**The rise of ‘analytic philosophy’: When and how did people begin calling themselves ‘analytic philosophers’?**

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**1. Introduction**

What—if anything—is analytic philosophy? Many people have addressed this difficult question, but I will not attempt to answer it here. Rather, I tackle a smaller, and hopefully more manageable, set of questions: when and how did people begin attaching the label ‘analytic philosophy’ to philosophical work, and using the term ‘analytic philosopher’ to describe themselves and others? These questions can also be framed in terms of *actors’ categories* (which are “the categories used … by the historical actors themselves” (Hatfield 1996, 491)): when and how did analytic philosophy become an actors’ category?

I will not attempt to characterize what analytic philosophy is, at least in terms of doctrine or methodology. Many initially plausible answers to ‘What is analytic philosophy?’ turn out to be unsatisfactory, foundering on various false positives or false negatives.[[1]](#footnote-1) Because this question is so difficult—and unanswerable, if in fact there is no such thing as analytic philosophy—I bracket it. This paper focuses instead upon an issue that may be more tractable: the rise of the *category* or *label* ‘analytic philosophy.’ This may appear to be a dodge, but it is motivated by the repeated difficulties of attempting to determine the nature of analytic philosophy directly.

The paper proceeds as follows. In §2, I provide reasons why one would care when people began calling themselves or others ‘analytic philosophers.’ §3 addresses the question ‘When did the label ‘analytic philosophy’ (in roughly our sense) first appear, and when did it become widespread?’ These two questions must be separated because the label did not become widespread until about 1950, but it first appeared in the 1930’s. §4 explores how this label was understood by those ‘early adopters’ who described themselves or others as producing analytic philosophy: how did people originally justify grouping these particular sets of philosophers together under one heading? In §5, I consider possible explanations for why the term ‘analytic philosophy’ was not widely adopted earlier, by examining the resistance some people had to being grouped together with other members of the class of what we today consider analytic philosophers (specifically, many British philosophers resisted being grouped together with logical empiricists). §6 examines the shifting contrast classes for ‘analytic philosophy’: interestingly, ‘continental philosophy’ is a relative newcomer to the scene; earlier contrasting labels included ‘speculative,’ ‘metaphysical,’ and ‘traditional’ philosophy.

**2. Motivations**

Why is the rise of ‘analytic philosophy’ worth investigating? Some readers may find the questions addressed in this essay intrinsically interesting and important. For those who do not, this section offers three justifications for studying the rise of analytic philosophy as an actor’s category.

First, imagine someone innocent of philosophy, encountering today e.g. Moore’s 1939 “Proof of an External World” and Carnap’s 1934 *Logical Syntax of Language* for the first time. Such a person would most likely *not* consider these works two members of the same philosophical species; yet both works are usually considered paradigmatic instances of analytic philosophy, and Moore and Carnap to be paradigmatic analytic philosophers.[[2]](#footnote-2) One immediately obvious difference is that Carnap makes heavy use of mathematical logic, which makes no appearance in Moore’s text. Furthermore, Carnap says in 1934 that philosophy should be (replaced by) the logic of science (1934/1937, §72); but it is a strain to describe the activities of Moore or his acolytes as the logic of science. Since classifying these texts and thinkers together under the single category of analytic philosophy is not obvious, it seems worthwhile to attempt to understand how this non-obvious grouping occurred. In short, surprising things call out for explanations, and grouping Moore with Carnap is surprising—if one looks at it with fresh eyes.

Robert Ammerman, in the introduction to his 1965 anthology *Classics of Analytic Philosophy*, makes a similar point. He recognizes the wide diversity of thinkers and texts lumped together under the banner of ‘analytic philosophy’: “it is misleading to speak of ‘analytic philosophy’ as if it were something homogenous or monolithic. There is no single philosophy of analysis. … The word ‘analysis’ is used here as a way of grouping together a number of heterogeneous philosophers” (1965, 2). So if there is no such thing as a ‘single philosophy of analysis,’ and the people we collect under the banner ‘analytic’ are actually ‘heterogenous,’ the natural next question to ask is: how and why were they all lumped together under the single genus of ‘analytic philosophy’? More recently, Beaney states that the “Fregean strand in analytic philosophy” (which I think Carnap exemplifies) “is complemented by a Moorean strand, the creative tension between these two main strands forming the central core of the internal dynamic of the analytic tradition” (2013, 26). The question of this essay is: since there are two distinct strands, and there is tension between them, how did they come together under a single heading? This is one reason to study the rise of the label ‘analytic philosophy.’

However, one might wonder whether our impression that Moore and Carnap’s texts feel so different today is anachronistic: we examine their texts through the distorting lens of the present, while the historical actors we call ‘analytic philosophers’ considered themselves to be engaged in more or less the same projects. This suspicion is unfounded. Significantly, many of the early heroes of analytic philosophy did *not* think of themselves as belonging to a single group containing all the paradigmatic cases of philosophers we today consider analytic. This resistance to assimilation will be discussed at length in §5. This provides a second, related reason to study the rise of analytic philosophy as an actor’s category: given that it was not an obvious or natural grouping at the time to many people we call ‘analytic philosophers,’ how did the historical actors who united these various texts and thinkers under the single label of ‘analytic philosophy’ rationalize this grouping to themselves, given that their immediate predecessors did not?

This is an abstract way of phrasing the point. The question gains concrete bite by examining concrete examples. Ryle famously penned an excoriating review of Carnap’s *Meaning and Necessity*. Dummett recalls, as a student in the 1940s, that “the enemy was… Carnap; it was he who was seen in Ryle’s Oxford as the embodiment of philosophical error, above all, as the exponent of a false philosophical methodology” (1978, 437). As a second, less vitriolic example, C. J. Ducasse organizes his 1941 *Philosophy as a Science* around answers to the question ‘What is philosophy?’. Ducasse portrays Carnap, Langer, and Russell as providing different answers to the question, devoting a chapter to each (the answers are, respectively, “syntax of the logic of science” (87), the “systematic study of meanings” (73), and “identical with logic” (63). (Ducasse’s book does not merely deal with sub-species of analytic philosophy.) Furthermore, Ducasse makes the sensible point that ‘analysis’ (in Russell’s usage) “can hardly be described either as a distinctively philosophical method, or as the whole of the method of philosophy” (1941, 72).

Some scholars, Thomas Akehurst in particular, have argued that ‘analytic philosophy’ arose as a result of British antipathy towards Germany after the Second World War (2010). If correct, this would be part of the explanation why these disparate groups were lumped together. But it need not be our entire story: it is also important to understand how the various historical actors justified this grouping *to themselves*. Even if nationalistic impulses partially impelled this grouping, British nationalism (or, more broadly, an anti-Axis stance) was not the rationale professed by the actors themselves for their actions. Of course, the actors’ true motives could be hidden from their conscious awareness. But it is still worthwhile to investigate and understand the professed, conscious rationales they offered to justify this grouping, since as Neil Gross says, one’s “intellectual self-concept” is an important determinant of action—not all of our actions are completely determined by unconscious drives and biases (2008, 235).

This suggests a third justification for investigating when and how ‘analytic philosophy’ became a label for a certain group of people and their intellectual products. Analytic philosophy is an example of what Ian Hacking calls an ‘interactive kind,’ namely “kinds that can influence what is classified” (1999, 103), and often ‘what is classified’ are people. If someone becomes aware that a kind term applies to her, that knowledge can alter her behavior. In the present case, thinking of myself as an analytic philosopher affects my behavior: it creates an in-group vs. out-group division (my fellow analytic philosophers vs. everyone else). My knowledge of this division influences to whom I (and my colleagues) hold myself intellectually accountable. This in turn affects what texts I must read and respond to on a subject, in contrast with which texts I can ignore, or deride without bothering to read carefully and sympathetically. §6 will spell out these general ideas in the context of analytic philosophy in the second half of the 20th Century: “one of the main functions of the idea of an analytic/continental split” is that it “rationalizes a willingness not to read” (Glendinning 2006, 6).

This classification was unavailable to e.g. Russell and Moore in 1903, and thus could not influence the writing of *Principles of Mathematics* or *Principia Ethica*. Presumably, Russell is a paradigmatic analytic philosopher (but see (Raatikainen 2013)). Yet as late as 1940’s *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, he writes: “As will be evident to the reader, I am, as regards method, more in sympathy with *logical positivism* than any other existing school” (1940, 7; my emphasis). Russell did *not* identify himself as an analytic philosopher in 1940; instead he aligned himself with the logical positivists. The category analytic philosopher was not part of his ‘intellectual self-concept,’ in Gross’s terminology introduced above.

To recapitulate these three reasons to investigate the rise of analytic philosophy (roughly as we understand it) as an actor’s category: various historical figures we now call ‘analytic philosophers’ (i) appear to fresh eyes today to be *prima facie* quite different, and (ii) appeared to each another quite different at the time. Furthermore, this matters, because (iii) philosophers’ actions are influenced by how they think of themselves, i.e. their ‘intellectual self-concept.’

**3. When?**

Before proceeding, let us further refine the question of when analytic philosophy became an actor’s category. The question cannot simply be: ‘When did the two-word phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ (or its equivalent in other languages) first appear in print?’ This is inadequate because, for example, John Stuart Mill calls Locke “the unquestioned founder of the analytic philosophy of mind” (1843/1974, 112), but no one wants to classify Locke as an analytic philosopher (at least in the sense of Russell, Carnap, *et al.*). So our actual, refined version of the question must be: When and how did people begin calling themselves ‘analytic philosophers’ *in roughly the sense we use it today*? I will not attempt to spell out exactly what this sense is, (a) because that reverts to the question of what analytic philosophy is, and (b) because most people agree that Hempel and Russell are analytic philosophers (if anyone is), and Heidegger and Hegel are not, even if we disagree about certain borderline cases.

Readers new to this topic may be surprised that Russell did not identify his work as analytic philosophy as late as 1940. However, historians of analytic philosophy have recently claimed (e.g. Preston 2007, §3; Glock 2008, §3.1; Beaney 2013, 44) that (a) the label ‘analytic philosophy’ (in roughly our sense) does not first appear until the 1930’s, and (b) the phrase does not begin to be widely used until around 1950. In this section, I first present new large-scale, coarse-grained evidence that both claims are correct. Second, I add some detail to this rough picture by examining the nuances and complications found in particular texts from these times.

*3.1. Google Books data*

To find the earliest instances of ‘analytic philosophy,’ one can simply comb through books and journals. But how can one substantiate the claim that the term does not begin to be used widely until around 1950 (without devoting a lifetime of reading to the issue)? Fortunately, a tool has recently been developed that could provide some evidence for or against this claim, other than individuals’ general impressions: the ngram viewer for the Google books data set.[[3]](#footnote-3) The current version of this data set contains 8 million books, with half a trillion English words (Lin et al. 2012, 170). The ngram viewer plots changes in the relative frequency of a word or phrase’s appearance over time. That is, if you enter a three-word phrase into the viewer, it will plot, by year, what percentage of all three-word phrase tokens that year are occurrences of your specified phrase (Michel et al. 2011). The following graph compares two two-word phrases: ‘analytic philosophy’ and, to provide some sense of scale, ‘logical positivism.’

Using the Google books corpus to study change in linguistic patterns is not unproblematic (Pechenick et al. 2015), and its ngrams should only be taken as a rough guide. Despite these important caveats, the above graph provides some evidence for the claim, already extant in the historical literature, that ‘analytic philosophy’ does not start to be widely used until the 1950s.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*3.2. Setting the boundaries: Nagel’s article, the first textbook, and anthologies*

To my knowledge, the first use of the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ to cover roughly the gamut of people that we today would call ‘analytic philosophers’ appears in the title of a two-part 1936 article in *The Journal of Philosophy* by Ernest Nagel, “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe” (Nagel 1936-I, -II) (Raatikainen 2013, 19). (This is a whiggish claim, but whiggishness is appropriate here, since the question is ‘When did *our current* categories arise?’) This pair of articles reported on Nagel’s year abroad. The extension of the term ‘analytic philosophy’ for Nagel is probably nearly identical to its extension for an analytic philosopher of today—if she had a time machine, travelled back to Europe in 1935, and asked herself ‘Who here qualifies as an analytic philosopher?’ Specifically, Nagel includes (1) Moorean analysts at Cambridge,[[5]](#footnote-5) (2) Logical Positivists (with Reichenbach as a cooperating ally), (3) Wittgenstein, and (4) the Polish logicians and nominalists.

This classification is (inexactly) echoed by Arthur Pap’s conception of the various types of analytic philosopher, presented in his 1949 *Elements of Analytic Philosophy*, which is widely considered the first textbook of analytic philosophy.[[6]](#footnote-6) Pap also has four similar categories: (1) “the followers of G. E. Moore,” (2) “the Carnapians,” who engage in “construction of ideal languages,” (3) therapeutic Wittgensteinians, and (4) those who aim at “clarification of the foundations of the sciences,” but resist identifying themselves with any of the previous three groups (1949, ix). Obviously, the fourth category in each list is ostensibly different, but perhaps some of the work emanating from Warsaw, Lwów, and Krakow could fit under Pap’s category (4), though presumably the Polish groups would not exhaust Pap’s (4).[[7]](#footnote-7) It is not clear who else Pap intends to include under his (4). He could be thinking of Reichenbach (unless Pap thinks of Reichenbach as a Carnapian), Popper (as Marcus Rossberg suggested to me), and/or his dissertation advisor Nagel (as Chris Pincock suggested to me).

A similar list appears in the preface to Feigl and Sellars’ widely used 1949 anthology, *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (with one additional, fifth category reflecting the editors’ American location—and perhaps Wilfrid Sellars’ father, Roy Wood Sellars):

The conception of philosophical analysis underlying our selections springs from two major traditions …, the [1] Cambridge movement deriving from Moore and Russell, and the [2] Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle ([3] Wittgenstein, Schlick, Carnap) together with the Scientific Empiricism of the Berlin group (led by Reichenbach). These, together with related [5] developments in America stemming from Realism and Pragmatism, and the relatively independent contributions of the [4] Polish logicians have increasingly merged to create an approach to philosophical problems which we frankly consider a decisive turn in the history of philosophy. (p. *vi*)

So these two codifying moments at mid-century—the first textbook in analytic philosophy, and an early popular anthology (which, interestingly, does not use the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’)—are both very similar to Nagel’s 1936 list of figures and groups.

A somewhat modified version of this list re-appears in J. O. Urmson’s “The History of Philosophical Analysis,” presented in 1961:

I propose… to sketch, in broad strokes, four major forms of philosophical analysis which I think important to distinguish carefully from one another. I shall call the first of these: classical analysis [Nagel’s 1]. It corresponds, roughly, to the traditional method of analysis used by English philosophers, a method which Russell did so much to develop. I shall then examine three other, more recent forms of philosophical analysis: (1) the type of analysis which involves the construction of artificial languages [2]; (2) the type of analysis practiced by Wittgenstein in his later period [3]; (3) the type of analysis which characterizes present-day Oxford philosophy [Austin and Ryle]. (1962/1967, 294-295).

The first three match[[8]](#footnote-8) Nagel’s first three, whereas Urmson’s more Anglocentric list replaces the Polish logicians and nominalists with the so-called ‘ordinary language’ group of Austin, Ryle, and their adherents—which obviously did not exist in 1936.

The case of C. S. Peirce is also worth discussing briefly. Why is he (and pragmatists more generally) not considered a prototypical analytic philosopher today? As we just saw, pragmatism makes Feigl and Sellars’ list in their preface—but there are no readings from Peirce in their anthology. Shortly after their quotation above, they explain that Peirce’s “work is not represented *because it is so amply available*” (vi). In other words, texts from Peirce would have been included in their anthology on the basis of his content and method, had Peirce’s work not already been so popular with their target audience. But perhaps Feigl and Sellars are idiosyncratic. So then we ask: why doesn’t Peirce in particular and/or Pragmatism more generally make Nagel’s list of analytic philosophers? This can be explained by recalling the end of the title of Nagel’s piece: “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy *in Europe*.” Since Peirce was American (and lacked any organized group of disciples in Europe), he could not be included in a list of *European* philosophers. However, Nagel, like Feigl and Sellars, finds important conceptual similarities between Peirce and the analytic European philosophers his article discusses: “Without being aware of it, they [The Vienna Circle] have taken seriously Peirce’s advice that expert knowledge of some empirical subject-matter should be part of the philosopher’s equipment” (1936-II: 30). Later (II: 37) he stresses the similarity of one of Carnap’s *Logical Syntax of Language* views to Peirce’s. Finally, in describing Wittgenstein’s views, Nagel says “[m]uch of this reads like a page from Peirce” (I: 18). In sum: early, influential users of the category analytic philosophy considered Peirce similar to his contemporaries who we today consider paradigm analytic philosophers, but these early users did not focus on Peirce for purely accidental reasons (specifically, his work was already easily available, or he was not located in Europe).

*3.3. Objections and replies … and complications*

Returning to the main thread of this essay, there are prima facie plausible counterexamples to the claim that Nagel’s 1936 *Journal of Philosophy* pair of papers is the first example of the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ used roughly in our sense. First, Aaron Preston (2007) finds the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ in John Wisdom in 1934, and in both R. G. Collingwood and W. P. Montague in 1933. For example, the first sentence of Wisdom (1934) is “[i]t is to analytic philosophy that this book is intended to be an introduction” (1).[[9]](#footnote-9) However, these instances of ‘analytic philosophy’ do not conclusively show that Nagel’s paper was not the first use of the term *in roughly our sense*. These earlier uses most probably refer *only*to the *Cambridge analysts*: e.g. Collingwood refers specifically to England, and Montague equates “the new analytic philosophy” with “the Cambridge school” (quoted in Preston 2007, 73). Since one of my goals here is to investigate when and how people began seeing Logical Empiricists and Cambridge analysts as members of the same philosophical group, these pre-1936 instances do not qualify. Furthermore, as we shall see in §5.1-2, Britons in the early 1930’s explicitly distanced themselves and their work from the Vienna Circle (while recognizing that some similarities exist).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Let us consider a second candidate counter-example to Nagel’s 1936 article being the first example of ‘analytic philosophy’ being used in our sense. Only searching for the strings ‘analytic philosophy’ and ‘analytic philosopher’ in the Google books corpus is probably overly narrow, since it requires an exact match. One might think the following is an earlier instance, missed by the Google Books string search. In Suzanne Langer’s 1930 book *The Practice of Philosophy* we find the following:

There is… one type of philosophy based upon a rule of procedure and defining itself thereby—that is the so-called ‘logical’ or ‘analytic’ type. It is sometimes called by the misleading name, ‘scientific philosophy’ (1930, 17).[[11]](#footnote-11)

Before assessing whether Langer’s text shows that Nagel’s 1936 essay was not the first use of ‘analytic philosophy’ in our sense, we should briefly address the following question: what is the relation between the two terms ‘scientific philosophy’ and ‘analytic philosophy’? This is significant, because one might wonder whether ‘analytic philosophy’ was just another, newer name that had (roughly) the same meaning as ‘scientific philosophy’—like ‘World War I’ came to replace ‘The Great War,’ though each phrase has the same denotation. In a Google ngram comparison, ‘scientific philosophy’ appears shortly after 1870, and is only overtaken by ‘analytic philosophy’ in the mid-1970s. For example, the *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie* [*Scientific Philosophy Quarterly*], which first appeared in 1877 (first edited by Avenarius, then by Mach), described itself as a “reaction against speculative philosophy… [the journal] addresses itself only to philosophy that amounts to *science* in that sense” (quoted in Heidegren and Lundberg 2010, 6).[[12]](#footnote-12) We will see in §6 that one of the earlier often-cited contrast classes for ‘analytic philosophy’ is ‘speculative philosophy.’



This graph provides evidence that the terms ‘analytic philosophy’-‘scientific philosophy’ are not tightly analogous to the terms ‘World War I’-‘The Great War.’ For during the time that ‘analytic philosophy’ is first gathering momentum from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, ‘scientific philosophy’ is holding strong. And more decisively, ‘scientific philosophy’ is in use by the mid-1870s—which is too early a start date for most conceptions of analytic philosophy.

Now, a careful reader might object that in the above quotation from Langer, “the so-called” suggests the phrase is in circulation already.[[13]](#footnote-13) I think Langer is probably referring to Russell’s *Our Knowledge of the External World* [henceforth *OKEW*], since Russell describes the project of that book as an example of “logico-analytic philosophy,” and the book is subtitled “as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy.” (These ideas are found in his article “On Scientific Method in Philosophy” as well, which also argues for the view that philosophy will more closely follow the methods of science, if philosophy is analysis.)

I do not think this shows that the concept of analytic philosophy was in wide circulation immediately post-*OKEW*, for three reasons, over and above the Google Books data. First, recall the earlier quotation, in which Russell did not identify himself as an analytic philosopher in 1940, but rather as a logical empiricist. Second, in *OKEW*, Russell always frames his work as exhibiting ‘the logical-analytic *method* (in scientific philosophy).’ There is a difference between using a method and belonging to a group or type. Of course, a group can be formed on the basis of a shared method, but not every method generates a sociologically significant group. A method can be ‘pulled off the shelf,’ used, and then ‘put away,’ without necessarily becoming part of one’s professional identity. Third, when Russell does talk about the professional identity of someone who would undertake the project of *OKEW*, it is in terms of being a scientific philosopher, not an analytic philosopher. For example, he writes: “In order to become a scientific philosopher, a certain peculiar mental discipline is required” (1914, 237).

Let us return to the question of whether Langer’s 1930 text picks out our conception of analytic philosophy before Nagel’s 1936 article. My answer is: in one sense (intensionally) yes, but in another sense (extensionally) no. I will begin with the ‘no’ answer. Langer’s conception of *who* the key players are in the analytic tradition is rather different from Nagel’s and ours:

the methodological broodings of Meinong and Husserl, Dewey and Schiller, Peirce, Russell, and Broad, the formulations of the “critical” philosophy,[[14]](#footnote-14) have all cleared the way for our recognition of a guiding principle that will define our field, dictate our procedure, … and give to philosophy a working basis as well as an ultimate aim: this principle is the pursuit of meaning. (21)

She omits certain people that we would think of as paradigmatic analytic philosophers, including Moore and his intellectual descendants, as well as any logical positivists—and the only philosophers on her list who we today would definitely class as analytic philosophers are Russell and (probably) Broad. So looking at her list of philosophers, it appears Langer’s ‘logical or analytic type of philosophy’ does *not* pick out roughly the same set as ‘analytic philosophy’ today.

However, matters are more complicated. As we just saw, Langer describes the analytic type of philosophy as possessing “a guiding principle that will define our field, dictate our procedure, … and give to philosophy a working basis as well as an ultimate aim: this principle is the pursuit of meaning” (21). As a result, “we must remember that analysis never applies directly to reality” (67). As we shall see in §4.2, this idea took root in mid-century: what unites heterogeneous people called ‘analytic philosophers’ is that they are all investigating (something in the neighborhood of) concepts or linguistic meaning. And here we find Langer expressing this principle in 1930. So while her extensional characterization of analytic philosophy (the list of progenitors) does not match our modern extension of ‘analytic philosopher circa 1930’ her intensional characterization, viz. the ‘pursuit of meaning,’ does foreshadow later justifications for grouping the disparate factions from Moore to Carnap together. Additionally, note that Langer does not say that “Meinong and Husserl” et al. *are* analytic philosophers; rather, she says only that they “have all cleared the way” for analytic philosophy—just as the Vienna Circle’s *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung* manifesto *also* includes, as forerunners of the scientific world-conception, many people we would not think of as analytic philosophers (in §1.1).

In short, the best response to this objection to Nagel’s (1936 I-II) being the first instance of ‘analytic philosophy’ in our sense is equivocal; and this ambivalence is to be expected, given the lack of ‘sharp joints’ in the historical development of groups and large-scale currents of philosophical thought. In picking out the particular paradigmatic (precursors to) analytic philosophy, Langer does not pre-date Nagel. However, her principle for grouping the various philosophers together, which became the standard mid-century, does pre-date Nagel. In the next section, we turn to the contemporaneous justifications offered for grouping these diverse philosophers together under the single banner ‘analytic philosophy,’ besides the one just cited from Langer.

**4. Contemporaneous justifications for the grouping**

*4.1 Nagel’s justifications*

§2 suggested that grouping Moore together with Carnap, as members of the same philosophical species, would be somewhat surprising for someone seeing their texts for the first time. And more importantly, Moore and Carnap’s contemporaries often did not see them as clearly engaged in the same sort of enterprise. How did the first generation of people using the term ‘analytic philosophy’ justify uniting these variegated philosophers under a single banner? I will first examine Nagel’s unifying principles, and then turn to principles used as the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ became more widespread. Then, in an interesting twist, §5 shows that these later principles directly contradict explicit self-descriptions of many of the earliest analytic philosophers.

How did Nagel justify including those he included—and excluding those he excluded—from his list of analytic philosophers? And what similarities did he discern among those he considered analytic philosophers? Perhaps wisely, Nagel does not attempt to define ‘analytic philosophy.’ But he does describe certain affinities amongst the philosophers he encountered during his 1935 *Bildungsreise*: “there is much they have in common, methodologically and doctrinally” (1936-I, 6). These commonalities include a focus on philosophical method, an ahistorical approach, and a resistance to grand system-building.

First, Nagel discerned a “concern with formulating the *method* of philosophic analysis dominates all these places” (6). As a result, “loyalty to a secure and tested method is preferable to a dogmatism with respect to points of doctrine, … because of this I met with next to no dogmatism and intellectual intolerance” (6). “[T]he sense of being in a genuine republic of letters rather than a community of seers was strong upon me.” (It should perhaps be noted that Nagel did not meet Wittgenstein; he only heard second-hand reports of Wittgenstein’s views.)

Second, Nagel notes that most philosophers he met in Europe were not working on the history of philosophy (or the history of ideas more generally) (6). He found himself in an “extremely unhistorical atmosphere,” where “the great figures in the history of philosophy and the traditional problems associated with them receive only a negative attention, … because… the alleged problems not revealed as empirical ones are to be dismissed as pseudo-problems masquerading as genuine ones under the cloak of grammar” (7). Interestingly, some contemporaries bundled the logical empiricists’ rejection of metaphysics together with their ahistorical approach. Here are the opening lines of a 1939 paper in *Journal of Philosophy* entitled “Logical Empiricism and the History of Philosophy”: “No aspect of… logical empiricism has provoked so much public attention as its rejection of metaphysics. Some have taken this to imply the denial of the whole history of philosophy” (Barrett 1939, 124).

Finally, Nagel says that these philosophers he met were “impatient with philosophic systems built in the traditionally grand manner” (1936-I, 6). What does this general, abstract characterization come to? Nagel cashes this out in three characteristics. First, for these analytic philosophers, “their preoccupation is with philosophy as *analysis*; they take for granted a body of authentic knowledge acquired by the special sciences, and are concerned not with *adding* to it…, but with *clarifying* its meaning and implications” (6).[[15]](#footnote-15) These philosophers exhibit “a common-sense naturalism”: the external world is not an illusion, and they generally accept the discoveries of science (8). Closely related to this point, the typical philosopher Nagel met believed that philosophy does not answer empirical questions, or decree which things it is possible to study scientifically. Comparing Poland to Cambridge, Nagel finds specialized, piecemeal work in both places: “[a]s in Russellized Cambridge, concern with specialized problems rather than the manufacture of vast systems is the daily fare of both students and professors” (1936-II, 50). Second, the philosophical work Nagel encountered was value-neutral: it was no substitute for religion or “social salvation” (8). Nagel found “ethical and political neutrality within the domain of philosophic analysis proper… Analytic philosophy *is* ethically neutral *formally*” (9).[[16]](#footnote-16) (However, Nagel suggested critical habits of thought about abstract questions would spill over into critical thought about practical and political matters.) Third, these various philosophers were supposedly united by a common enemy, metaphysics. Nagel recounts: “it was reported to me that in England some of the older men were dumbfounded and scandalized when, at a public meeting, a brilliant young adherent of the *Weiner Kreis* threatened them with early extinction since ‘the armies of Cambridge and Vienna are already upon them’” (1936-I, 9). Ayer’s biographer infers that this was Ayer, and quotes another report of Ayer’s remarks, phrased slightly differently: “You’re lost. The forces of Cambridge and Vienna are descending upon you!” (Rogers 1999, 104). Similarly, Max Black asserted that “English philosophers of metaphysical tendency have shivered for a long time in a draught of glacial severity proceeding from the direction of Cambridge” (1939, 24). The principle ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend’ thus suggests the Cambridge analysts were natural allies of the logical empiricists. However, this would not distinguish either group from Husserlian phenomenologists. As Alan Richardson has said, “In the early twentieth century, the philosophers who came to be considered founders of continental philosophy were as vocal in their rejection of old-fashioned systematic metaphysics as were the founders of analytic philosophy” (1997, 423).

Nagel cautions us to take the above generalizations with a grain of salt: “any *Weltanschauung* such as the one I am indicating would never be asserted by these men as a formal part of their philosophy” (1936-I, 8). Summing up analytic philosophy: “it aims to make as clear as possible what it is we really know” (9). This is likely too broad to distinguish analytic philosophy from many other types of philosophy. And it should probably be noted that the other characteristics mentioned above (focus on methodology, ahistorical approach, and distrust of synoptic systems) probably would not distinguish this group from all other groups of philosophers. Finally, it’s worth noting that (i) some of Nagel’s characteristics are still commonly heard (at least as stereotypes), (ii) logic is never mentioned as a distinguishing feature, and (iii) there is no mention of semantics, or of philosophy as a linguistic enterprise more generally.

*4.2. Second-phase, mid-century justifications*

What justifications were given in the second phase, i.e. the period in which ‘analytic philosophy’ became widespread, for classifying these various philosophers under one heading? The short answer is that these mid-century figures conceived of philosophy as a linguistic, and often specifically semantic, enterprise—echoing the idea suggested by Langer in 1930 (§3.3 above). This is what Aaron Preston calls the “linguistic thesis,” which he considers the “defining doctrine” of analytic philosophy: analytic philosophy is “a philosophical school that took the proper work of philosophy to be the analysis of language” (2007, 2). This view is famously associated with Dummett (1993), and has recently been defended by Raatikainen (2013).

For example, in the preface to the anthology *Classics of Analytic Philosophy*, Robert Ammerman claims that “analytic philosophy” is “any philosophy which places its greatest emphasis on the study of language and its complexities” (1965, 2). (This anthology includes *inter alia* Russell, Moore, Carnap, Hempel, Austin, and Ryle, and some notes of Wittgenstein’s Cambridge lectures, so it does cover roughly the same groups mentioned earlier.) Alice Ambrose’s article about the ‘new’ philosophy also reflects this conception of philosophy in its title: “The Revolution in Philosophy: from the Structure of the World to the Structure of Language” (1968). This defends her view that philosophy is linguistic, presented in her *Journal of Philosophy* article, “Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems” (1952). Furthermore, analytic philosophy’s opponents conceived of it in this way as well: for example, Brand Blanshard complains of “that tiresome obsession with language which has done so much in our day towards making philosophy trivial” (1962, 267).

As mentioned above, Arthur Pap’s *Elements of Analytic Philosophy* is widely considered the first textbook of analytic philosophy. The Introduction states that “[a] perusal of the contents of this book will reveal that there is a great deal of preoccupation—malicious tongues might say: diseased and arid preoccupation—with questions of semantics” (1949, *vi*). And much later in the book, Pap asserts that “a philosophical ‘theory’ of *X* is to be regarded as a proposed analysis of the meaning of‘*X*’” (343). So whereas Ammerman identified analytic philosophy as a linguistic enterprise broadly considered, Pap construes it more narrowly, as a matter of semantics or meaning in particular.

Gilbert Ryle echoes Pap’s claim that the business of analytic philosophy is the study of meanings:

The story of twentieth-century philosophy is very largely the story of this notion of sense or meaning. Meanings … are what Moore’s analyses have been analyses of; meanings are what Russell’s logical atoms were atoms of … meanings are just what, in different ways, philosophy and logic are *ex officio* about. (1956, 8)[[17]](#footnote-17)

So at mid-century, Ryle reads back into the early founders of analytic philosophy the conception of philosophy as an investigation into meanings. Ammerman says similar things about Moore’s critique of Idealism: “Idealism… had had many critics prior to Russell and Moore, but no one before Moore had concentrated his critical attack with such intensity upon the *meanings* of the metaphysical propositions advanced by the idealists” (1965, 4; emphasis in original). But as the next subsection will show, this Rylean reading seriously distorts the founders’ view of their own projects, for they distance themselves from the idea—associated with the Logical Positivists—that philosophy is a linguistic affair.

**5. Resistance to the grouping**

*5.1. Early Cambridge analysts explicitly rejected the second-phase justification for the grouping*

Here is a strange fact about the ‘Phase 2’ justification for grouping these various philosophers together: it unequivocally contradicts the older Cambridge analysts’ self-conception. Interestingly, however, the mid-century justification fits the conception found in Langer (1930) and the logical empiricist conception of philosophy the 1930s.

For example, in a symposium on analysis, Max Black states that the “English Realists [who Black earlier identified as including Moore, Russell, Stebbing, and Broad] … all probably agree with Mr. Wisdom that the business of analysis is the analysis of *facts rather* *than* of the *meaning* of statements” (1934, 54; my emphasis). Black goes on to draw an explicit contrast between the “philosophical analysis” of the English Realists and the “logical analysis” of the “Viennese Circle” (55). And we find one of Black’s English Realists, his teacher Susan Stebbing, in complete agreement with Black’s assessment: she explicitly states that her brand of philosophical analysis “is not linguistic,” and she criticizes the Logical Positivists for holding that philosophical inquiry is linguistic (1933, 34). She writes: “philosophers often speak of analysing *propositions*, not of analysing sentences. The elements of a sentence are words; the elements of a proposition are constituents of the world” (Stebbing 1932-3, 78).

Another of Black’s English Realists, C. D. Broad, explicitly endorses the view Black says he ‘probably’ holds. In a section presenting objections to his approach, Broad writes:

It may be said: ‘By your own admission the task of Philosophy is purely verbal; it consists entirely of discussions about the meanings of words.’ This criticism is of course absolutely wide of the mark. … Any analysis, when once it has been made, is naturally *expressed* in words; but so too is any other discovery. (1923, 17)

So here again, an early British analyst explicitly articulates the picture of philosophy that was used mid-century to unite the early Cambridge school with other philosophers—and then unequivocally rejects that conception of philosophy.[[18]](#footnote-18)

And perhaps the (currently) most well-known example of this anti-linguistic view of analysis is found in Moore’s *Principia Ethica*:

How is good to be defined? Now it may be thought that this is a verbal question. … But this is not the sort of definition I am asking for. … My business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea. (1903, §6)

And this is not merely an early phase that Moore later left behind (as he would have, if Moore realized he had, unbeknownst to his early self, been doing linguistic analysis all along). He articulates a very similar view nearly four decades later:

I never intended to use the word [“analysis”] in such a way that the *analysandum* would be a *verbal expression.* When I have talked of analyzing anything, *what* I have talked of analyzing has always been an idea or concept or proposition, and *not* a verbal expression; that is to say, if I talked of analyzing a “proposition,” I was always using “proposition” in such a sense that no verbal expression (no sentence, for instance), can be a “proposition,” in that sense. (Moore 1942, 661; emphasis in the original).

One wonders how recently Ryle had read Moore when he wrote ‘Meanings … are what Moore’s analyses have been analyses of.’ Ryle is not the only one who misreads Moore in this way. Nagel says “The *objective* of philosophy on Moore’s view… is to give *correct analyses* of the meanings of sentences expressing true propositions whose ‘ordinary meaning’ is *understood*” (1936-I, 12).

It is noteworthy that while the British analysts were explicitly rejecting the conception of philosophy as linguistic, the logical empiricists and many of their fellow-travellers were simultaneously endorsing it. For example, Schlick’s “The Future of Philosophy” articulates the mid-century view that philosophy is the study of meaning:

we find a definitive contrast between this philosophic method, which has for its object the discovery of meaning, and the method of the sciences, which have for their object the discovery of truth. … Science should be defined as the ‘pursuit of *truth*’ and philosophy as the ‘pursuit of *meaning’*.” (1931 [1979], 217)

And we have already seen (3.3) that Langer’s 1930 *The Practice of Philosophy*, which Schlick calls “a very excellent book” (219), takes a virtually identical position. She claims that “the pursuit of meaning” is “a guiding principle that will define our field” (1930, 21), that “philosophy… is the systematic study of meanings” (35-36), and that “[m]eanings are the object of all philosophical research” (221). Philosophy, for both Langer and Schlick in the 1930’s, is (what we today consider) semantics.

Not every Logical Empiricist thinks philosophy is semantics during this period; Carnap is in the midst of his syntactic period in the early 1930’s, where he is overtly hostile to semantics (1934/1937, §75)—though of course Carnap changes his mind about semantics partway through that decade. Neurath, however, remains skeptical of semantics (Mancosu 2008). And in *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Ayer endorses the weaker claim that philosophy is linguistic, not factual:

The question ‘What is the nature of a material thing?’ is, like any other question of that form, a linguistic question … And the propositions which are set forth in answer to it are linguistic propositions, even though they may … seem to be factual. They are propositions about the relationship of symbols, and not about the properties of the things which the symbols denote. (1936, 64-5)

In short, several logical empiricists claim that philosophy is a linguistic, as opposed to factual, enterprise during the 1930’s—a position many British analysts at that time explicitly and unequivocally repudiated. Accordingly, this subsection gives evidence against Aaron Preston’s view that “the belief that [analytic philosophy] had at least one defining doctrine—… the *linguistic thesis*[[19]](#footnote-19)—was the norm from the early 1930s” (2007, *x*).[[20]](#footnote-20)

*5.2. Why ‘analytic philosophy’ did not gain widespread currency until the 1950’s*

Why didn’t the label ‘analytic philosophy’ spread earlier than the 1950’s? The answer is undoubtedly complex, but part of the answer may be: Moorean analysts did not want to be in the same fundamental group as the logical empiricists, and so actively attempted to distinguish themselves from them and resist assimilation.

The first piece of evidence for this hypothesis is that, as we just saw, the older Cambridge-style analysts explicitly rejected the view that their work was fundamentally a linguistic endeavor, instead of an inquiry into facts—but the logical empiricists accepted that linguistic conception of philosophy. There is more textual evidence for this hypothesis. Susan Stebbing’s “Logical Positivism and Analysis” is revealing. She claims that although Mooreans and Logical Positivists can agree on the slogan ‘philosophy is the analysis of facts,’ they disagree over both what analysis is and what the facts are. In her taxonomy, Mooreans believe analysis is “directional”—i.e. there is some real, metaphysical relation of being more fundamental or basic than (perhaps an ancestor of what metaphysicians today call ‘grounding’), whereas the Logical Postivists think analysis is merely “postulational”—i.e. we can take whatever we like as unanalyzed primitives. Turning to the ‘facts’ part of the slogan, Stebbing claims that Logical Positivists “treat all facts as *linguistic facts*” (1933, 31).[[21]](#footnote-21) Furthermore, she claims these two differences amount to a “weakness” in logical positivism (4).

Other contemporaries also highlight important differences between the Mooreans and others. For example, Max Black distinguishes them as follows: “The dogmatic basis of Moore’s method is the pronouncement of commonsense, of Russell’s that of the scientist” (1939, 26, fn.6); this echoes his earlier statement that “[p]hilosophy must be replaced by analysis of the findings of science *or* everyday knowledge” (1934, 53; my emphasis). And this is a reasonably apt characterization of the Logical Empiricists and their fellow-travelers, even though it is different from Stebbing’s view that they aimed to analyze *linguistic* facts. Here is how Feigl distinguishes the methodology of the two main schools (i.e. what they took the activity of analysis to be):

A characteristic difference between two types of procedure in logical analysis is worth observing. Wittgenstein, very much like G. E. Moore before him, and like the English analytic school on the whole, pursues the Socratic task in a casuistic fashion; individual confusions are subjected to elucidation. It is the specific case that is treated, and the general theory of the treatment is not elaborated systematically. Carnap and his followers, on the other hand, proceeded with the development of a complete system, very much like Whitehead and Russell in *Principia Mathematica*. A whole system is set up, and the theory of the machinery fully set forth. (1949, 8-9)

One interesting fact to note here is that many philosophers in what Feigl calls the ‘systematic’ camp, including Russell and Carnap, explicitly endorsed a piecemeal approach to addressing philosophical questions. For example, in the beginning of *OKEW*, Russell claims his new philosophical approach “represents… the same kind of advance as was introduced into physics by Galileo: the substitution of piecemeal, detailed, and verifiable results for large untested generalities” (1914, 4). Similarly, in the *Aufbau*, Carnap states that the “new attitude” in philosophy means that an “individual no longer undertakes to erect in one bold stroke an entire system of philosophy. Rather, each works at his special place within the one unified science” (1928/1967, *xvi*).

Now, one might object as follows: what British philosophers were saying in the early 1930’s and before does not show that later British analysts were still actively resisting being grouped with the Logical Empiricists. The first reply is to recall the date on Moore’s second, later quotation above, espousing the view that philosophy does not analyze verbal expressions: 1942. Second, J. N. Findlay, in his reports on Wittgenstein’s 1939 lectures, forcefully maintains that “recent Cambridge philosophy”—which he equates with Wittgenstein—is categorically *not* positivist, and does not adopt a deferential attitude towards science (1941/1963, 38). Third, recall Dummett’s recollection (§2 above) that in Ryle’s Oxford in the 1940s, Carnap was considered the primary enemy. Furthermore, there are signs of resistance to assimilation even later. For example, here is Antony Flew and Alastair MacIntyre’s editorial introduction to their 1955 volume on philosophical theology:

This is a collection of twenty-two papers by sixteen different philosophers working in the British Commonwealth. The first thing which all the contributors have in common is a familiarity with and great indebtedness to the recent revolution in philosophy. They are therefore certain to be labeled ‘Logical Positivists’… This label is *entirely inappropriate*. (1955, *vii*, my emphasis)

Flew and MacIntyre do not explain what they mean by ‘the recent revolution in philosophy.’ As a second example, in the 1960s, J. O. Urmson still stresses the difference between the English philosophers and the Logical Empiricists:

anyone who … calls contemporary English philosophy ‘positivism’ will be seriously mistaken, for it is strikingly different from the Vienna Circle in both the type of analysis it practices and in its philosophical aims. (1962/1967, 296)

And in the Feigl and Sellars anthology discussed above, the phrase ‘analytic philosophy’ does not appear in their introduction. In fact, they highlight the difference between the Mooreans and he Logical Empiricists:

[t]he conception of philosophical analysis underlying our selections springs from *two* major traditions in recent thought, the Cambridge movement deriving from Moore and Russell, and the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle (Wittgenstein, Schlick, Carnap) together with the Scientific Empiricism of the Berlin group (led by Reichenbach). (1949, *vi*; my emphasis)

So even an anthology that apparently helped create ‘analytic philosophy’ as a single category, by bringing various texts together in one binding, presented Cambridge and Vienna as too far apart to lump together under a single heading.

The view I have been presenting evidence for is diametrically opposed to the following view, presented by Pap in his aforementioned textbook of analytic philosophy.

It is a familiar historical phenomenon that no sooner a school of thought has been founded in reaction to the traditional school than it divides itself into more or less antagonistic factions. This has also happened to what I broadly call ‘analytic philosophy’.” (1949, *ix*)

I have argued that Pap is exactly wrong: the factions existed before the founding of the (nominal) school. Instead, I agree with Urmson that “It is not sensible to ask for *the* method of making one’s fortune … there are many. It is no more sensible to ask ‘What is the analytical method?’ There is not one ‘analytic philosophy.’ There are several” (1962/1967, 301). The term has always been disjunctive; it has always contained multitudes. And this is likely part of why it has proven so resistant to definition—or even just characterization.

*5.3. Why did the British eventually accept the ‘second phase,’ linguistic accounts of philosophy?*

We have seen that Moore, Stebbing, Broad, and others reject the claim that their preferred species of philosophical analysis is a linguistic inquiry. But we have also seen Ryle and others accept it. The natural question to ask next is: what prompted this change, from rejection to acceptance? I do not have a conclusive or definitive answer. However, I can offer a pair of exploratory hypotheses, which are not mutually exclusive.

*Hypothesis 1* (Urmson): Ordinary Language Oxonians were interested in natural language for its own sake. Urmson writes:

The analytic philosophers of the Cambridge School—for example, Russell and Wittgenstein—came to philosophy after considerable work in the sciences and in mathematics. … But the [later] Oxford philosophers came to their subject… after extensive study of classics. Thus they were naturally interested in words, in syntax, and in idioms. They did not wish to use linguistic analysis simply to resolve philosophical problems; they were interested in the study of language for its own sake. (1962/1967, 299)

In other words: around mid-century, the most prominent UK philosophers started thinking of language as interesting for its own sake, and not merely as something to be reformed or replaced in order to better reveal the structure of facts (about mathematical objects, or the entities postulated by scientific theories, or the home truths of common sense). Thus, thinking of philosophy as first and foremost a linguistic enterprise would naturally seem more valuable and worthwhile, for someone who found language fascinating *per se*. (Notably, Urmson does not mention the third giant of Cambridge philosophy, Moore. Moore did *not* have ‘considerable work in the sciences and mathematics,’ and he actually studied Classics along with philosophy at Cambridge. Despite that difference with Russell and Wittgenstein, it nonetheless seems reasonable to say that Moore was *not* interested in language for its own sake, given the quotations from Moore cited above.)

*Hypothesis 2*: The influence of middle and later Wittgenstein on the UK philosophers increased over time. The case of John Wisdom, one of Moore’s students, is instructive. In 1934, just before moving from St. Andrews to Cambridge, he sounds like Stebbing in the early 1930’s:

(i) the goal of the analytic philosopher is insight into facts; … (ii) insight is clear apprehension of the ultimate nature of facts;… (iii) the structure of a fact is clearly apprehended when one apprehends clearly the form, the elements, and the arrangement of the elements of that fact. (1934, 3)

However, by 1936, his viewpoint has become more linguistically oriented, and he sounds like Langer or Ammerman:

*Philosophical statements are really verbal*. … A philosophical answer is really a verbal recommendation in response to a request which is really a request with regard to a sentence which lacks a conventional use whether there occur situations which could be conventionally described by it. (1936-7/1967, 101).

And the first footnote of the paper dispels any doubt as to Wittgenstein’s influence: “I can hardly exaggerate the debt I owe to him [Wittgenstein] and how much of the good in this work is his—not only in the treatment of this philosophical difficulty and that but how to do philosophy” (*ibid.*). However, it should be noted that in this article, Wisdom softens this view somewhat by also maintaining “though really verbal, a philosopher’s statements have not a merely verbal point” (102).

Finally, here is a third possible reason why British philosophers stopped resisting being classified together with the Logical Empiricists: Frege was introduced into Oxford discussions and curricula around 1950. J. L. Austin translated Frege’s *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* in 1950, and this made its way into both Austin’s Saturday morning discussions (Warnock 1973, 36), as well as an optional paper Austin devised for the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics program (Dummett 1993, 169). A UNESCO report on “The Teaching of philosophy in the United Kingdom” lists Frege’s *Foundations of Arithmetic* as one of the “modern works” in a bibliography “illustrative of the kind of field covered by the British student” (MacKinnon 1953). Geach and Black’s translations of many of Frege’s writings appeared in 1952.[[22]](#footnote-22) But Frege is of course one progenitor of the ‘Carnapian’ wing of analytic philosophy (along with Russell, in his more logical and scientific work). The fact that Frege began to be taken very seriously on the Oxford philosophical scene around 1950 thus could be one more reason why the British philosophers lessened their resistance to being grouped with the Logical Empiricists, since of course the latter took Frege very seriously as well. Shared canon promotes feelings of kinship.

**6. Contrast class(es) of ‘analytic philosophy’**

One way to understand something is to understand what it is not—and this generalization is particularly helpful for understanding human social groups. Groups often characterize and identify themselves by identifying opponents or outsiders (an out-group) from whom group members distance themselves. So if we are attempting to understand what ‘analytic philosophy’ meant for the early generations of people who used the term, we could likely gain additional insight into the category by understanding what the historical actors thought analytic philosophy was opposed to. The first subsection concerns the most common contrast class today, ‘continental philosophy,’ while the second covers earlier contrast classes.

*6.1. ‘Continental Philosophy’*

‘Continental philosophy’ was *not* the contrast class for the first generations of people who identified themselves and others as analytic philosophers. If we again examine large-scale bibliometric data, Google ngrams show that ‘continental philosophy’ does not begin to enter widespread circulation until the 1970s, well after ‘analytic philosophy’ comes to prominence.[[23]](#footnote-23) But the continued rise in ‘analytic philosophy’ from 1980 onwards *does* coincide with the increasing use of ‘continental philosophy’: ‘analytic’ becomes more common as an agreed-upon term for its intended contrast class emerged.



It is worth noting that ‘continental philosophy’ is what *analytic philosophers* call the group in question (Glendinning 2006, 3); it is not, until relatively recently, the label those philosophers chose for themselves. That said, none of the other terms one might use, e.g. ‘phenomenology,’ ‘deconstruction,’ ‘post-structuralism,’ and ‘existentialism,’ are broad enough to capture all the work and thinkers that ‘continental philosophy’ is standardly used to cover.[[24]](#footnote-24)

When did the phrase ‘continental philosophy,’ in roughly our current sense, first appear? One reasonable candidate for the earliest example that contrasts ‘Continental philosophy’ as a whole with Anglo-American philosophy is a 1954 *Journal of Philosophy* article reporting on the Eleventh International Congress of Philosophy.[[25]](#footnote-25) The author describes “the deep cleavage between Anglo-American philosophy on the one side and Continental philosophy on the other … There is no real discussion between these two groups … The Continental philosophers, steeped in the idiom of phenomenology … arouse bewilderment and incredulity” (Rieser 1954, 100). ‘Bewilderment and incredulity’ more famously supposedly occurred at the 1958 Royaumont colloquium, entitled ‘La Philosophie Analytique’ (but Overgaard 2010 and Vrahimis 2013 challenge this received view), which Glendinning calls the “*locus classicus*” of the analytic/continental divide (2006, 70). The bewilderment was not confined to the Anglophone philosophers; already in 1951 Georges Bataille claimed that “[t]here exists between French and English philosophers a sort of abyss that we do not find between French and German philosophers” (1986, 80). So the incomprehensibility between the two sides was serious enough to warrant explicit mention on both sides by the 1950s.

*6.2. Earlier contrast classes*

Some of the most common contemporaneous contrast classes for people doing what we today would call ‘analytic philosophy’ from the 1930’s through the 1960’s are (i) speculative, (ii) traditional, and (iii) metaphysical philosophy. There may be others (including ‘Idealist’ and ‘synthetic’); let us briefly consider these three.

(i) *Speculative*: Ammerman writes, in the Preface to his anthology, “[w]e will contrast the *analytic* with the *speculative* philosopher, who, if he studies language at all, does so only in order to facilitate the achievement of his main goal: speculation about the metaphysical foundations of the universe” (1965, 2). The UNESCO report, mentioned above in §5.3, states “[W]e are admittedly, in Britain, living in a period when the dominant temper of academic philosophy is analytic and critical rather than speculative” (1953, 119). There are many further examples (Wisdom 1931, 14, Wisdom 1934, 1, Nagel 1936-I, 9, Stebbing 1932-3 and Broad 1923, 20[[26]](#footnote-26)). Several of these authors stress that analytic philosophy does not discover any new information about the world, but instead aims to better understand the information we already have, via analysis.

(ii) *Traditional*: Near the end of the Vienna Circle’s *Scientific World-Conception* manifesto, the authors write “we now see clearly what is the essence of the new scientific world-conception in contrast with traditional philosophy” (1929/1973, §4). Black, in a symposium on the method of analysis, says that some advocates of this method “subject most traditional conceptions of the nature of Philosophy to adverse criticism” (1934, 53). Nagel also draws this contrast in his pair of *Journal of Philosophy* articles (1936-I, 9, 11). (iii) *Metaphysical*: The anti-metaphysical animus of the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein, and their allies is well known, and is a defining theme throughout their work, especially from the 1930s onward. Returning to the Ammerman quote in (i) just above, we see that the speculations at issue concern ‘the metaphysical foundations of the universe.’ And Nagel’s pair of articles combines (ii) and (iii), depicting Moore as combating “metaphysics of traditional philosophy” (1936-I, 11; cf. 16). That said, although many prototypical analytic philosophers rejected what they call ‘traditional metaphysics’ or ‘idealist metaphysics,’ some Cambridge analysts thought a reformed metaphysics was possible. This is Russell’s position (e.g. 1918/2010, 110); Stebbing (1932-33) provides a detailed attempt to characterize and defend metaphysics as a proper part of the method of analysis.

Can we explain the shift in contrast classes, from ‘speculative /metaphysical/ traditional’ to ‘continental’? Here is one exploratory hypothesis. In the early part of the 20th Century, the British analysts’ (non-linguistic) piecemeal, analytic endeavors were quite different from traditional or idealist speculative metaphysical systems. Then, in what I called ‘Phase two’ above, these analysts agreed with the logical empiricists that philosophy should be pursued linguistically. Then, at some point in the later 1960s or 70s, the analytic philosophers realized that the people they were aligning themselves against were also very interested in language (Glock 2008, 132), and often at least as hostile to traditional, systematic metaphysics as the analytic philosophers. Thus a new label needed to be fashioned, which could still serve to distinguish the two (by now) sociologically distinct groups. The term ‘continental’ fit this bill.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Here is a further hypothesis: the shift in contrast class from ‘speculative/metaphysical’ to ‘continental’ helped allow the resurrection of metaphysics within analytic philosophy, and skepticism towards the linguistic turn. Once analytic philosophy’s other espoused staunchly anti-metaphysical stances, and became more interested in the workings of language, analytic philosophers could once again take up the mantle of metaphysics. Of course, there are many other likely causes of the revival of metaphysics in analytic philosophy: e.g. Quine’s claim at the end of “Two Dogmas” that rejecting the analytic-synthetic distinction blurs the line between metaphysics and science, Strawson’s *Individuals*, and Kripke’s making modality appear intellectually respectable.

**7. Conclusion**

I have argued that, in line with previous scholarship, the term ‘analytic philosophy’ in our sense first appears in the 1930s, but doesn’t being to gain wide currency until around 1950. I then discussed various rationales people during that time period gave for grouping these (in many ways) disparate philosophers under a single heading. But the later rationale grounding the grouping, namely that philosophical inquiries are at bottom linguistic, contradicts certain earlier actors’ explicit descriptions of their activities. So, unsurprisingly, some historical actors resisted this grouping—and this may in part explain why the term ‘analytic philosophy’ did not begin to spread widely until the 1950s. Finally, the contrast class for ‘analytic’ has not always been ‘continental’: that is a relatively recent development—in part because the previous ways the analytic community distinguished itself from outsiders ceased to hold of the analytic and non-analytic philosophers.

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1. We probably should not allow self-classification to be a necessary or sufficient condition: Derrida says “I am an analytic philosopher. I say this very seriously” (Derrida 2000, 381). Conversely, many historical figures considered analytic philosophers never labeled themselves as such, e.g. Carnap (Beaney 2013, 44). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This has been denied in the literature: Panu Raatikainen claims that Moore was not an analytic philosopher (and neither was Frege or Russell); rather, “analytic philosophy *derives* from these great thinkers” (2013, 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://books.google.com/ngrams [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The spike in 1949 is probably primarily the result of Arthur Pap’s textbook *The Elements of Analytic Philosophy*: ‘analytic philosophy’ is in the book’s running header, and each of these instances counts towards the total in the Google Books corpus. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. However, one could reasonably urge that it is ‘heterogeneity all the way down’: even grouping people together under the category of ‘Cambridge-style analysts’ or ‘logical empiricists’ is more misleading than helpful. Max Black writes: “Professor Carnap has recently protested [in *Testability and Meaning*] against the misleading suggestions of the label ‘Logical Positivism’. An even stronger warning is needed against the suggestion that there is, or ever has been, a group of analysts in England sufficiently conscious of a common program to constitute a ‘school’. Even at the present time, when supporters of analytical method are both numerous and self-conscious it would be difficult to find a single principle which all would accept.” (1939, 24). (See also (Black 1950, 2).) And something similar holds of “Logical Empiricism”: recent commentators (perhaps (Uebel 2007) most fully) have stressed the diversity of opinions found amongst the members of the Vienna Circle and their intellectual allies. And this heterogeneity was recognized at the time, too: Bela von Juhos, in “Principles of Logical Empiricism,” writes: “As regards the terminology it should be noted that the designation ‘Logical Empiricism’ was used, at the International Congress for Unity of Science (Paris, 1935), in a very general and unprecise manner, to denote *all* the opinions represented at that congress. As can be seen from the reports, many of the ideas were quite incompatible with one another” (1937, 320-321). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Von Wright hypothesizes that Pap’s textbook is responsible for beginning the widespread use of the term ‘analytic philosophy’ (1993). Beaney, on the other hand, suggests that Susan Stebbing’s *A Modern Introduction to Logic* “might be regarded as the first textbook of analytic philosophy” (2013, 43). That said, Stebbing does not explicitly describe it in those terms. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ### Many of the Lwów-Warsaw scholars did not want to be assimilated to the Vienna Circle (Rojszczak 1999, 126-127).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. One might object that logical empiricism is not identical with ‘analysis which involves the construction of artificial languages.’ Specifically, one could justifiably stress that Neurath was not in the same boat as Carnap *et al*. on this matter. That said, (i) many logical empiricists did make use of artificial languages to address philosophical problems, and (ii) even Neurath recognized the utility of artificial languages for certain purposes, even if he harbored reservations (which grew over time) about using them as widely as Carnap. According to Neurath, “‘Formal logic’… will now become a major tool of committed empiricists who… are setting out to conquer the whole domain of science and reserve no propositions for that which one once called ‘metaphysics’” (quoted in Freudenthal and Karachentsev 2010, 119; see also Cirera 1994, 144). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Beaney found an instance of ‘analytic philosopher’ even earlier, in Wisdom’s 1931 *Interpretation and Analysis in Relation to Bentham’s Theory of Definition*. Beaney is careful to say that this is the “first use of ‘analytic philosopher’ to refer to at least *some* of those whom we would now count as analytic philosophers” (2013, 42; my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Even given these facts, I think a reasonable case can still be made that Collingwood’s 1933 use was the first use in our sense; a thorough treatment of this question would require discussing how words acquire their meaning, and how meanings change over time. Since that is an extremely complex issue, and nothing in later sections depends on Nagel’s 1936 papers being the first instance, I will not pursue this further. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Langer describes the “proper subject matter” of this type of philosophy as “Space and Time, Matter and Motion, Number and Relations and any other basic concepts whereon the sciences are built” (17). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For more on the history of the phrase ‘Scientific Philosophy,’ see (Richardson 1997). One fact that distinguishes ‘analytic’ from ‘scientific’ philosophy is that “phenomenology was also hailed by its early twentieth-century adherents as a new, fully scientific philosophy” (1997, 424), e.g. Husserl’s 1911 *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (though of course Anglophones must remember that ‘Wissenschaft’ applies more widely than the English word ‘science’). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In this case, the careful reader is Michael Kremer. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The critical philosophy conducts an investigation into the fundamental “concepts whereon the sciences are built” (1930, 17), perhaps similar to Pap’s category (4) above, and what Langer calls ‘proper subject matter’ of the analytic type of philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This echoes Max Black’s description of the difference between Logical Empiricism and Cambridge Analysis, quoted below in §5.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Some readers are likely familiar with the thesis that logical empiricism was fundamentally political in Europe, but became de-politicized after transplantation to the US (Reisch 2005). However, if Nagel is correct that his subjects’ philosophical work is politically and ethically neutral, then the more extreme versions of this thesis are somewhat undercut. (Carnap, Reichenbach, and others were indisputably politically active in their ‘off-duty’ hours.) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Similarly, Ryle writes that “[p]reoccupation with the theory of meaning could be described as the occupational disease of twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon and Austrian philosophy. We need not worry whether it is a disease.” (Ryle 1957/1963, 239) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. However, one should be careful, when recognizing the real differences between the Cambridge analysts and the Vienna Circle, not to overstate the dissimilarities. Later, Black writes that “the development of the analytical movement in England and of Logical Positivism have much in common. They have had, roughly speaking, the same friends and the same enemies” (1939, 33). At a sociological or professional level, Ayer functioned as a bridge between the two groups from the mid-1930s onward. And Stebbing helped bring Carnap to London to give a series of three lectures, written up by Stebbing’s students in *Analysis* (Maund and Reeves 1934), and this was the first time Carnap met Russell and Ayer in person (Beaney 2013, 43). (Thanks to Alexander Klein for discussion.) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Reminder: Preston’s ‘linguistic thesis’ takes “the proper work of philosophy to be the analysis of language” (2007, 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Preston’s view could be defended from this charge by adopting Raatikainen’s view that Moore is not an analytic philosopher (2013, 21), and expanding that to include Black’s English Realists. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. However, Feigl’s “Logical Empiricism” (1949) claims Logical Empiricists *do* engage in “directional analysis” (8); nonetheless, the direction for Logical Empiricists is epistemic, whereas for the British analysts it is ontological, so a difference nonetheless remains. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The textual evidence for this paragraph is heavily indebted to Guy Longworth (see https://guylongworth.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/j-l-austin-and-freges-grundlagen/) and Michael Kremer. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The small spike in ‘continental philosophy’ at 1945 is apparently due to a running header in B. A. G. Fuller’s *A History of Philosophy: Modern*, which covers philosophy on the continent in earlier centuries. (Plus, the book shows up twice in the Google Books corpus; this sort of double-counting is one reason ngrams of the Google Books corpus must be taken with a grain of salt, especially with relatively infrequent phrases.) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. What psychologists call the ‘outgroup homogeneity effect’ could be operative here: we tend to see groups that we do not belong to as more homogenous (on outgroup traits) than groups we belong to. This could explain why analytic philosophers group together non-analytic philosophers from very different, even antagonistic traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Eric Schliesser pointed out a potentially earlier instance, which he credits to Anthony Crifasi. In his review of Ayer’s *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Nagel writes: “To have stated in clear language the outcome of the logico-analytic method, freed from the disturbing overtones of the continental schools, is … the most important merit of this book” (1936c, 330). One might suspect this is the first appearance of the concept of continental philosophy. But this suspicion can be resisted. First, one could emphasize ‘schools’ rather than ‘continental’ in the above quotation; this fits with Nagel’s ‘method not dogma’ description of analytic philosophy. More significantly, in his 1936 pair of articles, Nagel uses the adjective ‘continental’ twice, and both times it refers to people we would today call ‘analytic’: “This radical conventionalism of Ajdukiewicz… is thus another philosophically significant outcome of the continental interest in semantic analysis” (1936-II, 53); “recent researches by the continental positivists have proved him [Wittgenstein] wrong, and their more formal approach to questions of syntax seems to me to have definite advantages” (1936-I, 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Broad calls the analysis of concepts and the criticism of basic assumptions ‘critical philosophy,’ not ‘analytic philosophy.’ Also, Broad describes speculative philosophy as follows: “Its object is to take over the results of the various sciences, to add to them the results of the religious and ethical experiences of mankind, and then to reflect upon the whole. The hope is that, by this means, we may be able to reach some general conclusions as to the nature of the Universe, and as to our position and prospects in it” (1923, 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. As Glendinning writes, “‘Continental philosophy’ is less the name for another kind of philosophy than analytic philosophy, but a term that functions *within* analytic philosophy as the name of its own other, that part of its lexicon which represents what is ‘*not part*’ of it” (2006, 12). Just as there is no such thing as a unified biological kind ‘non-Drosophila,’ or unified chemical kind ‘non-gold,’ there will be no unified social/ conceptual kind ‘non-analytic.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-27)