperable. The occurrence of sense-data is neither necessary for the presence of a material object, since we may fail to perceive objects even under favorable conditions, nor sufficient, because of the possibility of illusion and hallucination. Other stumbling blocks included attributions of belief: the truth-value of “Sarah believes that Blair is honest” is not determined simply by that of the sentence expressing the belief, contrary to the thesis of extensionality (Urmson 1956: 60–74, 146–62).

As regards the analysis of concepts, an additional hurdle was the so-called “paradox of analysis” (Langford 1942). Suppose that “brother” is analysed as “male sibling”. Either the analysandum has the same meaning as the analysans, in which case the analysis is trivial and nothing is learned by it; or the two are not synonymous, in which case the analysis is incorrect.

It is tempting to blame the failure of reductive analysis on the vagaries of ordinary language: the proposed analysis fails to say precisely the same thing as the analysandum simply because the analysandum does not say anything precise to begin with. This was the attitude of a strand within analytic philosophy that is known as “ideal language philosophy” and comprises Frege, Russell, Tarski, the logical positivists, and Quine. It holds that owing to their logical shortcomings (ambiguity, vagueness,
referential failure, category-confusions), natural languages need to be replaced by an ideal language – an interpreted logical calculus – at least for the purposes of science and “scientific philosophy.”

According to Carnap, the attempt to reveal the underlying logical form of sentences in the vernacular is futile; analysis should instead take the form of logical construction, not just in the sense that eliminated phrases are reconstructed out of acceptable ones, but in the sense of devising entirely new artificial languages. “The logical analysis of a particular expression consists in the setting-up of a linguistic system and the placing of that expression in this system.” (1936: 143). Carnap’s procedure of “rational reconstruction” or “logical explication” bypasses the paradox of analysis (1928: §100; 1956: 7–9). The objective is not to provide a synonym of the analysandum, but to replace it by an alternative expression or construction, one which serves the cognitive purposes of the original equally well while avoiding drawbacks such as obscurity, philosophical puzzlement, and undesirable ontological commitments. In the same vein, Quine regards it as a “philosophical paradigm” that “whatever good had been accomplished by talking of an ordered pair <x, y> could be accomplished by talking instead of the class {{x}, {x, y}},” without claiming that these expressions carry the same meaning (1960: §53; see also the section “The rehabilitation of metaphysics,” below).

Emboldened by the emergence of Brouwer’s intuitionist logic, which denies the law of the excluded middle recognized by the bivalent logic of Frege and Russell, Carnap espoused a “principle of tolerance” in logic (1937: §17). We are at liberty to construct novel calculi, constrained only by the demand for consistency and considerations like ease of explanation and avoidance of puzzlement. This pragmatist attitude puts him at odds with the *Tractatus*, for which there is a single “logical syntax,” a logico-metaphysical structure which all meaningful languages – including natural languages – must have in common, since it is only by sharing this structure with reality that a sign system is capable of representing reality. It also puts him at loggerheads with Frege, Russell, and Quine, who insist that an ideal formal language should uniquely mirror the metaphysical structure of reality.

An alternative to both reductive analysis and logical constructionism emerged from 1929 onwards, when Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge and subjected his own earlier work to a withering critique. The eventual result was his second masterpiece, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953 (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*).

The color-exclusion problem forced Wittgenstein to realize that nothing could possibly fit the bill of logically independent elementary propositions (see “The birth of analytic philosophy,” Chapter 1). This had the further consequence that there are logical relations between propositions which do not result from the truth-functional combination of such elementary propositions. Ordinary language is not “a calculus according to definite rules” (1953: §81), as the *Tractatus* had assumed. Its rules are more diverse, diffuse, and subject to change than those of artificial calculi. The atomistic idea of unanalyzable names and indecomposable objects is a chimera. The distinction between simple and complex is not absolute but relative to one’s analytic tools and even to one’s philosophical purposes.

The collapse of logical atomism also undermines the picture theory of the proposition. If there are no ultimate constituents of facts – objects – which are simple in an
absolute metaphysical sense, then there are no corresponding constituents of propositions which are simple in an absolute semantic sense. Wittgenstein also jettisoned the idea that a proposition must have a logical form which it shares with what it depicts. The spell of this idea was broken by an exchange with the economist Sraffa, who presented him with a Neapolitan gesture of contempt and asked “What is the logical form of that?” The explanation of how propositions represent possible facts cannot be that they are arrangements of logical atoms which share a logical form with an arrangement of metaphysical atoms.

Moreover, the possibility of linguistic representation does not presuppose a one-to-one correlation between words and things. Fundamentally, Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein all shared a referential conception of meaning, according to which the meaning of an expression is an object for which it stands. This conception is doubly wrong. Not all meaningful words are names that refer to objects. The referential conception is modeled solely on proper names, mass nouns, and sortal nouns. It ignores verbs, adjectives, adverbs, connectives, prepositions, indexicals, and exclamations (Wittgenstein 1958: 77; 1953: §§1–27). Moreover, even in the case of referring expressions, their meaning is not the object they stand for. “The word ‘meaning’ is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that ‘corresponds’ to the word.”

“When Mr. N.N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies” (1953: §40). There are two parts to this objection. First, if the meaning of a word were an object it stands for, referential failure would have to render a proposition like “Mr. N.N. died” senseless. Secondly, identifying the meaning of a word with its referent is what Gilbert Ryle (1900–76) called a category mistake, namely of confusing what a word stands for with its meaning: the referent of “Mr. N.N.” can die, but not its meaning. Wittgenstein also presented an alternative to the referential conception: the linguistic meaning of an expression is its “use in the language.” The meaning of a word is not an entity of any kind – whether physical, mental, or abstract, but its use according to linguistic rules (see below).

Both the picture theory and verificationism restrict meaningful propositions to statements of fact. Wittgenstein now rejects the idea, epitomized in the Tractatus notion of the general propositional form, that the sole function of language is to describe reality. In addition to statements of fact there are not just questions and commands but “countless” other “language-games,” linguistic activities such as telling jokes, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying, etc. Furthermore, the logical and semantic rules that constitute a language – Wittgenstein calls them “grammatical rules” – do not have to mirror the structure of reality but are “autonomous.” They are not responsible either to physical reality or to a Platonic realm of “meanings.” Language is not the self-sufficient abstract system which it appears in Frege, Russell and the Tractatus. Rather, it is a human practice which in turn is embedded in a social “form of life” (1953: §23).

Wittgenstein still held that philosophical problems are rooted in misunderstandings of language. But he rejected both logical analysis and logical construction as means of resolving these confusions. There are no logically independent elementary propositions or indefinable names for analysis to terminate with. Indeed, not all legitimate
concepts can be sharply defined by reference to necessary and sufficient conditions for their application. Such **analytic definition** is only one form of explanation among others. Many philosophically contested concepts are united by “family-resemblances,” overlapping similarities rather than by a common characteristic mark. In particular, propositions do not share a common essence, the single propositional form detected by the *Tractatus*. Finally, the idea that analysis can make unexpected discoveries about what ordinary expressions **really mean** is misguided. The rules of language cannot be “hidden” beneath the surface and await discovery by logicians and linguists. Rather, competent speakers must be capable of recognizing them, since they are the normative standards which guide their utterances. To fight the “bewitchment of our understanding through the means of our language” we need neither the construction of artificial languages nor the uncovering of logical forms beneath the surface of ordinary language. Instead, we need a description of our public linguistic practices which constitute a motley of language-games (1953: §§65–88, 108, 23).

Wittgenstein’s new ideas, combined with Moore’s defence of common sense against both idealism and skepticism, had a profound impact on a movement which dominated British philosophy between the 1930s and the 1960s. Its opponents called it “ordinary language” or “Oxford philosophy,” since its most eminent proponents – Ryle, Austin, and Peter Strawson (1919–2006) – were based there. They themselves preferred labels such as “conceptual analysis” or “linguistic philosophy.” For they took a linguistic turn by regarding philosophical problems as conceptual and concepts as embodied in language. To possess a concept is to know the meaning of certain expressions; and concepts are neither mental occurrences nor entities beyond space and time, but abstractions from our use of words.

Initially, Ryle upheld the view that ordinary language creates philosophical confusion because its surface conceals its underlying logical form. Later he denied that there is a logical form to be discovered underneath the surface of ordinary language (see Rorty 1967: 305). Strawson (1952) argued at length that the predicate calculus – the weapon of choice for previous logical analysts – does not reveal the true structure of ordinary discourse. The gulf between the truth-functional connectives and their vernacular correlates is wider than commonly accepted. Similarly, by paraphrasing away singular referring expressions, Russell’s theory of descriptions misconstrues their distinctive role, which is to pick out the things we talk about. According to Strawson, the subtlety and variety of natural languages is mangled by the Procrustean bed of formal logic. No matter whether it stands in the service of reductive analysis or of logical construction, formal logic is not a sufficient instrument for revealing all the logical and conceptual features that have a bearing on philosophical problems and philosophical argument.

What survives is conceptual analysis and linguistic paraphrase. Philosophical problems are resolved by explaining expressions and by establishing the status and inferential powers of the statements in which they occur. The structure of “I have a pain” is the same as that of “I have a pin”; yet Wittgenstein maintained that these statements are disanalogous moves in the language-game (1953: §§572–3). Similarly, Ryle advocated that philosophy should chart the “logical geography” of our concepts.
In *The Concept of Mind* he argued that the Cartesian dualism of mind and body results from “category mistakes”: it treats mental concepts which signify behavioral dispositions as if they referred to processes that are just like physical ones, only more ethereal. Ryle accepted that philosophy is a meta-discipline which does not “talk sense with concepts” but tries to “talk sense about concepts” (1949: 9-10). Yet he rejected Wittgenstein’s therapeutic simile according to which “the philosopher treats a question like a disease” (1953: §255).

J. L. Austin (1911–60) exemplified linguistic philosophy, especially to its enemies, since he was a master of observing minutiae of linguistic use: “*what we should say when*, and so why and what we should mean by it.” For example, he carefully contrasted apparently equivalent terms such as “appear,” “look,” and “seem” by looking at the different situations that license their application. But his interest in language was not motivated solely by the desire of rectifying confusions, and he even toyed with the idea that linguistic analysis might turn into a branch of linguistics (1970: 181, 231–2). By a similar token, whereas Wittgenstein and his disciples regarded the quest for systematic theories as a misguided intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy, Austin founded a systematic approach to language, namely speech act theory. At the same time, even Austin was suspicious of the craving for uniformity that logical positivism shared with traditional philosophy. Thus he condemned as a “descriptive fallacy” the dogma that language has just a single function, namely to describe.

### The collapse of logical positivism

The rise of Nazism forced most logical positivists to emigrate, mainly to the USA. By the 1940s their views had achieved the status of orthodoxy, partly aided by the existence of an indigenous form of empiricism derived from American pragmatism. It is probably no more than mild hyperbole when Donald Davidson (1917–2003) states that he got through graduate school by reading Feigl’s and Sellars’ anthology of positivist writings (1980: 261).

Labels such as “logical analysis,” “philosophical analysis,” and “conceptual analysis” had been rife since Russell and Moore, and they were soon joined by “linguistic philosophy” and “the analysis of language.” But pertinent uses of “analytic(al) philosophy” came relatively late. One of the first occurs in Ernest Nagel (1901–85) (see Nagel 1936). But the label caught on only after the war, perhaps through Arthur Pap (von Wright 1993: 41n; Hacker 1996: 275–6n). Later it was extended from logical positivism to conceptual analysis (Beck 1962; Montefiori and Williams 1966).

Thus, between the 1930s and 1950s, analytic philosophy established itself as a self-conscious philosophical movement or tendency, albeit one splitting into two distinct branches: logical construction and conceptual analysis. At the same time, however, some assumptions uniting these two branches came to be questioned. The main protagonist of this development was the Harvard logician W. V. O. Quine (1908–2000). Quine was heavily indebted to the logical positivists. He shared their predilection for artificial languages, the conviction that natural science constitutes the paradigm of human knowledge, their vision of a unified science, their suspicion of
abstract entities, and the empiricist credo that sensory experience not only provides the evidence on which our beliefs rest (doctrinal empiricism), but also endows our language with its meaning (conceptual empiricism), “Whatever evidence there is for science is sensory evidence,” and “all inculcation of meaning of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence” (1969: 75). But just as the logical positivists had tried to improve on Hume and Mach, Quine tried to improve on them, replacing their logical empiricism by a more pragmatist variety.

Quine first came to fame in 1951 through “Two dogmas of empiricism” (reprinted in 1953). The article vigorously attacked the two pillars of the logical positivists’ conception of philosophy, namely the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions and the project of reductive analysis. The linguistic turn promised a distinctive role for philosophy, without dubious appeals to a Platonic realm of abstract entities, Aristotelian essences, or Kantian pure reason. While science results in empirical propositions that describe reality – and are hence synthetic – philosophy results in analytic propositions which unfold the meaning of the terms employed by science or common sense.

A similar line was taken by Wittgenstein and linguistic philosophers. In spite of their considerable disagreements, these philosophers accepted that there is a qualitative difference between science, which is concerned with factual issues and hence a posteriori, and philosophy, which is concerned with conceptual issues, and hence a priori. Quine overturned this picture by vigorously denying that there is a significant qualitative difference between apparently a priori disciplines like mathematics, logic, and philosophy on the one hand, and empirical science on the other. Unlike John Stuart Mill (1806–73), Quine did not simply assimilate necessary propositions to empirical generalizations. Instead, he questioned the distinctions that had traditionally been used to set philosophy and science apart, in particular the analytic/synthetic distinction. He thereby challenged the idea that there is a distinct type of proposition which articulates logical and conceptual connections rather than empirical facts, and reinvigorated radical empiricism, according to which even apparently a priori disciplines are ultimately based on experience.

Quine’s attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction involved two lines of reasoning, one concerning epistemology and scientific method, the other concerning semantics and ontology. The impetus of the first line is that the analytic/synthetic distinction presupposes a second dogma of empiricism, namely “reductionism,” the view that every meaningful statement is translatable into a statement about the immediate experiences that confirm it. Reductionism would allow one to define analytic statements as those which are confirmed come what experience may. However, Quine argues, it is at odds with the holistic nature of scientific belief-formation, the fact that our beliefs form a “web” in which each belief is linked to all others, and ultimately to experience. This means that it is impossible to specify confirming evidence for individual statements. It also means that any belief can be abandoned for the sake of preserving other parts of the web, and hence that there are no a priori statements immune to empirical revision.

Quine’s semantic argument is that analyticity is part of a circle of intensional notions – notions concerning what expressions mean or say – that cannot be reduced to purely
extensional notions – notions like reference, concerning what expressions stand for or apply to. But, he insisted, all these notions are obscure, because there are no criteria of identity for “intensions”: while we know what it is for two expressions to have the same extension, we do not know what it is for them to have the same intension or meaning. In *Word and Object* Quine supported this contention by focusing on “radical translation,” the translation of a completely foreign language from scratch (1960: ch. 2). Because such translation cannot assume any prior understanding, it helps to appreciate that translation is “indeterminate”: there is no fact of the matter as to whether two expressions are synonymous, and hence no criteria of identity for intensions. For this reason, scientific philosophy should eliminate them from its ontology.

The result of Quine’s assimilation of the analytic and the synthetic, the a priori and the empirical, is a thoroughgoing naturalism. For Quine, philosophy is a branch of or continuous with natural science (meta-philosophical naturalism). There is no genuine knowledge outside natural science (epistemological naturalism), and the latter provides the sole standard for what is real (ontological naturalism). This naturalistic conception of knowledge in turn requires a new, “naturalized epistemology.” Like traditional epistemology, this novel discipline investigates the relationship between our beliefs and the empirical evidence for them. Yet it does so not by providing an a priori “rational reconstruction” (à la Carnap) of the reasons we have for accepting scientific theories, but through a scientific investigation – behaviorist psychology or neurophysiology – of what causes us to adopt them. In the wake of Quine, this naturalistic conception of philosophy has achieved the status of orthodoxy, especially in the USA. Few analytic philosophers these days would dare to publish a book in the philosophy of mind without at least professing their allegiance to some form of naturalism in the preface, however implausible such professions may ultimately be.

Reductionism and verificationism proved to be an Achilles’ heel of logical positivism not just in the philosophy of language, but also in the philosophy of science. Their failure undermined logical empiricism, but other versions soon came to the fore. Close to Quine’s holistic empiricism is Karl Popper’s fallibilism (1934). Popper rejected the verificationist criterion of meaningfulness on several grounds. First, separating meaningful science from nonsensical metaphysics is not just unfeasible but also undesirable, since metaphysical speculation provides an invaluable stimulus to scientific research. Second, what is needed is a demarcation not between sense and nonsense, but between empirical science and other disciplines. Finally, the criterion for that demarcation cannot be verifiability. Science depends on universal laws, and these can never be conclusively verified, since they cover an infinite number of cases. Instead, it is falsifiability. A theory is scientific if it allows for the derivation of predictions that can be falsified by empirical data. Science proceeds not by fine-tuning inductive generalizations, but by bold conjectures, the logical deduction of predictions from these conjectures, and their ruthless refutation in the light of novel data.

For the logical positivists, scientific theory-formation was an ahistorical activity, namely of constructing theoretical frameworks to fit the available empirical evidence. Popper introduced a historical element, because a novel scientific theory is judged largely by the extent to which it can explain the observations that refuted its
predecessors. He nevertheless retained the image of scientific progress as a linear and rational process in which theories are conclusively falsified and replaced by new ones which increasingly approximate the truth. This image was questioned by Thomas Kuhn (1922–96) (see Kuhn 1970), and Paul Feyerabend (1924–94) (see Feyerabend 1975). They maintained that the history of science does not consist of rational shifts from inferior to superior theories, but of “paradigm-shifts” that are partly dictated by non-cognitive factors (social, aesthetic, etc.). There is no universal scientific rationality which would allow us to maintain that more recent theories are objectively better than their predecessors. They also questioned the Kantian distinction between the “context of discovery” and the “context of justification,” which had allowed the logical positivists to keep the rational reconstruction and defense of scientific theories apart from an explanation of their origins, whether it be physiological or sociological.

Although few analytic philosophers have swallowed their relativistic conclusions, Kuhn and Feyerabend turned philosophy of science from ahistorical methodological questions to the history and, to a lesser extent, the sociology of science. Since the 1970s, the preoccupation with methodology also came under pressure from metaphysics. Casting off what they regarded as positivistic shackles, philosophers of science maintained that unobservable theoretical entities and the laws of nature are mind-independent features of reality rather than merely linguistic expedients for the explanation and prediction of experience (see “Philosophy of science,” Chapter 14).

The rehabilitation of metaphysics

In this respect, post-positivist philosophy of science was part of a more general trend. The ground for this rehabilitation of metaphysics had been cleared by the aforementioned withdrawal of the verificationist criterion of meaningfulness. Into this ground analytic philosophers planted three distinct metaphysical seeds.

The first was Quine’s naturalistic approach to ontology. For Carnap, the only genuine questions of existence are scientific questions like “Are there neutrinos?” or “Are there prime numbers greater than 10^10?”; they concern particular groups of entities and can be solved within a specific “linguistic framework.” By contrast, philosophical questions like “Are there material objects?” or “Do numbers exist?” concerning whole categories of entities are either meaningless or “practical” in nature. They boil down to the pragmatic question of whether for scientific purposes it is convenient to adopt a linguistic framework like that of the natural numbers.

By contrast, Quine’s naturalism resulted in a “blurring of the boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science” (Quine 1953: 20). Philosophy is concerned with the “limning of the most general traits of reality.” It investigates the fundamental “furniture of our universe,” and differs from science only quantitatively, in the generality and breadth of its questions. Quine declares himself to be “no champion of traditional metaphysics.” He denies that a priori philosophical reflection can establish what kinds of things there are. Nevertheless, he finds a place for ontology (1966: 203–4). Like traditional ontology, Quine’s naturalistic variety seeks to establish what kinds of things there are. But it does not pursue this aspiration
directly or in isolation. Instead, it helps science in drawing up an inventory of the world. It translates our scientific theories into an ideal formal language – Quine calls it “canonical notation” – and thereby clarifies and, where possible, reduces their “ontological commitments,” the types of entities the existence of which these theories presuppose. A canonical notation displays our ontological commitments and allows us to paraphrase them in order to keep them at a minimum. While

(2) Red is a color

contains a name for a property, and thereby seems to commit us to the existence of an intensional entity, the paraphrase

(2’) \( \forall x \ (x \text{ is red} \rightarrow x \text{ is a color}) \)

avoids any such commitment. Decisions on whether to admit entities that cannot be paraphrased away are guided by a pragmatic trade-off between the systematic efficacy (explanatory power) attained by admitting them and the ontological economy achieved by excluding them.

Like Carnap, Quine does not analyze our existing notions but explicates them, i.e. replaces them by analogues deemed to be scientifically more respectable. But whereas the logical positivists aspired to an ideal language that avoids metaphysical problems, Quine’s ideal language aims to reveal the metaphysics of science. This has become a guiding principle of contemporary naturalists. By exploring what things our best current scientific theories take to exist, they also purport to provide the best account of what things actually exist.

A contrasting rehabilitation of metaphysics was provided by Strawson. His early writings criticized orthodoxies of logical construction by appeal to ordinary use. But in Individuals (1959) Strawson’s concern shifted to “descriptive metaphysics.” This Kantian enterprise differs from previous conceptual analysis in its greater scope and generality, since it seeks to “lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure.” These are not discernible in the motley of ordinary use, but in fundamental functions of discourse, notably those of reference – picking out an individual item – and predication – saying something about it. Descriptive metaphysics “is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world,” by contrast to revisionary metaphysics, which aspires “to produce a better structure” based either on a priori insights, as in traditional metaphysics, or on the perceived demands of science, as in naturalism. It also differs from both in that it elucidates not the most abstract features of the world, but the preconditions of our thought about the world, of our “conceptual scheme” (1959: 9).

This idea is also central to Strawson’s epistemology, which revived the idea of transcendental arguments. Such arguments aim to show that skeptical doubts are incoherent or self-refuting, because they question preconditions of any meaningful discourse, the skeptic’s own doubts included. The skeptic saws off the branch on which he is sitting, because his doubts employ concepts which make sense only on the tacit assumption of conceptual connections he explicitly rejects.
Critics have protested that transcendental arguments establish at best that we must employ concepts like those of a mind-independent object, not that they are actually satisfied by anything in reality (Stroud 1968; cf. Glock 2003c). Nevertheless, the idea of establishing the preconditions of experience, thought, or discourse continues to inspire philosophers, including Davidson. It promises to avoid both the Scylla of skepticism and the Charybdis of naturalized epistemology, which bypasses the question of whether our beliefs are justified in favor of causal explanations of their origins. The same goes for descriptive metaphysics, the attempt to make explicit the fundamental notions and assumptions of our conceptual scheme (e.g. Jackson 1998: 31–3).

The final source of contemporary analytic metaphysics has two interrelated roots. The first is the thriving of modal logic, in particular the idea that the logic of terms like “necessarily” and “possibly” can be explicated in terms of Leibniz’s notion of a possible world. The second is the rise of theories of “direct reference,” according to which many expressions, notably proper names and natural kind terms, refer to their denotata directly, without the mediation of Fregean senses, i.e. of properties which the denotata uniquely possess. Quine had followed the logical positivists in treating the necessary, the analytic, and the a priori as equivalent. This is at odds not just with Kant’s endorsement of synthetic a priori truths, but also with contemporary essentialism. For Saul Kripke (1940–), the a priori is an epistemological category, necessity a metaphysical one, and analyticity a logical one (see Kripke 1980: 34–9). In the wake of Kripke, the following definitions have found favor: a truth is a priori if and only if (abbreviated to “iff”) it can be known independently of experience; it is necessary iff it is true in all possible worlds; it is analytic iff it is true by virtue of meaning. According to Kripke’s and Putnam’s “realist semantics,” these categories differ not just in their intension, but also in their extension. Theoretical identifications like

\[(3) \text{ Water is } H_2O\]

are both a posteriori, because they are discovered by science, and necessary. For natural kind terms (like proper names) are “rigid designators.” In all possible worlds in which they pick out anything at all, they pick out the same thing, namely a substance with a particular microstructure (\(H_2O\) in our case), and that microstructure constitutes the essence of the natural kind.

With characteristic foresight, Quine had anticipated the essentialist implications of modal logic, yet he ridiculed the idea that philosophers can get essences into the haircrosses of their intellectual periscopes. Ironically, instead of undermining modal logic, his warnings led to a revival of essentialism. What is more, this revival can appeal to Quine’s own naturalism. Quine holds that philosophy must eschew necessity and essences because it is continuous with empirical science. But if some necessary truths – truths about the essence of things – are a posteriori, philosophy can be continuous with science precisely because it scrutinizes such essences.

This presupposes, however, that sense can be made of modal notions like that of possible worlds. In line with his general attack on intensions, Quine complained that there are no criteria for trans-world identity. The essential features of an individual are
those which it possesses in all possible worlds in which it exists. But what determines who is who in different possible worlds? Another issue is the ontological status of possible worlds. According to the hyper-realism of David Lewis (1941–2001), possible worlds are just as real as the actual one. Each world is a self-contained space-time with no connection to any other world. According to Kripke’s, by contrast, a possible world is a way this world might have been, it is something real yet abstract. And according to fictionalism, a possible world is a fiction, a totality of consistent representations. To say that it is possible that \( p \) is to say that there is a consistent description of a world according to which \( p \). Reality attaches not to the unactualized possibilities themselves, but rather to our representations of them (see Baldwin 2001: ch. 6).

Irrespective of these difficulties, essentialism has led to a new genre, one in which metaphysical questions are answered by appeal to modal intuitions, intuitions about whether there is a possible world satisfying certain conditions. For instance, the question whether the mind is identical with the body is tackled by contemplating whether there is a possible world with “zombies,” creatures physically identical to us but without any kind of mental life (Chalmers 1996).

Their metaphysical ambitions notwithstanding, all three projects remain faithful to the linguistic turn, insofar as they proceed through reflections on language. Quine’s contribution to the investigation of reality lies in devising a canonical notation and in providing ontologically parsimonious formulations of scientific theories. For Strawson, the metaphysically fundamental categories are those that play a central role in our conceptual scheme as embodied in language. And although essentialism seeks to establish necessities which concern reality rather than our conceptual scheme, it identifies these through the workings of language, notably the rigid fashion in which proper names and natural kind terms designate. This is why Kripke and Putnam (1975) frequently appeal to “what we would say” about certain counterfactual situations, e.g. a “Twin Earth” on which a substance which shares all the surface properties of water turns out to have a chemical composition other than \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \).

From language to mind

For logical positivism, Wittgenstein and linguistic philosophy language mattered because it provided a means of resolving philosophical problems. For logical atomism as well as for Quine and essentialism it matters because it provides a guide to the ontological constitution of reality. But the linguistic turn also encouraged an interest in language as a topic in its own right. From the 1960s onwards, linguistic philosophy was contrasted unfavorably with the philosophy of language (Searle 1969: 3–4; Dummett 1978: 441–3). Two differences were diagnosed. First, whereas philosophy of language is a discipline just like the philosophy of law or of religion, linguistic philosophy is a method, namely for the resolution of problems from all areas of philosophy. Second, linguistic philosophy was said to proceed by the piecemeal investigation of particular expressions or constructions, whereas proper philosophy of language was deemed to require a systematic account of language. Even among those eager to utilize linguistic analyses for the resolution of philosophical problems, many felt that without such an account these analyses lack a proper foundation.
The rise of philosophy of language thus understood reveals that the received contrast between ideal and ordinary language philosophy actually comprises two distinct conflicts. The first is between two different aims: while logical construction seeks to replace natural languages by artificial alternatives, both conceptual analysis and the new philosophies of language explore the workings of actual languages. The second is between two different techniques (which in turn are connected to different perspectives on language, see below): while formal approaches define terms and paraphrase sentences by translating them into an interpreted logical calculus, non-formal approaches explain words and paraphrase sentences by describing their role and their connections with other expressions from the vernacular.

Formal approaches are not confined to logical construction. For it is possible and indeed popular to treat formal calculi not as ideal languages which avoid the shortcomings of ordinary language, but as indicating the underlying “logical form” that sentences in the vernacular possessed all along. Thus Strawson (1971: 171–2) highlighted the “Homeric struggle” between formal semanticists, who treat language – natural languages included – as an abstract system of complex formal rules, and those who regard it primarily as a kind of human activity. Yet some figures straddle even this divide. This holds for Quine and his pupil Donald Davidson (1984). Both combine formal semantics with a pragmatist emphasis on language as a form of social human behavior. Whereas Quine is ultimately interested in artificial languages, however, Davidson has been the most eminent champion of a theory of meaning for natural languages. Before him, a theory of meaning was supposed to provide an analysis – in a suitably loose sense – of the concept of meaning (as in referential, verificationist and use theories of meaning). By contrast to such analytic theories, Davidson envisages a constructive theory which does not explain directly what meaning is. Instead, it generates for each sentence of a natural language a theorem that specifies its meaning. Such a theory is empirical; and actually to construct it is a task for linguistics. The philosopher’s brief is to establish the requirements that such theories must fulfill. This is done by Tractatus-like reflections on the essential preconditions of language. Thus it is argued that speakers can produce and understand a potentially infinite number of sentences, and that this “semantic productivity” requires a “compositional” theory, one which displays the meaning of each sentence as determined by that of its components (drawn from a finite lexicon) and the mode of their composition.

Just as the Tractatus maintained that the hidden depth-structure of ordinary language is given by Russellian logic, Davidson maintains that it is given by Tarski’s formal theory of truth. According to Davidson, a Tarskian truth-theory satisfies these requirements, because with a finite number of axioms it permits for each sentence of a language the derivation of a “T-sentence.” For instance, a theory for German delivers

(4) “Schnee ist weiss” is true iff snow is white

Whereas Tarski tried to define truth, Davidson employs T-sentences to state the meaning of sentences by specifying the conditions under which they are true. Unlike
Tarski, Davidson is optimistic that such theories can be devised not just for formal but also for natural languages. He argues that they allow of empirical confirmation under conditions of “radical interpretation” (a variant of radical translation), namely, if one ascertains the conditions under which alien speakers assent to their own sentences.

According to Davidson’s “principle of charity,” it is a precondition of radical interpretation, and hence of linguistic understanding in general, that the interpretees hold beliefs which are by-and-large correct. On this assumption, a theory of meaning can answer questions about reality, since any interpretable language must have a logical form that mirrors the structure of reality. Thus Davidson seeks to demonstrate the existence of events by showing that certain inferential patterns of ordinary discourse ontologically commit us to events (1980: ch. 7). Michael Dummett’s “anti-realism” (1978) also regards theories of meaning as a guide to metaphysical insights. Against Davidson’s truth-conditional semantics, however, he maintains that the meaning of sentences is determined not by the conditions under which sentences are true, which are independent of our ability to decide whether they obtain, but by the conditions “which warrant their assertion.”

In another respect, Davidson and Dummett (1925– ) are on the same side. Like many icons of mid-century analytic philosophy (Wittgenstein, linguistic philosophy, Quine, Sellars) they adopt a third-person perspective on language, holding that the meaning of words and sentences is determined by observable behavior. All of the aforementioned also tend to assign priority to language over thought. Both claims conflict with a powerful recent trend. The slogan that meaning is use came under scrutiny by Grice’s theory of conversational implicatures. Paul Grice (1913–88) maintained that many of the patterns of linguistic use highlighted by conceptual analysts are semantically irrelevant, since they are due not to the meaning of specific expressions, but to pragmatic principles governing discourse in general (Grice 1989). Furthermore, a common theme in linguistic philosophy is that language is a form of intentional behavior. This suggested to Austin that the philosophy of language is a branch of the philosophy of action. Taking this proposal one step further, Grice and John Searle (1932– ) turned it into a sub-domain of the philosophy of mind, by trying to reduce semantic notions to psychological ones like intention.

Gricean theories still hold that expressions derive their meaning from the use to which speakers put them. Approaches influenced by Noam Chomsky’s “revolution in linguistics” shed any vestige of the commonsense idea that meaning and language are rooted in communication. Thus Jerry Fodor (1935– ) argued that both the meaning of public languages and the intentionality of thought can be explained by a “language of thought” (Fodor 1975). External sentences are meaningful because they are correlated with internal symbols, sentence-like representations in the brain which also constitute our thoughts.

This reversal of the linguistic turn has turned the philosophy of mind into the perceived foundation of philosophy (see “Philosophy of mind,” Chapter 12). Nevertheless the postwar flourishing of the subject received its initial impetus from Wittgenstein and Ryle. Running through the mainstream of modern philosophy is the idea that a person can be certain about his inner world of subjective experiences, but
can at best infer how things are outside him. Subjective experience was conceived not only as the foundation of empirical knowledge, but also as the foundation of language: the meaning of words seems fixed by naming subjective experiences (impressions, sense-data, qualia, preconceptual contents), for example through inner ostension (“pain’ means *this*”). Wittgenstein’s famous private-language argument undermines this assumption (1953: §§243–314). A ceremony of naming can only lay down standards for distinguishing between correct and incorrect uses of a term “S,” and hence provide the latter with meaning, if it can be explained to and understood by others.

Wittgenstein explicitly does not exclude the possibility of a language spoken or even invented by a single speaker, but only of a language which cannot be understood by others because its “meanings” are private in principle. The fulcrum of his argument is neither a stipulation according to which the term “language” is confined to systems of communication, nor skepticism about memory. At issue is not whether the private linguist can remember what he means by “S,” but whether he has managed to endow “S” with meaning in the first place. To this end, the putative naming ceremony would have to lay down a rule for the correct use of “S.” But there is no such thing as a non-operational rule, one which cannot even in principle be used to distinguish between correct and incorrect applications. Yet the putative definition of the private linguist is non-operational. The private linguist’s application of “S” at t₁ is incorrigible not just at t₁, it cannot even be corrected by him at t₂. For at t₂ nothing distinguishes the private linguist’s rectifying a mistake by reference to a prior rule from his adopting a new rule. Justification consists in “appealing to something independent,” and this is *ab initio* precluded in the case of a private language (1953: §265). Hence there can be no private ostensive definition in which a private impression functions as a sample.

Wittgenstein’s attack on the Cartesian picture of mind and meaning was reinforced by Ryle’s assault on the myth of the “ghost in the machine,” the idea that perception and action are cases of an immaterial soul interacting with the physical world. Both of them distinguished between establishing the causal preconditions of mental phenomena, such as the firing of neurons, and the analysis of mental concepts, which specifies features that are constitutive of mental phenomena. Quinean naturalism fueled an opposing outlook, according to which the philosophy of mind is either continuous with or a branch of psychology, biology, or neuroscience. The widely accepted task is to naturalize mental phenomena, i.e. to show that they are fully explicable in the terms of physical science.

Wittgenstein’s and Ryle’s attacks on Cartesian dualism found favor. But their denial that mental terms refer to inner states which cause our outward behavior was repudiated, especially by “Australian materialists” such as U. T. Place (1924–2000), John Jamieson Carswell Smart (1920– ), and David Armstrong (1926– ) (see Baldwin 2001: 47–52, 201–3). And if these inner states are not irreducibly mental, they must be physical. The result was the mind/brain identity theory: the mind is identical with the brain and mental properties are identical with neurophysiological properties. The identity theory was not presented as a semantic or analytic reduction showing that mental concepts mean the same as terms referring to neurophysiological phenomena. Instead, it was put forward as a scientific or synthetic reduction based on a posteriori
hypotheses. The identity of the mind with the brain is supposed to be a scientific discovery on a par with that of the identity of water with H2O. In effect, however, the identity theory combined the conceptual claim that mental terms refer to inner states that cause behavior with the scientific claim that this causal role is played by certain neural states.

This combination soon came a cropper. As Putnam (1975: chs. 18–21) and Fodor (1974) pointed out, mental phenomena are multiply realizable through physiochemical phenomena, not just in principle (Martians, computers) but in fact, and not just across species. When different test persons solve one and the same problem, slightly different parts of the brain are activated. This led to a novel form of materialism. According to functionalism, mental states are functional states of a machine. What is constitutive of a mental phenomenon is not the particular physical process but the causal role or function that it performs, a role which could be realized or implemented in diverse physical states. Pain, for instance, can only be identified with the function of correlating a stimulatory input (e.g. injury) with a behavioral output (e.g. crying), not with the firing of specific neurons.

The mind/brain identity theory maintained that types of mental states are identical with types of neurophysiological states. Davidson’s “anomalous monism” (1980) abandons this “type/type” identity: But it retains the idea that each “token,” each instance of a mental state or event occurring in an individual, is identical with a particular neurophysiological event or state. Like functionalism, it also holds on to the idea that mental properties supervene on physical properties. While there can be a physical difference between individuals without any mental difference, there cannot be a mental difference without a physical difference.

Though hugely popular, functionalism faced objections on two fronts. At one end it was castigated for failing to do justice to the indelibly subjective nature of the mind. Thus Thomas Nagel (1974) and Frank Jackson (1986) argued that materialism in general and functionalism in particular cannot account for “qualia,” the private feel of mental phenomena. At the other end, it was alleged that functionalism cannot explain intentionality, and in particular the content of our thoughts. Searle’s Chinese room argument (1980) uses a thought-experiment in the style of conceptual analysis to show that the mere “syntactic” ability to produce an appropriate output of symbols in response to an input does not amount to genuine understanding or thought about the world, since it is present even in a system that merely simulates these achievements. Furthermore, so-called externalists denied that the content of an individual A’s thoughts is exclusively determined by her intrinsic (mental or physiological) properties. Instead, what A thinks depends at least partly on facts “external” to, and often unknown to, A, facts about A’s physical (Putnam 1975) or social (Burge 1979) environment. Two physically identical individuals might have different thoughts. When a physical duplicate of mine on Twin Earth thinks about the transparent, odorless, and potable liquid surrounding him, the content of his thoughts differs from mine: he cannot be thinking about water, since he is surrounded by XYZ rather than H2O.

A radical, some would say desperate, reaction to the travails of existing variants of materialism is eliminative materialism (Churchland 1981). It treats our ordinary
psychological beliefs and concepts as part of a theory – “folk psychology” – which is simply wrong and does not refer to real phenomena. Therefore folk psychology should be replaced by a more scientific, purely neurophysiological theory. Like Quine’s nihilism about meaning, this is a form of eliminative naturalism. Statements which involve concepts that cannot be accommodated within natural science – notably about thought and meaning – are not analyzed, not even in the weaker sense of scientific reduction. Instead, they are simply replaced by naturalistically acceptable statements and notions.

Matters of value

For Moore, the question of how “good” is to be defined was the most fundamental problem of ethics. But his famous “open question” argument drove him to the conclusion that “good” is indefinable, since goodness is a simple quality which has no parts. Consider any definition of the form:

\[(5) \text{ Good is } X.\]

(Candidates for “X” include “that which causes pleasure”.) For any substitution for “X” – other than “good” itself – it is always an intelligible and in that sense “open” question whether (5) is true. Therefore, even if things which are X are in fact good, “X” cannot mean the same as “good” and hence cannot be used to define it. In particular, any attempt to define “good” in terms of natural properties is bound to fail, the contrary view being dubbed by Moore the “naturalistic fallacy” (1903: 10–16). Good is a non-natural simple property, to which we have access by a kind of rational intuition. Nevertheless, this property supervenes on natural properties: any two things with exactly the same natural properties would also have to be equally good.

Later analytic philosophers tended to accept Moore’s conclusion that moral properties cannot be analytically defined in terms of natural ones, while rejecting his intuitionism. This led many to the conclusion that moral judgments are not descriptive and hence not strictly speaking truth-apt at all. According to the logical positivists, cognitively significant propositions are either analytic or a priori. But moral statements fit neither category. They concluded that moral statements are not cognitively significant, and that their real function is not to make factual claims but rather to express our emotions, in particular of approval or disapproval (Ayer 1936: ch. 6). This emotivism was supported by C. L. Stevenson (1908–79) on independent grounds (Stevenson 1944). According to him, it accounted for the fact that whereas descriptions of fact seem to be motivationally neutral, moral statements are intrinsically action-guiding: it would be odd to say “Φ-ing is the right thing to do, but I am in no way in favor of Φ-ing.”

Emotivism runs the risk of reducing moral statements to interjections like “boo” and “hurrah,” and to ignore the role that reason plays in moral argument. This shortcoming was addressed by R. M. Hare (1919–2002), the most influential moral philosopher among the Oxford conceptual analysts. According to Hare, moral state-
ments are closer to imperatives than to avowals of emotions: their purpose is to guide action. But unlike imperatives they are universalizable: if one morally condemns a lie, one is committed to condemning all lies in circumstances of a similar kind. The question of whether the person making a moral statement can consistently desire this kind of universalization provides scope for reasoned argument, even though there are no moral facts.

Because of this last point, and in spite of its Kantian provenance, universal prescriptivism came to be lumped with emotivism under the heading of “non-cognitivism.” Hare’s work set the scene for the subsequent debate. In line with the linguistic turn, he initially restricted moral philosophy to “meta-ethics” – a second-order discipline which does not issue any moral claims but instead analyses moral concepts, examines the status of moral judgments and delineates the structure of moral argument. “Ethics, as I conceive it, is the logical study of the language of morals” (1952: v). H. L. A. Hart (1907–92) provided a comparable stimulus to legal and political theory (Hart 1962). He tried to avoid futile metaphysical disputes about the nature of obligations and rights through conceptual analysis. But under the influence of Wittgensteinian ideas he rejected the search for analytic definitions in favor of a more contextual elucidation of the role such concepts play in legal discourse.

Non-cognitivism was challenged in the first instance by conceptual analysts who cast doubt on its picture of moral discourse. Peter Geach (1916– ) argued that it cannot do justice to the occurrence of moral statements in inferences, because the latter requires propositions that can be truth-apt. Later cognitivists set store by the fact that we ordinarily call moral judgments true or false and that moral discourse displays the full grammar and logic of assertions. Philippa Foot (1920– ) and Mary Warnock (1924– ) maintained that the sharp distinction between descriptive and prescriptive uses of language is untenable (on Foot, see “Twentieth-century moral philosophy,” Chapter 20). Among the most pervasive moral concepts are “thick concepts” such as rudeness, concepts which include both descriptive and prescriptive elements. And Searle argued that by appeal to institutional facts it is after all possible to derive prescriptive from descriptive statements, an “ought” from an “is.”

Putnam (1981) pointed in a similar direction when he insisted that the philosophy of science no longer supports the fact/value distinction, since scientific inquiry itself rests on norms. And John McDowell (1942– ) and David Wiggins (1933– ) urged a rethink of the non-cognitivist dichotomy of the subjective (expression, prescription) and the objective (description), by exploring the analogy between values and secondary qualities. Similarities between moral and perceptual judgments were also explored through a revival of intuitionism, especially in Britain under the label “particularism” (Dancy 2004).

At the same time, both non-cognitivism and intuitionism had to face a novel, methodological challenge. Can meta-ethical issues about the logic of moral discourse really be kept separate from substantive moral questions? For one thing, Hare himself moved from an allegedly neutral meta-ethics to a position which tries to draw substantive ethical conclusions from the nature of our moral concepts. For another, there were Quinean animadversions against distinguishing the analysis of concepts
from the discovery of matters of fact (Harman 1977). Third, the 1960s and 1970s brought to the fore issues such as war, nuclear deterrence, abortion, civil disobedience, and the destruction of the natural environment. Many philosophers realized that these issues raise substantive moral questions that cannot be left to either religious dogma or political ideologies like Marxism. “Applied ethics” became the name of the attempt to deal with such specific moral issues in a cogent rational manner. Finally, the rebirth of normative ethics was completed by the realization that grand normative theory beyond conceptual analysis remained possible. John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice (1971) was a compelling trend-setter (see “Twentieth-century political philosophy,” Chapter 21). It marked the rise of political theory, hitherto neglected, within the analytic tradition. Rawls (1921–2002) argued that a principle of distributive justice can be justified by considering the kind of rules which agents ignorant of their future place within society should rationally opt for. Rawls also inspired a revival of the Kantian idea that there is such a thing as objective practical reasons for action, over and beyond the means–ends rationality stressed by Hume and also explored by decision theory, yet independent of any contentious ontology of moral facts.

These developments did not spell the end for meta-ethics, but instead led to an intertwining of meta-ethical and ethical discussions. Furthermore, the focus altered from specific moral notions to investigations into the nature of moral justification and the metaphysical status of values. Naturalism also reasserted itself at this level. One variant maintains that moral concepts can be accommodated within naturalism once we give up the misguided ambition of analyzing them. Moral predicates meet naturalistic demands because the properties they attribute – e.g. contributing to human flourishing – play a role in the best explanatory theories of empirical science (Boyd, Sturgeon), or because they are idealizations of psychological properties (Lewis, Harman). But there is also a contrasting, eliminative version of naturalism. According to Mackie’s “error theory” (1977), moral concepts and judgments are indeed descriptive or factual. The trouble, according to Mackie, is that nothing corresponds to moral concepts in reality, which is purely physical, and that hence our moral judgments – all and sundry – are mistaken.

An equally iconoclastic attack on the very terms of moral debate was launched by neo-Nietzscheans such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–) and Bernard Williams (1929–2003). They suggested that philosophy is impotent to fill the moral gap left by the decline of religion. The demand for objective, rational, and impersonal validation unites all major positions in normative ethics. But, the neo-Nietzscheans urged, it is of dubious origins, unfeasible, and lacks sufficient credibility to sustain the project of a philosophical ethics. Although the neo-Nietzscheans are less infatuated with science than the naturalists, in one respect they point in a similar direction. Even as regards matters of value, the story goes, philosophy is not an autonomous discipline; rather, it needs to be supplemented by other modes of discourse, whether they be natural science, the social and historical sciences, or even art and religion.
The end of analysis?

Analytic philosophy has undergone a sea-change since its inception by Frege, Moore, and Russell. The major development has no doubt been the linguistic turn and its subsequent reversal, notably through the rise of naturalism and of subjectivist/mentalist approaches to mind and language. To many contemporary philosophers, conceptual analysis is out of date and out of touch with cutting-edge scientific philosophy. On closer inspection, however, the objections to it are far from conclusive.

The struggle between conceptual analysis and logical construction was originally fought on a common ground, namely the assumption that philosophical problems are rooted in conceptual/linguistic confusions. Conceptual analysts tried to resolve these problems not through substituting artificial terms and constructions for the idioms of natural languages, but by clarifying the latter. To logical constructionists, this appeared as a philistine cult of common sense and ordinary use, at the expense of scientific insights and terminology. Similarly, present-day cognitive and neuroscientists complain that conceptual analysts like Searle and Hacker who criticize their philosophical conclusions prefer thought-experiments to real experiments, and that they set themselves up as “guardians of semantic inertia” (Gregory 1987: 242–3).

These complaints ignore that the term “ordinary use” is ambiguous (mutatis mutandis for “ordinary language”). It can either mean the everyday use of a term; or it can mean its established use, whether it be in common parlance or in technical forms of discourse with a tightly regimented vocabulary (Ryle 1971: ch. 23). Conceptual analysis does not extol the virtues of the mundane everyday over the sophisticated specialized employment of a term. Nor does it prohibit the introduction of technical terminology in either science or philosophy, as the case of Austin makes patently clear. Persistent misinterpretations notwithstanding, conceptual analysts have refrained explicitly from criticizing philosophical positions merely for employing novel terms or familiar words in ways that differ from the established patterns of use.

Rather, they insist that such novel terms or uses need to be adequately explained by laying down clear rules. They further allege that many metaphysical questions and theories – no matter whether propounded by philosophers or scientists – get off the ground only because they employ terms in a way which is at odds with their official explanations, and that they trade on deviant rules along with the ordinary ones. Thus Ryle insisted that linguistic philosophy is interested less in language as a system, than in the often slippery and equivocal uses to which it is put in the course of philosophical argument. Conceptual analysis is not linguistics masquerading as philosophy: it is a tool of critical thinking and a way of dealing with the quest for the essences of things that have been central to philosophy since Plato. In a similar vein, Wittgenstein tried to confront metaphysicians with a “trilemma”: either their novel uses of terms remain unexplained (unintelligibility), or it is revealed that they use expressions according to incompatible rules (inconsistency), or their consistent employment of new concepts simply passes by the ordinary use – including the standard use of technical terms – and hence the concepts in terms of which the philosophical problems were phrased.
“If we are using the word ‘to know’ as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain” (Wittgenstein 1953: §246). According to the established rules, it makes perfectly good sense to say that I know that others are in pain. This suggests that the skeptic about other minds is like someone who claims that there are no physicians in London, since by “physician” he understands someone who can cure any disease within twenty minutes. His doubts either amount to an *ignoratio elenchi*, since they employ “knowledge” according to other rules than the knowledge-claims which these doubts purport to attack, or they simply manifest his repudiation of those rules (1958: 55ff.). But how could such a repudiation be justified? The established rules are unmistakably superior to those implicit in the skeptic’s position, since they draw important distinctions – e.g. between more or less well-established beliefs or between more or less trustworthy informants – which he obliterates (see Glock 1996: 258–64, 336–41).

However, isn’t the simplest way of avoiding such equivocations to abandon the old concepts altogether? Logical constructionists reasoned as follows: since philosophical confusions originate in natural languages, the recipe for avoiding them is to replace natural languages by artificial alternatives. Conceptual analysts replied that precisely because the problems originate in our actual conceptual framework, as ideal language philosophers granted, the introduction of a novel framework will merely sweep these problems under the carpet, unless its relation to the old concepts is properly understood (Strawson 1963).

One rejoinder to this last point is Quine’s suggestion that clarity about our actual linguistic framework is best achieved by translating its constructions into a formal language. The “familiarity” of our ordinary idiom, Quine opines, “carries no presumption of clarity. It merely breeds contentment” (Hahn and Schilpp 1986: 228). This line is uncompelling. There is no reason whatever why the mere introduction of novel concepts could shed light on the old ones. One cannot understand how birds fly simply by constructing an airplane (Hacker 1996: 310n). Furthermore, if we can successfully apply and explain the terms of natural languages, this certainly creates a presumption of clarity.

It is more plausible to insist that this presumption is defeated by the fact that the ordinary use of terms like “true” leads to antinomies and paradoxes like that of the liar. The moot question, however, is whether the philosophical difficulties arise out of ordinary language as such, or out of its distortion and misunderstanding in the course of philosophical theorizing. Furthermore, it is downright mysterious how clarity might be achieved through the introduction of artificial alternatives, if natural languages were indeed irredeemably obscure or incoherent. For as Wittgenstein, Austin, and Quine himself have pointed out, ordinary language is the ultimate medium of explanation. In Austin’s words, while “ordinary language is not the last word … it is the first word” (1970: 185). All neologisms, those of science included, need to be explained. By pain of regress, this can ultimately be done only in terms of ordinary expressions which are already understood. These expressions we acquire not through explanation in terms of another language, but through training in basic linguistic skills. With respect to many purposes ordinary language is inferior to technical idioms. But it is
semantic bedrock. It is only by acquiring ordinary language that we acquire the ability to learn and explain new and technical terms.

Science can and must develop its own terminology and conceptual apparatus. The explanation of perception, for instance, cannot be couched exclusively in everyday concepts, but must employ technical concepts from a variety of areas, ranging from psychology to biochemistry. Yet it is arguable that in presenting and interpreting the results of empirical research into perception, both philosophers and scientists do not stick to that technical terminology. Instead, they often employ everyday terms like “representation,” “symbol,” “map,” “image,” “information,” or “language” in ways which either remain unexplained or illicitly combine their ordinary uses with technical ones (Bennett and Hacker 2003; Glock 2003a). This is no coincidence, moreover. Everyday statements like “Maria saw that Frank had put on weight,” “Sarah listens to the Eroica,” “One can smell the wild strawberries,” “The sense of taste is not affected by old age,” etc. pick out the phenomena that the science of perception seeks to explain.

Consider another philosophical problem that is hotly debated at present and intimately connected to thriving scientific research: Can non-human animals have a mind? The answer to this question depends not just on empirical findings about animal behavior, its physiological causes or its evolutionary emergence (no matter whether these stem from field studies in the wild or experiments in laboratories). It also depends on what counts as having a mind (as thinking, behaving intelligently, etc.), and on the circumstances under which mental properties can be ascribed to an organism. Even in these cases, which prima facie favor a hardnosed methodological naturalism, the distinctively philosophical task does not consist in collecting novel data, but in clarifying contested concepts and in spelling out their implications for the methods and results of scientific research. This is not to say that one needs a watertight definition of mental properties before cognitive ethology can begin to devise empirical theories. But such theory-formation inevitably presupposes a certain understanding of its subject area. Consequently it stands in need of being accompanied by reflections on the concepts which determine this subject area, concepts which are presupposed in specific research projects, methods, or conclusions from the special sciences. For these reasons it is a precondition of any sober approach to philosophical problems that it should pay attention to the established use of philosophically contested notions within their normal surroundings.

Whether such investigations will terminate in analytic definitions of concepts, i.e. definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, is another matter. Certain contemporary opponents of conceptual analysis have devoted themselves to a pastime invented by Wittgenstein. They take delight in pointing out that ever since Plato, philosophers have failed spectacularly to come up with convincing definitions of any but the most trivial concepts. Thus Fodor opines hyperbolically though not without some justice that “the number of concepts whose analyses have thus far been determined continues to hover stubbornly around none” (2003: 6; similarly Davidson 1996).

Nevertheless, we need not share such extreme pessimism. For one thing, it appears that even some central philosophical concepts allow of definitions, once one bids
farewell to unjustified assumptions, e.g. that truth must be a relation between a truth-bearer and a truth-maker or that knowledge must be belief plus something else (Hyman 1999; Künne 2003). Other cases may indeed defy analytic definition. This does not mean, however, that it is either impossible or unnecessary to elucidate them. There are other perfectly respectable ways of explaining concepts. Nor are these confined to contextual definitions like the ones Frege gave for numerals or Russell for definite descriptions. In this context, Strawson has distinguished between “reductive” and “connective analysis” (1992: ch. 2). The former seeks to break down concepts and propositions into ultimate components. But the developments in the wake of the later Wittgenstein and of Quine cast doubt on the idea of ultimate components and a definite structure. Connective analysis, by contrast, abandons the analogy to chemical analysis. It is simply the description of the rule-governed use of expressions, and of their connections with other expressions by way of implication, presupposition, and exclusion. Connective analysis need not result in definitions, it can rest content with elucidating features which are constitutive of the concepts under consideration, and how they bear on philosophical problems and arguments. It is this kind of connective analysis which plays a role both in contemporary conceptual role semantics and in recent attempts to tackle metaphysical issues by way of conceptual analysis (Jackson 1998).

Meeting the naturalistic challenge

Even connective analysis, however, separates conceptual from factual issues, and the explanation of expressions from the investigation of reality. Until quite recently, most analytic philosophers have rejected such separations out of hand, by appeal to Quine’s metaphilosophical naturalism. The naturalistic assimilation of philosophy to science is widely regarded as up-to-date and inevitable, a philosophical analogue to globalization. But Quine’s actual arguments against the analytic/synthetic distinction are less compelling than commonly assumed.

As regards the semantic prong of his attack, the initial circularity charge merely shows that intensional notions like analyticity or meaning can only be explained by using other intensional notions, and hence cannot be reduced to purely extensional ones. It does not show that they are in any way obscure or illegitimate to begin with. To that end Quine maintains that “intensions” lack clear criteria of identity: there is no objective way of telling whether two expressions mean the same. Yet he himself grants that criteria of identity for intensions could be provided, if we could appeal to notions like analyticity, necessity, or synonymy: two predicates mean the same attribute, for example, if they are synonymous. Quine rejects that solution precisely because he repudiates these notions as unclear (1953: 4, 152; 1969: 19–23).

An argument that doesn’t simply beg the question is in the offing only if Quine succeeds in establishing that meaning is indeterminate, without assuming from the outset that intensional notions are obscure. This is the task of the thesis of indeterminacy of translation. That thesis, however, is widely resisted by most contemporary naturalists, who are realists about meaning and intentionality and recoil from the
nihilistic conclusion that there is no such thing as meaning. What is more, they are right to do so, since Quine's indeterminacy thesis relies on behavioristic and holistic assumptions about meaning which are unconvincing (see Glock 2003b: chs. 3, 7).

The epistemological prong of Quine's attack suggests that within scientific revolutions even definitions and analytic propositions can be abandoned. In Newtonian physics, for instance, “momentum” was defined as “mass times velocity.” It soon turned out, moreover, that momentum is conserved in elastic collision. But with the acceptance of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity a problem emerged. If momentum was to remain a conserved quantity, it could not be exactly equal to rest-mass times velocity. Consequently it was not only possible but rational for Einstein to revise the statement that momentum is equal to mass times velocity, in spite of the fact that this statement was originally a definition.

This case turns on the fact that before Einstein both “equals mass times velocity” and “is preserved in elastic collision” could be regarded as constitutive of the meaning of “momentum.” Since the two seemed to coincide invariably, there was no need to decide which one of them should have an analytic status and which one should be regarded as empirical. When it was discovered that mass times velocity is not strictly preserved in elastic collision, Einstein accorded analytic status exclusively to “preserved in elastic collision,” which amounts to partially redefining the term “momentum.” Scientific revolutions of this kind illustrate that scientific concepts are frequently held in place by more than one connection (analytic proposition), and that both concepts and the analytic propositions that define them are subject to change rather than being immutable. It does not show that there is no dynamic distinction between conceptual and factual connections. For once the question of status arises, it is possible to distinguish between those connections which are then adopted as constitutive of meaning (conservation) and those which are abandoned (mass times velocity). With respect to specific scientific experiments or lines of reasoning, it is often possible to decide whether or not particular sentences are used empirically or as a definition.

The same goes for specific philosophical problems or arguments. Precisely because at present many of these are intertwined with scientific issues, it is imperative to disentangle the factual issues ascertained by empirical science from issues of a different kind. These include not just conceptual issues, but also fundamental moral and aesthetic convictions. It would be futile to pretend, for instance, that rational debate in medical ethics can proceed without distinguishing between conceptual questions (e.g. What should count as a person?), factual questions (e.g. What happens in cloning?), and moral questions (e.g. Can it be legitimate to design a person?). Behind the backs of their Quinean super-egos, even conscientious naturalists constantly need to draw distinctions of a kind which their official positions prohibit or at least cannot account for.

Though often derided at present, the image of philosophy promoted by conceptual analysts squares well with the actual practice of philosophers, naturalists included. Ironically, Quine himself is a case in point. Although he is fêted for having liberated the subject from the scourge of “armchair philosophy” (e.g. in Churchland 1986: 2-3), he was in practice himself of the armchair variety. He did not claim that philosophy
is empirical because he had discovered scientific evidence which solves philosophical problems. Instead, his line of argument was purely a priori. He maintained that from a logical point of view there is no qualitative difference between empirical propositions and the allegedly necessary propositions of logic, mathematics, and philosophy. And in support of this claim he employed thought-experiments – notably in his argument for the indeterminacy of translation – which are totally removed from empirical evidence. In fact, his arguments are much closer to Descartes’s hyperbolical doubts than to scientific research. This is no coincidence, moreover, since naturalism is itself a philosophical rather than a purely scientific thesis (see “Naturalism,” Chapter 6).

Quine even came to recognize that there is a legitimate dichotomy between the analytic and the synthetic: “a sentence is analytic if everybody learns that it is true by learning its words” (1974: 79). According to Quine, this approximates the layperson’s intuitive conception of analyticity. Yet he also insists that this conception does not have the epistemological and meta-philosophical importance traditionally accorded to it, and that, in fact, it lacks “explanatory value.” The reason is that the distinction concerns only the acceptance of the sentences in question and hence does not capture an “enduring” trait of the truths thus “created” (1966: 113, 119–21).

Fortunately, this defect can be remedied by jettisoning the genetic element of Quine’s definition. Whether a sentence counts as analytic should not depend on how it came to be accepted (whether it was accepted as part of language acquisition). Rather, it should depend on its subsequent status. What counts is whether in a linguistic community rejecting the sentence is generally regarded as a criterion of having failed to understand it.

Contrast the following two propositions:

(6) My five-year-old daughter understands Russell’s theory of types.
(7) My five-year-old daughter is an adult.

To (6) we would typically react with disbelief and by demanding evidence. By contrast, we fail to understand (7) and will demand an explanation of what, if anything, the speaker means by an adult (Grice and Strawson 1956: 150–1). Our typical reaction to (6) is “I don’t believe what you say” (provided that we take the statement to be in earnest), whereas our typical reaction to (7) is “I don’t understand what you mean” (provided that we do not take it as shorthand for “My five-year-old daughter behaves like an adult”). This contrast is firmly established in our conceptual scheme. It is evident in the difference between terms like “doubt” and “incredible” on the one hand, terms like “misunderstanding” and “unintelligible” on the other, terms that have an established and clear use.

The sincere refusal to acknowledge an analytic proposition is a criterion either for not understanding at least one of its constituents, or for deliberately employing that constituent in a new sense. On this basis, one can define a class of propositions that one can label analytic or conceptual. A sentence $s$ expresses an analytic proposition:

if a speaker $x$ sincerely denies or rejects $s$, this shows either that $x$ has failed to understand $s$, or that $x$ is deliberately employing $s$ in a novel sense.
Whether the resulting distinction has the significance traditionally bestowed upon it depends on what that significance is supposed to be. No workable distinction will accommodate all the disparate claims made by the various proponents of an analytic/synthetic distinction (see Bealer 1998). Nevertheless, the distinction introduced here is a legitimate and useful instrument of sober philosophizing.

Language revisited

Ironically, even the widespread repudiation of linguistic philosophy has done little to dampen analytic philosophy’s preoccupation with language and semiotic (syntactic and semantic) themes. The reason is threefold. For one thing, the linguistic turn – especially as taken by the Tractatus – placed the nature of representation or intentionality at the center of philosophy. It thereby set the agenda for current theories of meaning and content. Furthermore, even the linguistic approach to this agenda remains pertinent. Whether or not it is prior to thought, language provides the paradigmatic and clearest case of intentionality, and willy-nilly shapes the discussion of the latter. Fodor’s “language of thought hypothesis” is indicative of this schizophrenic situation. It extols the priority of private minds over public languages, while retaining the machinery and vocabulary (meaning, content) of logico-linguistic analysis, because it regards thought as a process of logical computations on internal sentences.

Even those who do not regard thoughts as sentences of a mental language continue to operate in a linguistic vein, by discussing the relation between thought/language and reality in semantic terms such as truth, reference, and meaning. When it comes to the philosophical elucidation of thought, moreover, not even the most ardent subjectivist can abstain from considering sentences. For it is through their linguistic expression alone that thoughts are amenable to intersubjective paraphrase and analysis into components. Finally, at least in practice most analytic philosophers not only concede that the analysis of concepts and the paraphrase of propositions constitutes an important part of philosophy (if only a propaedeutic one); they also accept the connection between concepts and propositions on the one hand, and the meaning of words and sentences on the other.

For these reasons, language, meaning, and concepts remain on the analytic menu, even outside the burgeoning fields of philosophy of language and of mind. One can distinguish three general approaches to these topics, which might be termed mentalism, Platonism, and pragmatism (all in a wide sense), since they place emphasis on, respectively, individual psychic/neurophysiological phenomena, abstract entities and systems, and intersubjective practices.

Mentalist approaches adopt an individualistic perspective on language. The fundamental linguistic phenomenon is the idiolect, the language of an individual rather than a shared public language. Furthermore, they play down or repudiate the commonsensical idea that language is a means of communication.

According to Noam Chomsky (1928–), a language is a “system of knowledge,” a “state of the language faculty,” which itself is an internal “component of the mind/
brain” of individuals (1988: 60). He calls languages in this sense “I-languages,” and contrasts them with languages in the everyday sense, which he calls “E-languages.” Note that this model is not just individualistic but psychologistic. An I-language is not the idiolect of an individual speaker; it is an internal state of the “mind/brain” which causally underlies that idiolect.

Chomsky’s psychologistic conception entails that language has no essential connection with communication, and even less with shared norms of communication. It has the unpalatable (if openly acknowledged) consequence that English and Xhosa, for example, are not languages, and strictly speaking do not exist. Unfortunately, this deprives the study of language of its ultimate topic, which consists in patterns of inter-subjective linguistic behavior. To explain this behavior we may have to regard it as the exercise of a specific language faculty, and that faculty may depend on specific areas in the brain. But the faculty itself is a set of complex abilities possessed by speakers. To identify it with either the brain or a state of the brain is to confuse an ability with its vehicle, the physical mechanism or structure in virtue of which an individual has an ability (Kenny 1989: ch. 5). And to deny the existence of the exercise of the ability by appeal to the vehicle is to saw off the branch on which anyone talking about faculties, capacities, or abilities must be sitting.

Unsurprisingly, Chomsky’s denial of any substantial link between language and communication has stretched the credulity even of admirers (e.g. Jackendoff 2002). It creates insurmountable difficulties for explaining the origins of language. There is no conceivable evolutionary explanation of why our hominid ancestors should have developed biologically costly neural structures simply in order to soliloquize or to run through the tree diagrams of a Chomskian phrase-structure grammar in silence. This point is all the more acute since these ancestors were social primates like us, with an immediate and pressing need for media of communication and coordination (see Greenspan and Shanker 2004). Furthermore, Chomsky describes “the language faculty” as an organ. But an organ, especially one that is not a physiological unit, had better have a function. Chomsky seems to acknowledge this point, since he describes language as a means for expressing thoughts. Yet it is difficult to see what principal purpose the expression of thoughts could serve, if not that of communicating.

Platonists for their part treat language as an abstract system that exists eternally in a realm beyond space, time, and causation, independently of either individual speakers or intersubjective practices. Thus for Lewis a language is an abstract entity that maps (sequences of) signs onto abstract meanings (1983: ch. 11). This has the equally unpalatable consequence that languages cannot emerge, undergo change, or die out (and mutatis mutandis for language per se). Neither mentalism nor Platonism conform to the established use of “language” that prevails both in ordinary parlance and in the linguistic sciences. Both introduce a new and entirely stipulative use of “language.” Unfortunately, they are rarely explicit about this fact. Furthermore, even if the theoretical enterprises that motivate the introduction of a novel concept are legitimate, it is confusing to express that concept through a familiar term, one that serves the distinct and indispensable function of identifying the very topic of any study of language – whether scientific or philosophical.
Mentalist approaches to concepts suffer from similar shortcomings. They treat concepts as phenomena in the minds of individuals, entities or goings-on “in the head.” Thus according to Fodor’s high-profile representational theory of mind, concepts constitute a kind of “mental representation” and hence a “kind of mental particular” (Fodor 1998: 7, 22), “objects in the mind” of individuals that have causes and effects in the physical world (Fodor 2003: 13n). Representationalism comes in two versions. According to the traditional dualist one, these representations are mental images or words occurring in a private non-material realm. According to the contemporary physicalist version, they are ultimately neurophysiological phenomena, for instance patterns of neural firings that instantiate a computer program, as in Fodor.

The dualist version falls prey to criticisms by Frege and Wittgenstein: no mental images or words need cross my mind when I engage in conceptual thought, and those that do fail to determine the content of my thoughts. The physicalist version avoids some of these criticisms, since the representations it postulates are neurophysiological phenomena of which normal subjects cannot be aware. It inherits another difficulty, however. Both mental and neurophysiological particulars occur in different heads and are hence specific to individuals. Yet even Fodor accepts as one of the “non-negotiable conditions on a theory of concepts” that “concepts are public; they’re the sorts of things people can, and do, share” (1998: 22, 28). For instance, different individuals may operate with the same concept of a dog. Fodor tries to overcome the difficulty by appealing to the distinction between type and token signs. According to Fodor, concepts are symbols of the language of thought; and what is shared between individuals are abstract concept-types, of which the neural particulars are tokens, i.e. concrete occurrences. When Sue and Joe both believe that dogs bark, Fodor maintains, in both brains there occur tokenings of the word-type “dog,” i.e. neural word-tokens with the meaning “dog.”

But this solution amounts to nothing other than a surreptitious recantation of the central mentalist claim about concepts, namely that they are particulars which form part of the causal order. For that claim applies only to the neural tokens, which are not shareable. At the same time, the non-negotiable constraint of shareability is satisfied only by the abstract types, which are not particulars. By Fodor’s own lights, concepts cannot be particulars, whether mental or neural:

$$\begin{align*}
P_1 & \quad \text{Concepts must satisfy the non-negotiable constraint of shareability.} \\
P_2 & \quad \text{Mental particulars cannot satisfy this constraint.} \\
C & \quad \text{Concepts are not particulars.}
\end{align*}$$

Echoing Putnam’s externalism about meanings we might say: “Any way you cut up the pie, concepts ain’t in the head!” Even if patterns of neural firing could be symbolic representations (cf. Bennett and Hacker 2003: ch. 3.1; Glock 2003a), concepts cannot themselves be such representations, since they are among the kinds of things which representations represent or express. Like Chomsky’s I-languages at a more general level, Fodor’s token-concepts are charitably seen as phenomena that provide the
causal basis for the possession and operation of concepts (the understanding and use of words); but such phenomena must be distinguished both from the concepts themselves and from their possession.

Such considerations carry no weight against Platonist accounts, since the latter treat concepts and meanings as abstract entities independent of goings-on in the minds or brains of individuals. Well-known arguments by Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Quine demonstrate that the meaning of an expression is neither the object it stands for, nor any kind of physical object. For one thing, failure to stand for an object does not render referring expressions meaningless; if it did, expressions like “Kant’s first wife” could not make sense. For another, two expressions may refer to the same thing without having the same meaning. Finally, to identify the meaning of a word with its referent is to commit a category mistake – of reification. The referent of “Prince Charles’s first wife” can die or weigh 60 kilos, yet its meaning cannot.

These arguments do not preclude, for example, the Fregean option that the meaning of an expression might be a sense, an abstract entity associated with it which is not its referent but a “mode of presenting” the referent. Unfortunately, the idea of a separate realm of abstract entities is contentious, and the question of how we can have access to such a realm remains shrouded in mystery. By a similar token, while Platonism does justice to the fact that concepts can be shared, it has difficulty in accounting for the role they play in the thought and action of flesh-and-blood creatures like ourselves. At a more specific level, it can be shown that knowledge of meaning is not acquaintance with an object, whether referent or sense. Whereas “A knows Willy Brandt” and “Willy Brandt is identical with Karl Frahm” jointly entail “A knows Karl Frahm,” “A knows the meaning of ‘superfluous’” and “The meaning of ‘superfluous’ is identical with the meaning of ‘redundant’” do not entail, even jointly, “A knows the meaning of ‘redundant.’” Nor do they entail that there is an entity x such that “superfluous” means x and A knows x. “The meaning of s₁” does not designate a genuine object; it is equivalent to “what s₁ means.” The “what” here is not a relative pronoun, as in “what s₁ is written on,” but an interrogative pronoun (Latin quid rather than quod). It indirectly introduces a question, namely: “What does s₁ mean?” That s₁ has a meaning means that there is an answer to this question; that A knows the meaning of s₁ means that she can answer it; and that s₁ has the same meaning as s₂ means that the same answer can be given for both (see Austin 1970: 96–7).

Meaning, use, and rules

These ruminations lend credence to the pragmatist alternative. Its most striking manifestation has been Wittgenstein’s dictum that the meaning of a word is “its use in the language” (1953: §43). The idea that meaning is use not only unites Wittgensteinians and Ordinary Language philosophers, it has also been accepted by some of their opponents, notably Quine, Davidson, and Dummett; furthermore, it informs the work of field-linguists and lexicographers. What is more, there are obvious arguments in its favor: whether an expression like “sesquipedalian” means something in a given language depends on whether it has an established use in a linguistic community;
what an expression means depends on how it can be used within that community;
we learn what an expression means by learning how to use it, just as we learn how
to play chess not by associating the pieces with objects, but by learning how they
can be moved.

In spite of its prima facie plausibility, however, the identification of meaning with
use is problematic. Ironically, one reason is that while the uses of “meaning” and
“use” overlap, they also diverge in important respects (Rundle 1990: chs. 1, 9–10).
First, there are expressions which have a use, but no meaning, such as “tally-ho” and
“abracadabra.” Second, unlike its meaning, the use of a word can be unjustified, accom-
panied by gestures and reveal something about the speaker, etc., and even a way of
using a word can be fashionable or die out. Third, two expressions may have the same
meaning without having the same use, e.g. “cop” and “policeman.” “Cop” does not
mean “nasty policeman,” it is explained in the same way as “policeman,” and applied
on the same grounds. Nor does it necessarily express hostility towards law-enforcement
agents; it merely indicates that the word is employed in a certain social context.

This last difference indicates that not all aspects of the use of a term are relevant
to its meaning. This leaves open a more modest pragmatist claim, however. Meaning
does not determine use, yet use determines meaning, not causally, but logically, just
as for Frege sense determines reference. While sameness of meaning coexists with
difference of use, every difference in meaning is a difference in use. Given the use of
a word, we can infer its meaning without further evidence, but not vice versa. One
cannot tell from a dictionary explanation of “cop” whether the term is frequently used
by British academics. By contrast, one can write the dictionary entry on the basis of a
full description of the term’s employment.

If use determines meaning, we can learn from the use of a word everything there
is to its meaning; use remains the guide to meaning, and conceptual analysis a matter
of investigating linguistic use. Some critics have protested that far from being deter-
mined by use, meaning antecedes use: speakers use expressions in a particular way
because they have a particular meaning which is independent of that use. But we must
distinguish between the use an individual speaker makes of e, and the use that the
linguistic community C makes of it. While individual use is responsible to meaning,
communal use constitutes meaning. For expressions do not have an intrinsic meaning.
Rather, human beings give them a meaning by explaining and applying them in a
certain way (Wittgenstein 1958: 28).

A related complaint is that meaning cannot depend on use, since people often use
words incorrectly. But the pragmatist contention is that the meaning of e is deter-
mined by its established use, not by its misuse. In this connection, Wittgenstein and
Oxford conceptual analysts have emphasized the normative aspects of both meaning
and use. This normative dimension is absent from behaviorist and causal theories
of meaning; they also explain the meaning of an expression by reference to its use,
yet their conception of use is purely causal. Leaving aside various complications, the
meaning of a word is equated either with the conditions which cause a speaker to utter
it, or with the effects which such an utterance has on hearers.
From different angles, Wittgenstein and Chomsky have subjected these theories to decisive criticism. The causes and effects of uttering an expression determine neither whether the expression has meaning, nor what meaning it has. The meaning of an expression is not identical with the conditions that determine whether or not it is uttered in specific situations, since that depends not just on its meaning, but on extrinsic factors. That few people would dare to call the Pope a “liar” is due not to the meaning of the term, but to social norms.

Similarly, whether an expression is meaningful and what meaning it has does not depend on either its actual or intended effect, whether on a particular occasion or in general. If I say “Milk me sugar!” this may well have the result that my hearers stare at me and gape. But it does not follow that this combination of words means “Stare at me and gape!” It doesn’t even follow if this entertaining effect can be repeated. Indeed, it does not even follow if I utter these words with the intention of bringing about this reaction (Wittgenstein 1953: §§493–8).

The meaning of an utterance depends not on how it is actually used and understood, but on how it ought to be used and understood by members of a linguistic community. What is semantically relevant about the use of an expression is neither the causes nor the effects of its utterance, nor the intentions with which speakers utter it, but its correct use. According to normativists, the linguistic meaning of an expression is determined by semantic rules which lay down how it can be meaningfully used.

This idea also promises a middle way between the Scylla of epistemic naturalism and the Charybdis of ontological supernaturalism. Wittgenstein famously compared language to a game like chess. On the one hand, a chess-piece is a piece of wood that can be described by physics. On the other hand, one cannot explain what a chess-piece or what the game of chess is in purely physical terms. But the difference between a chess-piece and a simple piece of wood is not that the former is associated with an abstract entity or with a process in a separate mental realm. Rather, it is that there are rules for its use (see 1953: §108). The chess-piece has a role in a rule-guided practice. That practice in turn presupposes agents with special and distinctively human capacities. But while these capacities cannot be adequately characterized in physical terms, they do not transcend the natural world. They are perfectly intelligible features of animals of a unique kind; and their causal prerequisites and evolutionary emergence can be explained by science.

The view that language is governed by rules has been a commonplace at least since Aristotle observed that words have their meaning by convention. It is enshrined in disciplines like grammar (irrespective of whether it be prescriptive, descriptive, or generative), logic (irrespective of whether Aristotelian or Fregean), and formal semantics. It is central to speech-act theorists and Wittgensteinians who regard language as a form of behavior. Thus John Searle writes: “speaking a language is to engage in a rule-guided form of behavior. To put it more briskly, talking is performing acts according to rules” (1969: 22). It is equally shared by philosophers who regard language primarily as a formal system. According to David Lewis, it is a “platitude – something only a philosopher would dream of denying” that language is governed by conventions (1983: 166).
For all that, individualists such as Chomsky and Davidson have attacked the very idea that language is rule-governed, including the idea of semantic or lexical rules that determine the meaning of words. Thus Davidson contends that “the yearning for [linguistic] norms is a nostalgic hangover from the dependence on a Platonic conception of meaning” (1994: 145).

There is a straightforward normative dimension to meaning, however. Because of what words mean, some of their applications are correct while others are incorrect. It is correct to call an unmarried, unwidowed, adult male a bachelor, a male duck a drake, or the Kremlin red; it is incorrect to call a married man a bachelor, a female duck a drake, or the Taj Mahal red, because of what the terms “bachelor,” “drake,” and “red,” respectively, mean. Meaningful expressions possess conditions of correct application or of correct use (see Glock 2005).

There are three individualist objections against normativism. The first is that we are dealing here merely with “descriptive facts” concerning linguistic behavior (Davidson 1994: 146). Now, it is true that a proposition like

\[
(8) \text{In English, it is correct to apply \textit{“drake”} to an object } x \text{ iff } x \text{ is a male duck}
\]

states a fact about the behavior of Anglophones. But it does so only because the Anglophone speech community accepts a certain norm, a standard of correctness. We must distinguish between (8), which is an empirical proposition to the effect that a community follows a norm, what von Wright calls a “norm-proposition” (1963: viii), from the expression of the norm itself, as in:

\[
(9) \text{It is correct to apply \textit{“drake”} to an object } x \text{ iff } x \text{ is a male duck.}
\]

Like a definition of “drake,” (9) can be used to explain what the term “drake” means, and it does so by laying down conditions for its correct application (whether it actually applies depends on whether \( x \) satisfies these conditions).

Correctness is a normative notion par excellence, since it signifies that something is in accordance with an acknowledged standard. However, the individualist has a second objection in store. Even if (9) is normative, it is not a rule, since it does not guide behavior (Glüer and Pagin 1999). It does not oblige or even entreat us to apply the term “drake” to an object in a particular situation.

This second complaint is based on an unduly narrow conception of what counts as a rule. For one thing, it ignores the “definitory aspect of rules” (Baker and Hacker 1984: 259). Some rules do not prescribe a certain form of behavior, but instead lay down what a thing must be like to satisfy a certain description. Prime examples are the beloved EU norms concerning, for instance, what counts as a sausage. This point is connected to a well-known distinction between regulative and constitutive rules (Searle 1969: ch. 2.5). The former specify how one should optimally pursue an activity that can be specified independently of the rule; the latter are partly definitive of the activity in question. What goes on at dinner parties can be described as eating independently of the rules of etiquette. By contrast, what goes on when people move
certain pieces across a board cannot be described as castling, checking, mating, or, more generally, as playing chess, independently of rules such as “The king cannot castle out of a check” or “The king is mated if it is in check in such a way that no move will remove it from being in check.” This contrasts with a regulative rule of chess like “Do not relinquish control of the center.” Even someone who disregards all of these regulative rules does not cease to play chess; he will just play chess badly.

It can hardly be in doubt that constitutive rules form a paradigmatic type of rule or norm. Furthermore, the fact that they do not prescribe the use of a word does not entail that they play no role in guiding behavior. We can appeal to norms like (9) in justifying or criticizing a particular use of an expression. If I am challenged why I call Donald Duck a drake I can defend myself by saying that Donald is a male duck and that male ducks are called drakes. For another, they function as transformation or inference rules. Thus (9) licenses the inference from, e.g., “Donald is a male duck” to “Donald is a drake” and vice versa.

One of the main arguments in favor of a normativist conception of language is that linguistic utterances are subject to both regulative and constitutive rules in the same way as chess moves. Someone who calls his superior an “idiot,” or who provides lengthy explanations when he requires urgent help is imprudent, but he does not commit a linguistic mistake. By contrast, someone who violates rules of syntax, e.g., by failing to conjugate properly, or lexical rules, e.g., by calling an ambiguous statement ambidextrous, commits a linguistic mistake.

It might be thought that the analogy with games fails, on the grounds that someone who violates a constitutive rule of chess is no longer playing chess, while someone who violates the alleged constitutive rules of English, for example, is still speaking English. But this objection is dubious on both grounds. It is implausible to insist that a game involving a single incorrect move no longer counts as chess, just as it is implausible to insist that the medieval board game was not really chess because the pawns could not move two squares at a time in their first move. Conversely, although someone who commits a mistake may still be said to be speaking English, the mistake itself does not count as English. It is quite common to react to a serious mistake by saying “That’s not English!” And someone who commits too many such mistakes won’t be speaking English. What is true is that the margins of tolerance are wider and looser in the case of natural languages than in the case of chess, for the simple but important reason that the constitutive rules of natural languages do not form a precise and stable system.

Failure to appreciate this fact underlies a final individualist objection. Followers of Davidson and Chomsky rightly note that “if no two speakers ever share the very same vocabulary items or observe exactly the same rules of grammar there will be no formally precise, syntactic and semantic characterization of the language spoken by a given community” (Smith 1998). And from this they conclude that no two individuals ever share a language and that all there is are different idiolects. The crucial assumption of this reasoning is that languages are individuated by such formally precise characterizations. But this is clearly not how natural languages such as Basque or Mandarin are actually individuated. Not every divergence in linguistic use amounts to a difference in idiolects. Someone who persistently says that it is raining whenever it is raining
diverges from the common pattern of speech. But he does not speak an idiolect, he is simply an idiot. Similarly, the fact that Americans do not use the sentence “God save the Queen!” does not show that their language is impoverished, since the rules of American English allow for the construction of that sentence no less than those of British English; it shows rather that their political system differs from the British. Nor did the British alter their language when they stopped using “God save the King!” in 1952. The current anti-normativist vogue in analytic philosophy is symptomatic of a reluctance to come to terms with social and historical practices that go beyond individual behavior as well as individual brains.

**Whither analytic philosophy?**

When it comes to recognizing language as an intersubjective and historical practice, the hermeneutic tradition has the edge over analytic philosophy. To their credit, quite a few contemporary practitioners are both willing and capable of learning from so-called “Continental philosophy.” There have also been a handful of thinkers who have tried to synthesize the two in a more sustained manner, such as Georg Henrik von Wright (1916–2003), Robert Brandom (1950–), Dagfinn Føllesdal (1932–), Ernst Tugendhat (1930–), and Hubert Dreyfus (1929–). Furthermore, in the course of graduating from a revolutionary movement into the philosophical establishment, analytic philosophy has become so diverse as to lose its distinctive profile (von Wright 1993: 25). As a result of rapprochement on the one hand and diversification on the other, the very idea of analytic philosophy has come under fire. There have been persistent rumors about analytic philosophy being in crisis or even defunct (e.g. Biletzki and Matar 1998: xi; Leiter 2004: 1). A sense of crisis is palpable not only among commentators but also among some leading protagonists. Thus both Putnam and Jaakko Hintikka (1929–) have called for a revitalization and renewal of analytic philosophy. Small wonder that those more hostile to analytic philosophy, notably Richard Rorty (1931–2007) (see Rorty 1979), for some time clamored for its replacement by a “post-analytic philosophy” (Rajchman and West 1985).

At the same time, in terms of the sociology of science analytic philosophy has become the dominant force within western philosophy (Searle 1996: 1–2). It has prevailed for several decades in the English-speaking world and in Scandinavia; it is in the ascendancy in Germanophone countries; and it has made significant inroads even in places once regarded as hostile, such as France. For better or worse, the threat facing analytic philosophy is not defeat by a new philosophical paradigm, but turning into an ill-defined mainstream without serious competitors.

Even this threat should not be overestimated, however. The division of western philosophy into analytic and Continental streams has been deplored by leading analytic philosophers such as Dummett and Putnam, and may indeed be deplorable. For all that, it remains real. The labels “analytic” and “Continental” philosophy continue to be widely used. This holds even when it is suggested that the distinction is not a hard and fast one. In reviews, for instance it is absolutely standard to read not only that a book or author is typical of either the analytic or Continental movement,
but also that X is unusually sensitive or open minded “for an analytic philosopher” or that Y uncharacteristically clear or cogent “for a Continental thinker.” What Grice and Strawson (1956) pointed out decades ago about the term “analytic proposition” holds equally of the terms “analytic philosophy.” Although there may not be a clear and compelling explanation, we by-and-large agree in our application of these terms. Furthermore, we agree not just on what the clear cases are, but also on what count as borderline cases. Finally, the agreement is not based on a list but can be extended to an open class of new cases. There is no gainsaying the fact that the idea of a distinct analytic philosophy continues to shape the institutional practice of philosophy, whether it be through distinct journals, societies, job advertisements, or institutes.

Contemporary analytic philosophy is in danger of turning into an increasingly scholastic academic industry. This shows itself in, among other things, the focus on a very narrow range of issues and authors in what are regarded as the leading journals, a general disinclination to explain why these issues and authors are important, the tendency to treat many fundamental issues as settled once and for all, and a predilection for technicalities irrespective of their usefulness. Finally, there is a general attitude that those who do not conform to these various standards and preconceptions, those who dissent from the naturalistic orthodoxy or demand explanations of an established jargon, for example, are simply unprofessional.

In my view, however, the remedy for these defects does not lie in turning towards Continental or post-analytic philosophy. Instead, it lies in recovering some of the virtues of twentieth-century analytic philosophy. A cherished self-image of analytic philosophy notwithstanding, the inspirational figures from its past have not bequeathed us a series of indisputable demonstrations. But they have shown us how one can question deep-seated assumptions and resolve tempting confusions in a way that is striking, innovative, and illuminating; they have also shown us how one can broach complex problems in a manner that is clear, profound, and honest. At its best, analytic philosophy conforms to Russell’s ideal of “cold steel in the hand of passion” (Monk 1996: 262). At a time when economic dogmas and conflicting religious ideologies are ruling the planet with devastating effects, analytic philosophy might even have beneficial effects in a wider sphere, provided that it is used to slay a few intellectual monsters.

Notes

1 But whether there is an ultimately satisfactory way of blocking the logical and set-theoretic paradoxes remains a contentious issue. The feasibility of reducing numbers to sets is questioned in Paul Benaceraf’s influential article of 1965.

2 They further disagree on how to deal with a problem confronting any explanation of sentence-meaning in terms of truth, verification, or assertion, namely non-declarative sentences. Dummett, in accordance with the mainstream of formal semantics, distinguishes in each utterance a “sense-conveying component” or “propositional content clause” and a “force-indicator” or “mood indicator.” The former is common, e.g. to the assertion “The door is open,” the command “Open the door,” and the question “Is the door open?” and it has truth-conditions. The latter determines that the three utterances have different illocutionary force. Davidson, by contrast, tries to account for non-declarative sentences without distinguishing between reference, sense, and force (see Glock 2003a: 159–65; and “Philosophy of Language,” Chapter 9).
References


**Further reading**

Glock, H. J. (2008) *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (The book looks not just at the historical roots, but also at what analytic philosophy and the analytic/Continental divide currently amount to. It considers the pros and cons of various definitions of analytic philosophy, and tackles the methodological, historiographical, philosophical, and cultural issues raised by the issue).