

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: HEGEL'S DIALECTICS AND THE METHOD OF THE  
EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

*Abstract*

In the last decades, several attempts were made to exploit the relatedness between the early analytic philosophers and Hegel. Some 30 years ago, Peter Hylton and Nicholas Griffin investigated the apprenticeship of Bertrand Russell with neo-Hegelians.<sup>1</sup> 25 years later, the direction of interest changed. Paul Redding and Angelica Nuzzo sought a connection between Hegel and analytic philosophy following hints made by Robert Brandom and John McDowell. According to these authors, Hegel can be seen as a theorist of concepts.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, they found that Hegel's understanding of concepts is close to that of the early analytic philosophy.

The approach we are following in this paper is different. We shall concentrate on the relatedness between the method of the early analytic philosophers and aspects of Hegel's method. This is an unexplored venue and we hope that our study will open a new perspective both in the history of the early analytic philosophy and in Hegel Studies. To be more explicit, we are not going to specifically investigate the genealogical connection between these two methods. We shall be mainly concerned with their kinship.

*1. Hegel and the Eliminativistic Method of Early Analytic Philosophy*

The official story has it that the early analytic philosophy was developed as an antithesis to Hegel's dialectics. Whereas analytic philosophers strived to fix the *exact* terms and boundaries of logic, ontology and epistemology, Hegel was interested in the *transition* of terms, concepts and objects in other concepts and objects. Despite the fact that this story seems to be correct and is so rather convincing, there are also striking similarities between Hegel's method of dialectics and the method of the early analytic philosophers. In what exactly sense is this the case?

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. PETER HYLTON, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford 1990; NICHOLAS GRIFFIN, *Russell's Idealist Apprenticeship*, Oxford 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PAUL REDDING, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, Cambridge 2007; ANGELICA NUZZO (ed.), *Hegel and the Analytic Tradition*, London 2009.

Typical for the early analytic philosophy was the method of elimination. G. E. Moore used to demonstrate how one step in philosophical analysis also performs—accomplishes *ipso facto*—a side-task, killing two birds with one stone. Here are nine examples of this approach: (i) I know a class of sense-data and I *ipso facto* know their object; (ii) I know the existence of an object and *ipso facto* know the existence of its sense-data; (iii) I know the words of a proposition and I *ipso facto* know its meaning; (iv) I believe a proposition and I *ipso facto* understand it; (v) I apprehend a proposition and *ipso facto* apprehend the fact about which it is; (vi) I apprehend directly sense-data and am *ipso facto* aware of the proposition that I perceive it directly; (vii) I apprehend directly sense-data and *ipso facto* apprehend the proposition that it exists; (viii) I have an immediate knowledge of a proposition and I can *ipso facto* immediately know the resulting proposition; (ix) in the case that I can prove that there are two things in the world, I can *ipso facto* also prove that there are two things outside me.<sup>3</sup> In all these cases a superfluous duplication of terms is eliminated.

Russell's "eliminativistic philosophical method"<sup>4</sup> started as a method of interpretation, or of paraphrasing one proposition into another. Its result was abolishing numbers, relations, classes, propositions, propositional functions, and also objects of the external world as entities. Following G. E. Moore's and Russell's lead, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein eliminated logical constants, logical types, and epistemological subjects. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein only deepened this approach. (We are going to further discuss this point in § 4.)

Main claim of this paper is that the method of eliminating, so characteristic of the early analytic philosophy, was not only a product of the method of analysis. It was also related to aspects of Hegelian-type of dialectics. To be more precise, it was coupled to Hegel's discussion of immediacy and mediacy in ontology, epistemology and logic. In it Hegel introduced an approach in philosophy that is still less explored.<sup>5</sup> Characteristic of the latter is the varying relatedness of the elements of a whole into one other. In short, it "consists in constructing 'immediacies' that connect one [item] with another and thus make the process of

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<sup>3</sup> See NIKOLAY MILKOV, *The Varieties of Understanding: English Philosophy since 1898*, 2 vol., Frankfurt–New York 1997, i. 216.

<sup>4</sup> On Russell's eliminativism see GREGORY LANDINI, *Wittgenstein's Apprenticeship with Russell*, Cambridge, 2007, 21.

<sup>5</sup> See CLARK BUTLER, *The Dialectical Method: A Treatise Hegel Never Wrote*, New York 2011.

constituting the composition of the whole.”<sup>6</sup> Its advantage is that it secures most economic type of connection between the entities of mereological unities, and also most economic type of connection between them and the unities. Because of this, it can help to achieve a highly efficient form of eliminativism.

In our first book on the history of analytic philosophy, we called this approach “analytic immediacy”.<sup>7</sup> It was characteristic of all Cambridge early analytic philosophers. Importantly enough, it is not thus specific of Frege, which makes him rather different from them.<sup>8</sup> It is even less characteristic of what today is called “late analytic philosophy” that is mainly focused on exactness, not on eliminativistic reconstruction.

## 2. *Hegel’s Ontology/Logic and his Method*

As just mentioned, Hegel’s ontology and logic explored the connection of the individuals (items) of a whole with one other, as well as with the whole itself. Wholes are unities of individuals that are “linked to one another, are not really foreign to each other, but [are] only elements of *one* whole, each of them, in its connection with the other.”<sup>9</sup> (*Enc. I* § 158) In such cases Hegel himself spoke about mediation, or of dialectical immediacy.<sup>10</sup> An appropriate mediation can bring about the most economical connecting of the elements in a unity. It can thus help to achieve highly efficient form of eliminativism. It is neither causal, nor a relation of ontological dependence and is that “glue” that brings the elements of the unity together, without being itself an element.<sup>11</sup> Notable implication of the conception of dialectic immediacy applied as a method is the comprehensive inner connection of the all elements of the totality: every element in it is connected with everyone in the whole as well as with the whole itself.

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Heinz HOLZ, “Spekulation”, *Europäische Enzyklopädie zu Philosophie und Wissenschaft*, hgg. von H.-J. Sandkühler, vol. 4, Hamburg 1990, 399.

<sup>7</sup> See NIKOLAY MILKOV, *The Varieties of Understanding*, op. cit., i, 41–42. A few years earlier we called it “analectical method”, presenting it as a hybrid between the analytic and dialectical method. See NIKOLAY MILKOV, *Kaleidoscopic Mind: An Essay in Post-Wittgensteinian Philosophy*, Amsterdam 1992, ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Frege followed a kind of logical “mediacy”. Cf. NIKOLAY MILKOV, *The Varieties of Understanding*, op. cit., i, 123.

<sup>9</sup> We must not forget at that that Hegel’s “science of logic”, like all classical logic before Frege, was build “within the bounds of a mereological idea of logic”. PIRMIN STEKELER-WEITHOFER, *Hegels analytische Philosophie*, Paderborn 1992, 100.

<sup>10</sup> See NIKOLAY MILKOV, *The Varieties of Understanding*, op. cit., i, 86.

<sup>11</sup> We shall further discuss this point in § 3.

It deserves notice that Hegel's critique of the simple immediacy was mainly exercised in his epistemology and was directed towards the empiricists John Locke, David Hume, and F. H. Jacobi. It was a fight against the "given". According to Hegel's argument, epistemological immediacy already contains mediacy in itself since it takes place between two poles: subject and object. Apparently, pure immediacy is impossible. "The immediacy, so as Hegel understood it, is not only *mediated* immediacy; it is also a source, a *mediating* immediacy."<sup>12</sup>

Very good example of dialectical immediacy provides Hegel's concept of "sublation". According to it, one can understand the mind as sublated, but not as reduced, since "it involves Nature as absorbed in itself." (*Enc.*, § 96) Also in ordinary language, "sublation" means two things: "We mean by it (1) to clear away, or annul; thus we say, a law of regulation is set aside; (2) to keep, or preserve: in which sense we use it when we say: something is well put by." (*Ibid.*).

Similarly, Russell's eliminativism is not reductionism. Recently, this method was called "interpretative analysis". This conception maintains that the core of Russell's "philosophical project [is] that [it] is not just *reductivist* (like Frege's) but *eliminativist*."<sup>13</sup> Numbers are not 'reduced' to classes but 'eliminated' as mere logical fictions. Talk of numbers is nevertheless shown to be logically legitimate."<sup>14</sup>

### 3. *What is Analytic Immediacy?*

Not only Russell but also all early analytic philosophers followed a method related to Hegel's dialectics. Apparently, it was developed in the context of the pursuit of "economy of thought" that was a major trend in philosophy towards the *fin de siècle*. It is best known from the works of Ernst Mach, but William James and Edmund Husserl actively pursued it as well. As we see it, this movement was not limited to a single philosophical school or tradition. Unfortunately, it remains unexplored in the literature. Our claim here is that the early analytic philosophers, G. E. Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein, developed the vague principle of "economy of thought" into the much clearer and more powerful "principle of analytic immediacy". One is reminded here that Russell called his method "logical analysis" only *faute de mieux*.

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<sup>12</sup> ANDREAS ARNDT, *Unmittelbarkeit*, Bielefeld 2004, 23.

<sup>13</sup> We already mentioned this in §1.

<sup>14</sup> Michael BEANEY, "The Analytic Revolution", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 78 (2016), 227–49, here 245.

Perhaps its most fine illustration of this approach is Moore's quasi-Hegelian ontology developed around the concepts of "organic unity" as advanced in his *Principia Ethica* (1903). In *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) Russell, in his turn, defended the "unity of propositions" that he opposed to the logic based on the "aggregate" of terms. The elements of both organic unities and of propositions preserve their identity only because they are reciprocally related one to another and also to the whole. Exactly this relation constitutes their "glue". Importantly enough, the nature of this glue is not something mechanical. The connection between the elements of the unity is not produced in the way the connection keeping together the members of a chain is produced.

Symptomatically enough, the late analytic philosopher Graham Priest holds an opposite position. Similarly to Moore and Russell, he claims that "unities are more than just the sum of their parts. The parts must also be appropriately related. But, according to Priest, merely relating them is insufficient for unifying them. There must be something else that makes them one, something akin to an Aristotelian form. Priest calls this an object "gluon" which is a "contradictory entity".<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the early Wittgenstein saw the glue in the whole not as an entity but as a product of the way in which its elements are related to one another.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he tried to correctly express this understanding borrowing from one of Husserl's acolytes, Adolf Reinach, the concept of "state of affairs" (*Sachverhalt*).<sup>17</sup> According to Wittgenstein, the "general propositional form" is: *es verhält sich so und so* (*Tractatus*, 4.5).<sup>18</sup> Literally translated this means: "the things correlate to one another in a certain way." It brings to expression the effective relation between the elements of the whole, as well as their relation to the whole.

It remains to be said that, in fact, the method of analysis is intrinsically a dynamic process (and activity, "not a body of doctrine", 4.112) whose objective is to achieve a clearer vision of the subject under scrutiny in several steps. The very verbal noun Wittgenstein uses in the

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<sup>15</sup> C. A. MCINTOSH, "Graham Priest, *One: Being an investigation into the Unity of Reality and its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness*", *Philosophy in Review* 36(3) (2016): 130–132; here 130.

<sup>16</sup> See N. MILKOV, "Wittgenstein's Ways", in: Shyam Wuppuluri (ed.), *Wittgensteinian perspectives: Looking at things from the Viewpoint of Wittgenstein*, Berlin, 2019 (to appear).

<sup>17</sup> See BRIAN MCGUINNESS, *Approaches to Wittgenstein*, London 2006, 171 f.

<sup>18</sup> This concept, by the way, indicates the common roots of early analytic philosophy and phenomenology that are to be found in Hermann Lotze. We are going to return to this problem in ch. 11.

*Tractatus—Sachverhalt*—speaks about dynamic, about a process.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, according to Hegel’s dialectics, every concept transforms into another concept. The transformation is realized by way of explicating aspects of the initial concept (*Enc. I* §84). Importantly enough, this explication makes the initial concept more precise. The similarity of the practice of analysis as developed in the early analytic philosophy to Hegel’s dialectic is also revealed by the fact that some leading analytic philosophers, Rudolf Carnap, for example, also called the practice of analysis *explication*.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Wittgenstein’s radical analytic immediacy

Wittgenstein pursued a really Hegelian fight against the naïve mediacy and for dialectical immediacy in logic, ontology and epistemology. In this respect he was much more radical than Moore, or Russell. Moreover, there is an essential difference between the eliminativistic method followed by Russell and that followed by the Tractarian Wittgenstein. We can exemplify this difference comparing the logic and the philosophy of language of Russell and of the *Tractatus*.

Russell’s logical atomism was based on the idea of a “logical skeleton” (on the logic advanced in *Principia mathematica*) on which the data of experience can be fleshed out. In contrast, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein doesn’t make a use of the skeleton metaphor, and this for good reason. The point is that his logical forms are directly—immediately—embedded in the one and only one world of facts. In this way, he put the Russellian logical skeleton in brackets. To be more explicit, in the Tractarian philosophy of language, the elements of propositions (symbols, names) stick together on their own, without a mediator,<sup>21</sup> thanks to their logical profile (shape) alone—not thanks to logical constants (they do not represent) or to some other quasi logical objects external to them.

Moreover, an austere quasi-ontology corresponds to the Tractarian austere conceptual notation. Exactly as the propositions are concatenations of names, without logical objects that connect them together, the Tractarian objects that build up the states of affairs are not connected with the help of a mortar, or other kind of *tertium quid*.<sup>22</sup> In the states of affairs the

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<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein himself speaks about “*the process of analysis*”—analysis takes time. See LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2d ed., Oxford 1979, 46.

<sup>20</sup> See RUDOLF CARNAP, *Meaning and Necessity*, Chicago 1947, 4.

<sup>21</sup> The later Wittgenstein would say: “without intermediary [*Mittelwegen*]” (*PI*, § 94).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Letters to C. K. Ogden*, Oxford 1973, 23.

objects stay together to one another directly, thanks to their formal profile (to their topology) alone.

One of the consequences of this understanding was Wittgenstein's claim in the *Tractatus* that the logically correct conceptual notation alone—the conceptual notation that eschews intermediary elements—makes all superfluous entities in logic, such like logical objects, disappear.<sup>23</sup> Another consequence was his contention that “in a suitable notation we can in fact recognize the formal properties of propositions by mere inspection of the propositions themselves.” (6.122) We don't need the mediation of concepts or proofs to this purpose; we don't need any form of inference. In this way Wittgenstein achieved a most radical form of eliminativism.

It remains to be noted that the method followed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* can be seen as nothing but further development of the method of analytic immediacy he introduced in the *Tractatus*.<sup>24</sup> Now Wittgenstein argued that when we learn a language, or a calculus of mathematics, we do not learn rules “by heart” (it is just another *tertium quid*) that we later follow in practice. We are simply trained to use the language, or the calculation, in this or that way: we accept them.<sup>25</sup>

The conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of this interpretation is that the later Wittgenstein didn't abandon the early analytic method of doing philosophy as some authors use to claim today. On the contrary, he deepened it to extreme. In fact, the whole “mystery” of the later Wittgenstein consists in the fact that he radically extended the power of what we have called here the method of analytic immediacy, introduced by G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. Logic was dissolved in language games that are situated in practices of life. That is why instead of logic, now Wittgenstein spoke about grammar. Main problem of the traditional philosophy is that, under the influence of language, it reifies concepts used in thinking about mind and thinking. Characteristically enough, Hegel, too, criticised the understanding that the mind is a *thing*. (Enc. I § 34)

## 5. Gilbert Ryle

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nikolay MILKOV, “The Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: Toward a New Interpretation”, *Southwest Philosophy Review* 33:2 (2017), pp. 197–212.

<sup>24</sup> See on this Nikolay MILKOV, “The Method of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*” (in preparation).

<sup>25</sup> In fact, “my [whole] life consists in my being content to accept many things.” (*On Certainty*, § 344) As we are going to see in §5, this position was also adopted by Gilbert Ryle.

Ryle's *opus magnum*, *The Concept of Mind* (1949), is nothing but an attempt to develop Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind before Wittgenstein himself published his later views that were published posthumously as *Philosophical Investigations*. Its main idea is the fight against the "duplicationism" that is epitomized in the Cartesian dualism between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Its slogan was "Not Two Worlds, but one World". Characteristically enough, the fight against duplicationism does not mean a defense of reductionism. Famous are Ryle's words: "We must avoid what Peter Medawar has called the 'nothing-buttery' on the one side and what Descartes, if he'd been sensible, would have called 'as-wellism' on the other."<sup>26</sup> Typical example of Ryle's anti-duplicationism was his attempt to treat theorizing as intelligent behavior. The latter is not a compound of thinking and acting. It is only one thing something in-between acting and thinking. By acting, the agent does not silently say to herself the rules that she follows.

Against the mistake of duplicationism, Ryle also defended the method of "dispositional analysis". It maintains that believing and knowing, as well as other Cartesian "*res cogitans*", are not occurrences but dispositions. Important point is that the dispositional analysis was first developed by Bertrand Russell in his (1921).<sup>27</sup> This shows that something like dispositional analysis is intrinsically characteristic for the early analytic philosophy.

Ryle also insisted that what is important in philosophy are not the concepts *per se*, but the role they play in different contexts: in different contexts they have different roles. The same can be said about the price of goods, of their value.<sup>28</sup> Apparently, this position of Ryle is an implication of Frege's context principle.

*Prof. Dr. Nikolay Milkov*  
*Universität Paderborn, Fach Philosophie*  
*Warburgerstrasse 100*  
*33098 Paderborn*  
*nikolay.milkov@upb.de*

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<sup>26</sup> BRIAN MAGEE, *Modern British Philosophy*, 2d ed., Oxford 1986 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1971), 144.

<sup>27</sup> BERTRAND RUSSELL, *The Analysis of Mind*, London 1921. SAUL KRIPKE was the first who noticed this connection in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1982, 25, n. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. GILBERT RYLE, *Dilemmas*, Cambridge 1954, 84 ff.