Afterword: Analytic Philosophy and its Others

The purpose of this Afterword is to take up the topics broached at the end of the penultimate section of the General Introduction to this volume. It was observed there that during the third quarter of the twentieth century there was a tendency among analytic philosophers to oppose “Continental philosophy” to “analytic philosophy”. In this way of speaking the former term was meant to function in roughly the way the term “sophistry” once did for Socrates – as a name for the very kind of thing that serious philosophy is not. This, in turn, had the effect of allowing the term “analytic philosophy” to function as a synonym for serious philosophy. It was also remarked there that this tendency – and the correlative tendency sharply to mark off analytic philosophy from other kinds of philosophy – is no longer as pronounced among analytic philosophers as it once was. It was suggested that this change has been accompanied by two further related changes, one having to do with analytic philosophy’s attitude toward the history of philosophy more generally and another – yet more recent one – having to do with its attitude more specifically towards its own history. The purpose of this Afterword is to discuss these three dimensions of change in analytic philosophy’s attitudes toward its supposed philosophical others – its philosophical neighbors, the philosophical past, and its own past – and to remark upon their implications for its still-evolving self-understanding of itself as a distinctive tradition of philosophy in its own right.

**I. The Distinction between Analytic and Other Kinds of Philosophy**

Russell Russell in a number of his writings singled out the French philosopher Henri Bergson as a prime example of his philosophical opposite – a non-analytic philosopher – the kind of thinker who encourages the cultivation of instincts, tendencies and desires which interfere with the cultivation of the sorts of intellectual virtues required for what Russell deemed to be genuinely philosophical investigation. The interest of Bergson lay in the way in which he could be taken to represent an unusually frank proponent of an entire tendency in philosophy which Russell sought to oppose – and of which Hegel, Nietzsche, and the American pragmatists were Russell’s three other favorite examples. (For more on Russell’s critique of Bergson, see the Note on Russell in this volume.) Something in this opposition between two kinds of philosophy – which Russell first sketched in the second decade of the twentieth century – has proven to be a remarkably enduring fixture of the tradition, at least until recently. Russell’s critique of Bergson was in service of articulating a distinction between appropriately hard-headed philosophers and comparatively soft-headed philosophers – a distinction which, however inchoate, has played a continuing role in shaping analytic philosophy’s understanding of its philosophical other, as well as in shaping certain controversies which have in recent years increasingly come to dominate the internal discourse of analytic philosophy itself.

Many analytic philosophers today might well be willing to admit that they are in no position to specify the conditions which philosophical work must satisfy in order to count as “analytic” or genuinely “hard-headed”, while also being passionately concerned to retain their right to enter the charge that the work of some particular author be deemed unworthy of an analytic philosopher – as being insufficiently rigorous or overly soft in some respect. On what basis is this sort of judgment made? Those who make it are likely to insist that they simply can tell a work of analytic philosophy when they see one. Conversely, they can just tell when someone is no longer producing analytic philosophy, even if the work in question is authored by someone who was previously considered (and still considers herself) to be an analytic philosopher. That is, they can tell when a certain tipping point has been reached – when too many of the virtues of such philosophy have fallen away, or when too many of the vices characteristic of the writings of French or German “Contintental” luminaries obtrude themselves, or when there is a bit of both. This can lead to impassioned denunciations – episodes in which one analytic philosopher accuses another putative member of the guild of having betrayed a communally shared conception of the philosophical calling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One particular recent development within the Anglophone analytic tradition has therefore been greeted with particular dismay in such combatively-minded Continental European analytic circles: A minority of influential figures within the Anglo-American analytic community have become increasingly vocal in their expressions of annoyance at efforts (by both proponents and critics of the analytic tradition) to make too much of the idea that there is a philosophically significant contrast to be drawn between analytic and other kinds of philosophy. There are milder and more vitriolic manifestations of this annoyance. At the mild end of the spectrum, there is a tendency to regard the supposedly fundamental distinction between “analytic” and “Continental” philosophy as merely indicating differences in philosophizing traceable to contingencies in the environing conditions under which philosophy evolved among different groups at different times and places. On this view, convincing historical or cultural explanations of why these differences have arisen can be offered, but nothing of real philosophical interest is at stake in them.

Bernard Williams is an example of a major figure in the analytic tradition whose later writings manifest a leaning in this direction – and thus also a concern to deny that the differences in question reflect anything philosophically deep. In a characteristic passage he writes:

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

The terms “analytic” and “continental” mark a difference without a distinction, for Williams, if the purpose to which they are to be put is to provide a *philosophical* account of how the very essence of the analytic way of doing philosophy must of necessity differ from that of any other way of doing philosophy if it is to retain its integrity qua analytic philosophy. If, however, the point of using this terminology is merely to mark a difference between the sorts of writing more typically found in one tradition than another, then he is perfectly willing to grant that the terms in question may helpfully be employed to indicate characteristic differences in forms of philosophical prose. What he is most concerned to deny is that the differences thereby indicated are in any way a function of a *philosophically* significant opposition between two fundamentally different kinds of philosophy.

Much depends here on what it means to say that there is an “opposition” between two ways of being or doing something. In discussing a not altogether dissimilar issue – one that acquired a momentary urgency at a certain juncture *within* the analytic tradition (having to do with whether there is an opposition between the commitment to empiricism and that to realism about universals) – Nelson Goodman suggested that the case under consideration should be thought of as akin to the opposition between being a truck driver and being a lover of ballet. The opposition between the two is certainly real enough in this respect: If one conducts a series of interviews among the relevant sorts of individuals, one might well find that these two types of personality do not overlap. But there is no inherent or necessary opposition between the two at all – for there is nothing about what it is to be a truck driver that excludes the possibility of being a lover of ballet (or vice versa). There is no underlying principle to be grasped that accounts for or generates the impossibility of bringing these two ways of being a person into some unusual (perhaps even hitherto unprecedented) form of harmony. Williams, similarly, wishes to claim that there is nothing in either of the ways of writing that predominates in each of these two traditions which requires of the practitioner of the one that he purge himself of all traces of the other. Indeed, here, too, there might be nothing in principle which stands in the way of the possibility of these two ways of going about one’s philosophical business coming together in any number of harmonious ways.

Williams represents the milder end of the spectrum of forms of annoyance at talk of the "opposition" between analytic and continental philosophy, insofar as he thinks that there is *a* useful purpose that can be served by locutions such as “analytic” and “Continental” (as long as one is careful not to overestimate the philosophical interest of the differences which they mark). Hilary Putnam is a major figure who has come recently to be more vehemently critical of such ways of carving up the contemporary philosophical landscape. His worry is that the continuing employment of such locutions has its own special sort of pernicious philosophical effect. In a characteristic passage, he writes:

I am concerned about certain tendencies in analytic philosophy—by the tendency to scientism, the tendency to patronize the history of philosophy, the refusal to *hear* other sorts of philosophy— but fighting those tendencies is not the same thing as fighting analytic philosophy. As a philosopher whose own writing is full of references to Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, Kripke, David Lewis, and others, I count myself as an "analytic philosopher" in that sense. But … I see the tendency to think of analytic philosophy as a "movement" (a tendency that has led to the creation of new—and exclusionary—associations of analytic philosophers in several European countries) as a bad thing. From my point of view, the only legitimate function for "movements" in philosophy is to gain attention and recognition for ideas that are not yet being received or which have been neglected or marginalized. Analytic philosophy has been around a long time, and it is certainly one of the dominant currents in world philosophy. Making it into a "movement" is not necessary, and it only preserves the features I have deplored. Just as we can learn from Kant without calling ourselves Kantians, and from James and Dewey without calling ourselves pragmatists, and from Wittgenstein without calling ourselves Wittgensteinians, so we can learn from Frege and Russell and Carnap and Quine and Davidson without calling ourselves "analytic philosophers." Why can we not just be "philosophers" without an adjective?

Putnam is notably more comfortable than Williams was in his late phase to count himself as an analytic philosopher. Yet Putnam has become much more wary than Williams ever was about trumpeting the supposed virtues of the analytic *style* or the analytic *movement* in philosophy. He here suggests that when analytic philosophy was still in its comparative infancy, there was a point to distinguishing sharply between specifically analytic philosophy and various other kinds – thereby drawing attention to characteristic and widely unappreciated aspects of the new way of doing things in philosophy. In an effort to undo the relative neglect or marginalization of these initial philosophical achievements, it was altogether appropriate for analytic philosophers to struggle to articulate what was distinctive in the new way of doing philosophy. Now that analytic philosophy has become one of the dominant currents of world philosophy, however, a continued insistence upon what differentiates it from other ways of doing philosophy carries dangers with it that did not threaten the earlier stages of the tradition. Putnam’s view therefore is that the modifier “analytic” (as a device for marking off a distinctive way of doing philosophy) has outlived whatever usefulness or point it may once have had, and has become counterproductive. A misplaced insistence on philosophizing in this way threatens to close off contemporary philosophers from various forms of insight, reinforces regimes of intellectual orthodoxy, and encourages philosophical narrow-mindedness and sterility.

Williams’s and Putnam’s forms of dissatisfaction here differ not only in their respective degrees of intensity, but also in their philosophical grounds. Williams’s qualms have to do with the *explanatory* *merits* of the contrast (with whether the distinction succeeds in marking a genuinely illuminating difference between two fundamentally opposed ways of doing philosophy). Putnam’s qualms have to do with the *current pragmatic value* of policing the border between these two ways of doing philosophy (with whether there are intellectual costs involved in the continued employment of the contrast which were not incurred when it was first introduced). These differences in their postures notwithstanding, there is a common attitude underlying both – a distrust of a contemporary tendency to call upon the distinction to carry a kind of philosophical weight that they regard it as unable to bear.

The very possibility that *this* attitude might be shared by a number of leading figures within the analytic tradition marks, in and of itself, a significant development within the tradition. The comparatively recent emergence of this attitude (along with the correlative capacity to approach other ways of doing philosophy in this more ecumenical spirit) is arguably related to two further transformative moments in the recent evolution of the analytic tradition. These form the next two topics of this Afterword.

**II. Analytic Philosophy’s Relation to the History of Philosophy**

Analytic philosophers have differed markedly in their attitudes with respect to the history of philosophy. Some major figures have wanted to understand what is essential to analytic philosophy as requiring a sharp break with the entire past of philosophy. For them, there is no longer any need or reason for philosophers to occupy themselves with the writings of figures belonging to the prehistory of analytic philosophy. Others have spoken (only slightly less immodestly) of a form of philosophical inheritance of the past in which our understanding of the very nature of the activity undergoes radical transformation. Their view is that we may continue to be concerned with philosophical writings of the past, but in a sufficiently novel manner that we will, in effect, introduce (as later Wittgenstein put it) “a kink” in the history of philosophy. Yet others have seen their own philosophical projects as directly inheriting those of the great figures in the past. Our relation to them need not require any specifically historical form of understanding of the past; it should involve nothing more than direct philosophical engagement with the writings of these “mighty dead”.

Their differences notwithstanding, these attitudes share a tendency that has characterized the thinking of many analytic philosophers when it comes to the history of philosophy. The tendency is to take it for granted that meticulous scholarly inquiry into the historical dimension of the history of philosophy requires a mode of concern with philosophical texts and figures that is fundamentally different in nature from the kind of engagement with them that ought to form the business of a serious philosopher.

Many analytic philosophers have been prone to look upon “the history of philosophy” (insofar as they even considered there to be a serious discipline bearing this title) as a particular branch of the discipline of *history* – a mode of inquiry involving methods, concerns, and aims fundamentally distinct from those of the philosopher. One famous analytic philosopher went so far as to hang a sign on his office door that read: “Just say ‘No’ to the history of philosophy!” This statement is unusual in its succinctness and candor, but the underlying sentiment it expresses was once not uncommon. Many analytic philosophers have felt that the history of philosophy represents an alien (even if perhaps, for some institutional reason, unavoidable) thorn in the flesh of a properly “analytic” department of philosophy.

Times have changed, and over the past few decades this attitude has gradually given way to a more generous one, according to which the history of philosophy represents a genuine philosophical discipline in its own right. It is nonetheless still seen by many as one very different from analytic philosophy proper. Even analytic philosophers who welcome those with historical-philosophical interests as their colleagues nevertheless frequently regard such interests as somehow distinct from (and quite possibly irrelevant to) those that properly ought to animate the activity of serious first-order philosophizing. In an analytic department in which this sort of attitude predominates, members of the faculty with developed historical interests may discover themselves to be, in effect, denizens of an institutional ghetto. The intellectual space in which their inquiry proceeds is permitted to adjoin, but deemed to be by no means integral to, that of the philosophical community of which they are nominally a part.

But this, too, is changing. Analytic philosophers today, for a variety of reasons, are increasingly inclined to regard the very idea of a department of philosophy lacking capable historians of philosophy as existing in a condition of impoverishment. One set of concerns that play a role here comes from those practitioners of analytic philosophy (and there have always been some) who look upon their philosophical questions as stemming directly from those of a broader philosophical tradition. They have good reason to regard those who seek to acquire a broader and deeper understanding of that tradition as colleagues engaged in a form of inquiry continuous with their own.

This sort of connection to the community, however, can still leave the historian of philosophy (rightly) feeling that the reigning conception of the distribution of labor presupposes a historically parochial perspective on the philosophical bearing of the past on the present. For even among analytic philosophers who have in this way been open to the philosophical importance of cultivating such forms of familiarity with ancient, medieval, or early modern texts, there sometimes still lingers a tendency to regard the proper purview of the professional historian of philosophy as coming to an end at that moment in the history of the subject when the analytic tradition begins. On this way of looking at things, philosophers like Frege, Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, and Quine are to be regarded as forming a part of “our” analytic-philosophical present in a way that no merely “historical” figure could. One is thus thought to be doing a special sort of philosophical violence to such authors if one treats them as fit subjects of “historical” inquiry.

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

Speaking first in defense of the analytic philosopher, it should be noted that it is by no means evident that these tensions are to be traced solely to an usual degree of hostility on the part of analytic philosophers towards the philosophical past. They may be a function of very different ways of engaging with the past – among which the attitude of the typical analytic philosopher towards prior tradition may in fact represent the more time-honored alternative, far more closely resembling the ongoing philosophical activity of past historical epochs than is generally conceded by the contemporary working historian of philosophy. On this account of the matter, the source of tension enters into the practice of philosophy not through what is strange in the analytic philosopher’s attitude towards the history of philosophy, but rather through what is in fact historically quite parochial in the attitude of the *contemporary historian* towards the history of philosophy: namely an insistence on the cultivation and maintenance of a certain form of historical self-consciousness.

The form of self-consciousness at issue here was first introduced into the history of philosophy comparatively recently, by the interpretive tradition, just over two centuries ago. Its arrival on the analytic scene is a far more recent – and hence all the more unsettling – event. The irony underlying this line of defense is that the source of the conflict is thus attributed to a respect in which analytic philosophy is actually more *traditional* in its approach to philosophical problems (precisely in its *not* requiring the cultivation of historical self-consciousness in order to get down to philosophical business). Or, at any rate, it is far more traditional in its mode of philosophizing than the contemporary historian of philosophy hostile to analytic philosophy has usually been prepared to acknowledge.

There has been, and still is, a strongly cultivated tendency within analytic philosophy to approach the writings of the great figures of the past, as nearly as possible, as if they were attempting to make direct contributions to current debates, and to treat “the mighty dead” not just as philosophical equals but as *philosophical contemporaries*. Grice famously remarked that we “should treat great but dead philosophers as we treat great and living philosophers, as having something to say to *us*”. Such an approach to the history of philosophy hardly constitutes an unprecedented form of philosophical engagement with the past. In commenting on how *best* to understand Plato’s concept of an Idea, Kant sums up a longstanding method of engaging with the great figures of philosophy’s past – which he takes to permeate the writings of his great predecessors, such as Aristotle (in his relation to Plato), Aquinas (in his relation to Aristotle), and Leibniz (in his relation to all three). Here is how Kant puts it:

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

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

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

The involvement of Greek philosophy in the Western philosophical tradition is not measured merely by the fact that ancient philosophy originated so many fields of enquiry which continue to the present day. It emerges also in the fact that in each age philosophers have looked back to ancient philosophy—overwhelmingly, of course, to Plato and Aristotle—in order to give authority to their own work, or to contrast it, or by reinterpretation of the classical philosophers to come to understand them, and themselves, in different ways. The Greek philosophers have been not just the fathers, but the companions, of Western philosophy. Different motives for this concern have predominated in different ages…. But from whatever motive, these relations to the Greek past are a particularly important expression of that involvement in its own history which is characteristic of philosophy and not of the sciences…. [W]e might say that the classical philosophers Plato and Aristotle are classics in the sense that it has been impossible, at least up to now, for philosophy not to want to make some living sense of these writers and relate its positions to theirs, if only by showing why they have to be rejected.

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

One reason this quarrel is no longer quite as heated as it once was is because there has recently been a surprising amount of fruitful intellectual interchange between the original parties to the dispute. Some of the recent attempts on the part of scholars trained within the analytic tradition to read major figures of the philosophical past – and, in particular, to read them as far more sympathetic to some particular contemporary analytic project than one might have supposed possible – have occasioned fascinating and influential monographs. They not only have given rise to further historical scholarship on these figures, shaped by them, but also have led analytic philosophers to rethink aspects of their original readings of these figures.

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

Encouraged by individual efforts at perestroika stemming from each side, there are signs of a gradual thaw in this philosophical cold war. These stereotypes have increasingly come to be regarded as equally prejudicial and uncomprehending on both sides. There has, non-coincidentally, come to be a surge of historical scholarship investigating the ways in which, throughout the history of the analytic tradition, there have been important junctures at which analytic philosophers sought to engage in fruitful dialogue with interlocutors outside their tradition. (To name only three notable examples which have attracted recent scholarly attention on both sides of the Atlantic: Frege’s influential correspondence with Husserl, Ryle’s sympathetic review of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and Rawls’s late dialogue with Habermas.) The tendency to view such episodes as merely momentary thaws in the cold war has now given way to an interest in the various ways in which the two traditions may have repeatedly cross-fertilized one another in the past – and (even more importantly) how they may continue to do so, for as long as their philosophical identities remain sufficiently distinct to permit such forms of intellectual commerce to be mutually enriching.

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

As we have noted above, Bertrand Russell, writing in the middle of thetwentieth century, was happy to combine the terms “analytic” and “empiricism” into the novel compound “analytic empiricism”, using the first term to designate what was new in the form of philosophy he was championing and the second term to identify an older strand in the broader philosophical tradition that he sought to inherit, transform, and carry forward. If one had told him that soon there would be philosophers who purported to belong to a tradition that was built in part upon his own early work, but who would describe their philosophical outlook using compound expressions such as those just mentioned, he would have been mystified – and, in some cases, dismayed. For Aristotelianism, Thomism, and the rest, were among the very movements in philosophy he was vigorously fighting to displace in favor of his own conception of philosophy as logical analysis. The early Russell would have had difficulty comprehending how the term “analytic” in these different compounds could have anything to do with what he had originally meant by it, and so could amount to anything more than a mere homonym in relation to his own use of it. He could not have foreseen the development of a tradition that would both draw inspiration from the analytic philosophers of his generation and also seek to reincorporate so much that he himself was determined to eliminate. More generally, from that early vantage point, it would have been impossible for anyone to make out how a tradition might develop out of the work of Russell and the other early analytic philosophers that would be robust and capacious enough to be able to retain its distinctive identity, while reincorporating so many aspects of the previous strands of philosophy that the founders had sought to vanquish.

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

**III. The History of Analytic Philosophy as a New Form of Philosophy**

This new kind of interest fully matured with the gradual emergence of something called “the history of analytic philosophy” – where the phrase in question refers to an area of philosophical research in its own right within the ongoing pursuit of contemporary analytic philosophy. The aforementioned quarrel between analytic philosophers and professional historians of philosophy – epitomized in Gilbert Ryle’s notorious remark about how one ought to go about approaching a text by Plato – is presently further altering its shape, partly owing to pressures exerted on it by this new form of professional sub-specialty within analytic philosophy. As this field has gradually developed, so too, has a new form of historical self-consciousness on the part of many analytic philosophers with respect to the nature and extent of that which is historically local in their own philosophical tradition. It has given rise to the possibility – for practitioners and students of analytic philosophy alike – of encountering aspects of analytic philosophy’s own history as something remote and even alien, so that a confrontation with that history can itself become an occasion for philosophical reflection.

In the General Introduction to this volume we attempted to shed light on what analytic philosophy is by considering statements by both practitioners and ideologues of the discipline. The writings of *the historian of analytic philosophy* would provide yet another perspective upon our topic than those of its practitioners and ideologues – one that might likewise serve as a resource in seeking answers to the two guiding questions we took up in the General Introduction. In this case, however, it would be rather more difficult to compile an analogously perspicuous list of statements – comparable to those we employed there – only in this case furnishing a representative sample of the various outlooks harbored by practitioners of this newly emerging discipline. Nonetheless, it is still worth remarking briefly upon some of what an examination of exemplary instances of such work could bring to light that is relevant to understanding what analytic philosophy is.

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

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

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

Analytic philosophy, throughout much of its history, has been extraordinarily resistant to the very idea that it so much as *has a history* (in the relevant sense of what it means to say that a tradition “has a history”). Of course, no one denies that some authors lived before others and influenced successors who in turn lived and worked at some later point in time. In this trivial sense of what it means to “have a history”, analytic philosophers are happy to regard what they do as participating in an ongoing enterprise that has a history. Indeed, they tend to be deeply committed to a certain tidy account of what that history *must* have been – who the founding fathers were, what the defining statements of the tradition were, which pieces of writing counts as paradigms of philosophical analysis, and the like. This simplified account of the history of the tradition – now enshrined in numerous introductory textbooks and encyclopedia articles – often plays a constitutive role in various analytic practitioners’ respective understandings of the very enterprise that they themselves seek to continue in doing (what they themselves still want to call) “analytic philosophy”.

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

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

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

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

The historian of science seeks an entirely different order of intelligibility in the past than that which is conferred on it by an official textbook-level narrative of how the innovations of the mighty dead led to our contemporary understanding of the topic under consideration. What the historian of science wants to understand is *not* the reason that, with the hindsight of later development, now seems to a contemporary physicist to be the obvious basis for adopting our contemporary understanding of what Einstein’s, or Bohr’s, original conclusion must have been. The historian rather is concerned to uncover and sort out the tangle of now forgotten, but back then nagging (and – but only for those who had eyes to see – deeply significant) puzzles and anomalies which moved an Einstein or a Bohr, at that particular moment in the history of physics, to draw what could only seem to his contemporaries to be an altogether surprising (and not at all easily intelligible) conclusion. From the point of view of the historian, this requires doing full justice to every nuance of the many large and small differences between our present and (sometimes even only slightly) earlier ways of thinking about physical reality – nuances to which are all simultaneously erased from view in progressivist textbook accounts of the history of science. From the point of view of the physicist, such a historically nuanced account – with its seemingly myopic preoccupation with theoretically and experimentally secondary considerations – is heedless of the substantial extent to which our contemporary understanding of physical reality is able – indeed, *must* be able – to encompass and comprehend the point of view of an Einstein or a Bohr.

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

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

What this suggests is that the history of analytic philosophy’s most important function is not one that it shares – or even could share – with the history of science. For there is an absolutely crucial difference between the history of a science (like theoretical physics) and that of analytic philosophy – a difference that is clearly visible in the very different ways in which these two disciplines are generally practiced. Competent historians of physics are not out to make (and do not see themselves as seeking to make) contributions to contemporary physics. They think of themselves as historians rather than as physicists. As we have already noted, however, good historians of analytic philosophy tend to be (and to *want* to be) practitioners of the very discipline of which they also undertake to be historians.

In non-analytic philosophical circles there is seldom any presumption that these two forms of identity and inquiry (that of the historian and that of the philosopher) must exclude each other (even though they may be recognized to stand in a certain productive tension with each other, requiring careful negotiation), whereas among analytic philosophers – as among physicists – there has, until recently, often been such a presumption. Thus the capacity to fuse—or otherwise juggle— these two forms of identity within the space of single philosophical life has until recently remained a comparatively rare achievement in the analytic tradition, exemplified in the work of only a handful of figures. This is gradually beginning to change: Leading figures in the tradition now find themselves not only increasingly pushed but also naturally inclined to articulate their own respective plausible readings of just what it was Carnap, Ryle, or Anscombe might originally have wanted to mean in this or that frequently quoted (but previously seldom carefully read) remark, article, or book.

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

The good historian of analytic philosophy may bring out how two philosophers who appear to agree on fundamentals are only apparently in agreement with one another, as well as how two philosophers who appear to disagree actually do not – either because they really agree when they take themselves not to or because they are philosophically so far apart that their positions are not even sufficiently aligned to permit of disagreement in the first place. Finally, the good historian of analytic philosophy can reveal how two figures in the history of philosophy – perhaps only one of whom is an analytic philosopher – may actually have far more in common with one another than either one of them would have been willing to allow or could have been in a position to comprehend. This requires showing how the underlying projects of these two philosophers, belonging to different movements of thought (outwardly characterized by utterly different intellectual styles and temperaments), are inwardly bound together by profound affinities. Once affinities of this sort between the analytic and the non-analytic past are brought sharply into view, this may enable us to discern more clearly not only the intellectual-historical landscape, but also the philosophical landscape. For it can enable a clear apprehension of the very form of a philosophical problem for the first time – allowing us to separate the real form of the problem from the superficial guises through which it simultaneously manifests itself in the work of apparently very different thinkers. In this and other ways, the work of the good historian of analytic philosophy – utterly unlike the work of the historian of science in its relation to contemporary science – can, indeed, contribute to the achievement of new and surprising modes of philosophical progress.

The historian of analytic philosophy often finds himself having to work against the grain of sensibility of the working analytic philosopher. One distinguished historian of analytic philosophy, Peter Hylton, offers the following reflection:

Philosophy cannot, as the natural sciences perhaps can, absorb what is correct in its past and conclusively refute what is incorrect, for the difference is unsettled. There is as little finality in our views as to what is correct in the philosophies of Plato or Hume or Kant or Russell as there is in our views on the most contemporary issue…. Philosophy thus always has the hope of learning neglected lessons from its past. It also, and perhaps more characteristically, is always in a state of potential rivalry with its past, defining itself against its past, and threatened by it. It is for this reason that the history of philosophy often has an evaluative and judgmental tone—precisely *not* the tone of one who has a secure understanding of the matters at issue, but the tone of one whose understanding is threatened. The deliberately ahistorical character of much history of philosophy seems to me not accidental, but a product of this insecure relationship between philosophy and its past. We approach the past ahistorically in order to refute it—as if the past of philosophy will not stay in the past, but constantly threatens to come back to life. Our uncertainty over the history of philosophy—whether it is history, whether it is philosophy, whether it can be both—seems to correspond to the uneasiness of the relation between philosophy and its past, and to our unease about the status of the subject as a whole.

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

The topic of Hylton’s own book (the development of Russell’s philosophy, his early revolt against British Idealism, and his ongoing responses to the resulting internal tensions in his thought) is a classic topic in the genre of the history of analytic philosophy – as classic as you can get. Most of the work done on this topic—and, indeed, in this whole genre—is written in just the tone Hylton mentions above, and for the reason he gives. The unacknowledged unease in the tradition’s relation to the past at issue here is due in no small part precisely to a desire to have that relation be an *easy* one – one of total continuity or sharp discontinuity – as long as it allows analytic philosophers to look back upon their tradition simply with a view to absorbing what is correct in it and conclusively refuting what is false in it. The ensuing unease in the relation to the subject as a whole is therefore nourished by a desire to rid our relation to the past of the very dimensions of complexity and ambivalence that form constitutive aspects of philosophy’s ongoing encounter with its past. Indeed, analytic philosophy’s ambition to free itself from certain forms of preoccupation with history – an ambition characteristic of so many of the founding projects of the tradition – is part of what has given rise (at this much later stage in the history of the tradition) to the present felt need for a particular sort of philosophically sensitive work in the history of analytic philosophy able to undo specific forms of philosophical repression induced by the original founding ambition.

Viewed from this angle, one of analytic philosophy’s most characteristic features would appear to be one that failed to show up on our three collections of statements considered in the General Introduction to this volume. The characteristic feature of the analytic tradition that remained invisible there is the following: its sustained investment in trying in rid itself of the awareness that it (like any other form of philosophy) is subject to the vicissitudes of philosophy’s relation to its history. And it is no accident that it failed to appear there – not only because it is a more subtle sort of feature than any we sought to display on the lists considered there. It is a feature that can come properly into view only once the tradition’s prior retrospective relation to itself is viewed through the lens of the kind of philosophically sensitive work in the history of analytic philosophy discussed in the previous paragraphs. This, in turn, suggests that, as the history of analytic philosophy – practiced as a form of analytic philosophy – itself comes to be an increasingly significant and respectable sub-specialty within the discipline, this longstanding feature of the tradition must gradually mutate, and cease to characterize the tradition in quite the way it once did, as that tradition goes forward and further evolves.

That this particular sub-specialty has come to be conducted with an eye to transforming the shape of ongoing contemporary philosophical debate is non-accidentally related to the way in which it has also gradually come to be regarded as itself constituting a self-standing form of philosophically inquiry in its own right. This is a genuine and significant development within the analytic tradition. It involves the emergence of a philosophically self-conscious form of historical inquiry in the history of analytic philosophy conducted by analytic philosophers writing primarily for an audience of analytic philosophers.

Good historians of analytic philosophy will by no means simply converge upon some single alternative to the currently institutionalized account of the history of analytic philosophy. Here, as elsewhere in the practice of history, uncovering the historical past involves appreciating the revelatory powers of different forms of account. But for all of their differences, they would not be good historians if they were to take as their point of departure any particular definition of what analytic philosophy or the analytic style as such is – unless their purpose in doing so is to call it into question or employ it to illustrate how misleading such blanket statements prove to be. They will seek instead to characterize the historical episode of thought at issue precisely as part of an ongoing and internally evolving *tradition* – with all of the internal complexity and disagreement that is apt to characterize any interesting historical tradition of thought, be it literary, mathematical, or philosophical.

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

The unity and identity of a tradition is not explicable in terms of a collection of features that each of its members fortuitously happens to instantiate. It is explicable only through a form of understanding that seeks to grasp a specific sort of historical development – one in which each moment is linked to the others in a significant way. Reflection on the significance of each such moment possesses the power to illuminate that of any other – but only when they are collectively considered in the light of their partially overlapping and mutually intertwining relations with one another. The concept of a tradition shows its worth when, through concerted attempts to engage in such reflection, we actually do find our appreciation of each of the elements in a series of historical episodes coming to be deepened in this mutually illuminating way. When such acts of reflection bear fruit in this manner, what they uncover is revealed to be not merely a “series of historical episodes”, but rather the successive moments of the unfolding of a tradition. It is the aim of this volume to provoke this sort of reflection and confer this sort of illumination.