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Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: A Response to Glock's *What is Analytic Philosophy?* [1]

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There is much to admire in this excellent book. Its historical survey of analytic philosophy [ch. 2][2] is the best short survey that I have seen, and the remaining chapters are uniformly superb. Together, they cover all the central issues in the current debate over the nature of analytic philosophy. And unlike many who have tried to define analytic philosophy, Glock does not take for granted the methodological assumptions guiding his attempt. Instead, he rightly includes these among the central issues to be explored. Additionally, in the process of developing his own position, we are treated to Glock's critical commentary, brimming with insight, wisdom and wit, on analytic philosophy's successes and failures.

For all these reasons, I have no reservations about identifying this book as the best introduction now available to the current debate over its titular question. However, I am not convinced that it answers that question correctly. According to Glock, analytic philosophy is a historical tradition bound both by relations of influence and overlapping similarities of doctrine, method, and style. While on some level analytic philosophy certainly is that sort of thing, my view is that this cannot be *all* that it is. For if it were, Glock's own definition would be open to the same criticism that leads him to reject others made in terms of geography, language, doctrines, topics, methods, style, and so on – namely, that it fails to keep to the commonly acknowledged extension of "analytic philosophy".

This is doubtless a surprising charge, since Glock combines genetic and family-resemblance approaches precisely to avoid this problem. As he explains [pp. 212-24], taken in isolation, both the chains of overlapping similarity that factor into the family-resemblance aspect of Glock's definition, and the chains of influence that factor into the genetic aspect, travel beyond the term's commonly acknowledged extension. Thus, either of these types of definition, taken in isolation, would force us to alter the extension of "analytic philosophy" in unacceptable ways. But Glock proposes that these two approaches can do for each other what they cannot do for themselves. When

the project of tracing overlapping similarities threatens to take us beyond the commonly acknowledged extension of "analytic philosophy", genetic considerations block the way [pp. 218-220]. In turn, when tracing the chains of (positive, mutual) intellectual influence threatens to lead us beyond those same limits, family-resemblance considerations block the way [p. 223]. However, I simply do not see how these two sets of phenomena are capable of delimiting each other when they cannot delimit themselves. Put differently, I do not see why their combination gets us something that fits the desired extension rather than something that extends beyond it along two trajectories rather than one. So here, as elsewhere, two wrongs don't make a right.

Glock's strategy would seem to work only if the expansion-blocking phenomena were specifically tailored to fit the desired extension. That is, when we invoke these phenomena to block extensional expansion, we must invoke *just those overlapping similarities* and *just those relations of influence* that fit within our desired extension. But in order to do this, we must operate with a prior conception of analytic philosophy that defines the proper range of resemblances and influences. And this shows that analytic philosophy, while certainly a historical tradition, is not one *bound together by* family resemblance and historical influence. It is a tradition that *exhibits* these phenomena, to be sure, but they do not *bind it together*; for if they did we would not need something else set its *bound*aries.

Fortunately, Glock is clear about what this "something else" is. Early in the text, he insists that any inquiry into the nature of analytic philosophy requires a "preliminary" or "pretheoretical" concept grounded in our ordinary use of the associated term [pp. 13-14]. This is surely correct. However, when it comes to judging proposed definitions, Glock privileges contemporary over historical use (his "ultimate focus is on the present", [p. 16]), and one aspect of contemporary use over all others – namely, the commonly acknowledged extension of "analytic philosophy" [p. 15]. Each of these choices is problematic, for they direct attention away from what is most important for a philosophically adequate definition of "analytic philosophy". We will address these issues in reverse order.

First, while the commonly acknowledged extension is an important aspect of the term's ordinary use, it is neither the only nor the most important aspect. As it is ordinarily used, "analytic philosophy" has an intension as well as an extension. Indeed, many of the features that play a role in the family-resemblance part of Glock's own definition (see his helpful chart on p. 218) count as intensional aspects of our ordinary use of "analytic philosophy".

Now, traditionally, intensions are taken to explain extensions; e.g., the *reason* all birds belong together in the extension of "bird" is that they (and only they) share the features that constitute the intension of "bird"; and it is in virtue of this that it makes sense to apply to them a common term. Of course, Wittgenstein has taught us that language does not always work this way. But

the lesson I take from this is not that we are to give up on the traditional model entirely, but only that linguistic practices themselves often do not make good sense. In many contexts, this poses no problem whatever. But (*pace* Wittgenstein) in philosophy it sometimes does constitute a problem, and our linguistic practices involving "analytic philosophy" are a case in point. I will argue for this momentarily, but first let me note that in consequence of this view, the basic problem with Glock's approach is that, by trying to reverse-engineer the concept of "analytic philosophy" on an extensional basis, he makes unintelligible our *practice*, as philosophers, of holding together certain philosophers, chains of influence, and points of overlapping similarity under the banner of "analytic philosophy".

To defend this claim, we must consider the nature of philosophical groups and of the labels we use to name them. Like Glock, I am surprised at the lack of attention paid by analytic philosophers to the crucial terms "school", "movement" and "tradition" [p. 220; cf. Preston (2007), pp. 59-67]. I agree with Glock that "it makes sense to distinguish between a closely knit philosophical school and looser groupings such as movements or traditions" [pp. 151-2], and I think that his attempt at spelling out the differences [pp. 220-1] is a good start. But there is more to be said, especially as concerns the notion of a "philosophical school".

Glock takes a school to be "a tightly knit group based on relatively intimate personal contact and direct transfer of certain doctrines or methods" [pp. 220]. Noting that this is how "schools" are thought of in art (as in "the school of Rafael or of Rubens"), he claims that this "is also the sense in which we speak of schools in philosophy – the only significant difference being that "philosophical schools can continue long after the death of the original founder…renew[ing] themselves along a sequence of disciples turned teachers" [p. 220].

This is indeed one sense of "school" used in some philosophical discourse. But it is not the only such sense, nor even the most common. Entirely absent from Glock's account is the sense that makes "philosophical school" synonymous with "school of thought". Intimate personal contact and the direct transmission of doctrines or methods are incidental to "schools" thus construed. Essential to them are only the ideational structures (concepts, propositions, arguments, theories) which define every such school as a distinct "way of thinking" about something. Also absent from Glock's account is a closely related sense that makes "philosophical school" to mean "sociohistorically embodied school of thought". Intimate personal contact and the direct transmission of doctrines are necessary to a school thus construed, but they are still less fundamental to the group's identity than its distinctive "way of thinking" about these or those topics. They are, to use an old category, something like *proper accidents* of a school thus construed.

Now, many taxonomic terms in philosophy, including names for philosophical schools, are used in these theory-focused senses. Terms like "eliminative materialism", "substance dualism", and the like, clearly name what are first and foremost distinctive views, or "schools of thought". Things are admittedly trickier with terms like "Platonism" and "rationalism", which are sometimes used as names for "schools of thought" *simpliciter*, and sometimes for specific historical manifestations of these ways of thinking (as when by "rationalism" we mean specifically the "Continental Rationalism" of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz). Indeed, Glock himself uses "rationalism" as a name for a philosophical *position* [pp. 174 n], and I take "position" here to be equivalent to "view" or "theory" or even "doctrine".

So, many taxonomic terms in philosophy, and even in the history of philosophy, are not primarily historical labels but theoretical labels. This is no accident. It is the natural outcome of the fact that philosophers are interested primarily in ideas. I take Glock's masterful discussion of historicism [ch. 4] to indicate tacit agreement on this point. There he defends a "rationalist picture" [p. 96] of philosophy according to which it is an *a priori* science focused on solving "supremely abstract and fundamental" [p. 96] problems by means of rational thought. This naturally leads philosophers to approach the history of philosophy with the conviction that "it is possible to assess … theory for its *trans-historical merits*" and thereby to "derive substantive philosophical lessons" [p. 106]. Hence, a genuinely philosophical interest in the history of philosophy will be an interest primarily in the ideational. It therefore makes sense that the terms philosophers use to label such groups would focus on their ideational commitments.

So, philosophers naturally approach historical groups as schools of thought, and it is not clear why a group that could not be characterized as a school of thought would be of special interest to the philosopher *as such*. This point extends to "movements" and "traditions" as well. As indicated earlier, I agree that these terms do indicate differing degrees of "tightness" or "looseness" in the group's unity. But this is no reason to think that the unity in question could not or need not be ideational. To the contrary, philosophical traditions characteristically begin as embodied schools of thought, with members united in agreement over some set of philosophical views. But then, as questions about those views arise, different answers emerge, and along with them an "in-house debate" about what the school's views *really* presuppose, or entail, or mean (etc.). Thus, what is characteristic of philosophical traditions, as opposed to schools, is ideational unity on a general level and disagreement over the theoretical details. This fits well with Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of a "tradition", which is, to my knowledge, the most influential understanding of "tradition" in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy (and perhaps the *only* reflectively developed understanding currently available in the literature – cf. p. 220). According to MacIntyre, a tradi-

tion is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition" [MacIntyre (1984), p. 222] or, alternatively:

> An argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition…and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted [MacIntyre (1988), p. 12].

Of course, MacIntyre does not propose this as a definition specifically for *philosophical* traditions, but it fits them perfectly. The admixture of agreement and disagreement within a tradition accounts for its "looseness" relative to a "school", but agreement on some deep level is still essential. And for a *philosophical* tradition, this deep agreement must be ideational.

Earlier generations of philosophers took all of this to be obvious. They understood that the philosopher's characteristic interest in ideas entailed certain linguistic norms and duties for discourse about philosophical groups, be they schools, movements or traditions. For example, C.S. Peirce once complained against those who had taken over his term "pragmatism" and applied it to a view which, to his mind at least, different enough to merit a different name:

> He who introduces a new conception into philosophy is under an obligation to invent acceptable terms to express it, and when he has done so, the duty of his fellow students is to accept those terms, and to resent any wresting of them from their original meanings, as not only a gross discourtesy to him to whom philosophy was indebted for each conception, but also as an injury to philosophy itself [Peirce (1905), p. 104].

Peirce understood that philosophical terminology principally names "conceptions", and that success in the philosophical enterprise is helped by having distinct names for differing conceptions. Ambiguity in ordinary language may be an unavoidable challenge to philosophical clarity, but with novel terms specifically introduced to name novel ideas we have the opportunity to minimize such problems so long as we give good stipulative or descriptive definitions at the time of introduction (the time of "baptism", to use Kripke's figure) and then stick to the original meanings. And of course it should not be missed that the term at issue here is one that names a school of thought, a philosophical school in the "socio-historically embodied" sense, and one that has in the course of time ramified into a philosophical tradition.

In the same vein, Moritz Schlick once argued that, as a philosophical tradition becomes increasingly diverse, philosophers are obliged to make terminological distinctions among the various factions involved:

> Every philosophical movement is defined by the principles it regards as fundamental, and to which it constantly refers in its arguments. In the course of historical development, the principles are not apt to remain unaltered, whether it be that they acquire new formulations, and come to be extended or restricted, or that even their meaning gradually undergoes noticeable modifications. At some point the question then arises, as to whether we should still speak at all of the development of a single movement, and retain its old name, or whether a new movement has not in fact arisen. If , alongside the evolved outlook, an 'orthodox' movement still continues to exist, which clings to the first principles in their original form and meaning, then sooner or later some terminological distinction of the old from the new will automatically come about. But where this is not clearly so, and where, to the contrary, the most diverse and perhaps contradictory formulations and interpretations of the principles are bandied about among the various adherents of a 'movement', then a hubbub arises, whose result is that supporters and opponents of the view are found talking at cross purposes; everyone seeks out from the principles what he can specifically use for the defense of his own view, and everything ends in hopeless misunderstandings and obscurities [Schlick (1932), p. 259].

Philosophical movements are defined by their "principles", or views. Labels for such movements are to track those principles, not relations of influence or mere similarities of method or even doctrine. Of course, there are severe epistemic challenges to knowing when one has an instance of exactly the same principles rather than a case of mere similarity, and also when merely similar views are "similar enough" to warrant a common term. Nonetheless, the objective is to track the principles as best we can, and there are clear cases in which it is reasonable to suppose that several people do share the same views, as well as clear cases in which it is not reasonable.

Now, this traditional way of understanding philosophical groups and the labels we assign them entails that we treat the groups as having essences, and that we give real definitions for the labels. But Glock argues that this is wrongheaded since real definitions are limited to natural kind terms, and "labels for philosophical schools are *not* natural kind terms" [p. 11]:

> An essentialist account of taxonomic terms in philosophy is totally at odds with their actual role. Nobody could seriously suggest that 'analytic philosopher' applies to all and only those creatures with the same microstructure or genetic code as Rudolf Carnap or Elizabeth Anscombe. Although the labels and distinctions of natural science may be capable of 'carving nature at its joints'…, this cannot reasonably be expected of historical labels and distinctions [p. 12].

The idea that membership in a philosophical group is a matter of genetics or physical microstructure is, of course, preposterous. But this is a straw man, for it sets up an absurd analogy between organisms and social groups where a more reasonable analogy is possible. Social groups do not have genes or the sorts of physical microstructures that organisms do, but they do have structures analyzable into physical and metaphysical constituents, and some of the latter are indeed analogous to genes in a physical organism. The physical aspects include the bodies of the group members and all the material objects that largely constitute the "material culture" of the group *qua* group. The metaphysical components include *abstracta* like practices, conventions and norms – behavioral, ideational, doxastic, and so on. Unlike the particular physical components of a social group, these metaphysical components are capable of multiple instantiation at appropriate levels of analysis within the social group, just like a genetic code or other physical microstructures in organisms of the same kind. Moreover, like genes in an organism, these elements of culture make each distinct social group what it is – they confer upon it its essence, its identity. And in fact, one *bona fide* approach to the study of social phenomena – memetics – is founded upon an analogy between their role in human social organization and the role of genes in organismic life.[3] Consequently, social groups are analogous to natural kinds in ways that render them better candidates for real definition than Glock allows. Moreover, while it is true that "labels for philosophical schools are *not* natural kind terms", if Peirce, Schlick and I are right about what is (or ought to be) standard for this sort of philosophical terminology, it is not the case that "an essentialist account of taxonomic terms in philosophy is totally at odds with their actual role".

All of this speaks to the possibility of real definitions for philosophical groups, but it does not directly address the point on which Glock specifically takes me to task: the idea that philosophical groups are to be defined in terms of the theories they accept rather than the methods they employ [pp. 151-2]. Now, if by "philosophical school" we mean merely a "school of thought", it is tautological that they must be defined in terms of views, since they *just are* sets of views. But things are more complicated with "embodied" schools of thought, to which processes of thinking are as necessary as the ideas to which they lead. Thus, Glock claims that "even if all philosophical schools, movements or traditions had to aspire to theories, individual schools would not have to be united by acceptance of a theory; they could just as well be held together by adherence to a certain method for arriving at theories" [p. 152].

I agree that a shared method can contribute to, or even ground, group-identity. This is because the employment of a shared method will surely involve a set of shared practices, and, as noted earlier, shared practices are among the elements of group-identity. However, unless there is also agreement in the *products*, over and above the *processes*, of rational thought, the

group's unity will be merely *social* and not *philosophical* in the relevant sense. This is because, apart from the views explicating and justifying a method (i.e., its *methodology*, the theory *of* the method), a shared method is *just a practice*, a way of carrying-on together, and this is a social phenomenon rather than a philosophical one (although it may be described as "philosophical" in an extended sense – see Preston (2007), pp. 59-67). As such, it is not in itself a natural candidate for philosophical attention. On the other hand if the shared method is grounded in a shared methodology, then the group's fundamental unity is ideational after all. In sum: a group's sharing a method either is or is not grounded in its sharing a methodology; if it is, then the group's fundamental unity is ideational and hence philosophical; if it is not, then the group's unity is socio-behavioral rather than philosophical. In neither case do we have a counterexample to my claims about the nature of philosophical groups. And in the second case, we again run into what I earlier identified as the basic problem with Glock's attempt to reverse-engineer the concept of "analytic philosophy" on an extensional basis: it makes unintelligible our *practice*, as philosophers, of holding together certain philosophers, chains of influence, and points of overlapping similarity under the banner of "analytic philosophy".

The foregoing justifies my contention that Glock's errs in privileging extension over intension in defining "analytic philosophy". It also contributes to my case against Glock's second problematic choice, the choice to privilege contemporary over historical use. Schlick (in the above quotation) notes a second problem with failing to define philosophical schools ideationally. Failure to use philosophical terminology in ways that track "principles", he says, leads to "hopeless misunderstandings and obscurities". This is the very thing we see happening in the current debate over the nature of analytic philosophy, and precisely because of the kind of failure Schlick describes. Now, my argument against Glock's second choice is simply this: only by privileging the original use of "analytic philosophy" can we solve the two problems that result from trying to define "analytic philosophy" extensionally (i.e., the problem of *unintelligibility of linguistic practice* and the problem of *confusion about the nature of analytic philosophy*) in a way that is not historically misleading; because Glock does the opposite, his approach fails to solve these problems, and insofar as it purports to do so it is historically misleading.

If we look not to current use but to the *original* use of "analytic philosophy" in the 1930s, we see that it was indeed used a label for a socially embodied *school of thought*, distinguished from others by a novel metaphilosophical view widely taken to be its defining principle: the view that philosophy is the analysis of language [cf. Preston (2007), ch. 3]. Only over time, as internal disagreement mounted to such a degree that *it* became a more salient feature of the group than its originally perceived agreement, did the fundamental nature of analytic philosophy as an ideationally-unified

group come into question. Of course, the puzzling thing about analytic philosophy is that its originally perceived agreement was *merely perceived*, as neither Frege nor Moore nor Russell endorsed the idea that philosophy is linguistic analysis. Nonetheless, that *perception* made all the difference when it came to philosophers construing it as a distinctive phenomenon requiring a unique label for their own use as philosophers. It was that *perception* which made intelligible philosophers' practice of using this label, and which forestalled for several decades the problem of confusion about the nature of analytic philosophy.

For this reason, to define "analytic philosophy" in non-ideational terms (or, for that matter, in ideational terms significantly different from the metaphilosophical view indicated) is historically misleading. And given the "originalism" (in something like U.S. Supreme Court Justice Scalia's sense) implicit in the traditional mandate that philosophical labels track the self-same principles through history, I cannot agree that in every case "it is the [linguistic] status quo alone which determines whether a given concept is genetic or whether the actual or optimal justification of a belief or practice mentions its origins" [p. 102]. While it is true that "there can be no question of the label 'analytic philosophy' having a single correct or intrinsic meaning, independently of how we explain or use it" [p. 11], it is wrong to suppose that the relevant "we" is always just the extant linguistic community. Language-games have origins and histories. Sometimes these can be known. And sometimes they have a continuing significance for the current form of life in the relevant linguistic community. In the case of analytic philosophy, my view (which I cannot argue for here, but see Preston (2007)) is that many of its most obnoxious features (which Glock confronts so brilliantly throughout the book, but especially in pp. 242-255) are *intrinsically* related to its original self-conception as captured in the original use of "analytic philosophy". Consequently, we must look to the original use of "analytic philosophy" in order to understand the real roots of these problems, as well as to solve the problems of unintelligibility and disagreement.

Of course, there may be cases in which it is impossible to reform the linguistic status quo, and hence pointless to resist it in practice; but this should not prevent us from recognizing that *in principle* something has gone wrong in the evolution of our philosophical language-game. And so, rather than defining analytic philosophy mainly in light of current use, as "a historical tradition bound both by relations of influence and overlapping similarities of doctrine", it would be more accurate to say, in light both of the total history of its use and the nature of philosophy, that it is a historical tradition *exhibiting* relations of influence and overlapping similarities of doctrine, *bound together* first by the mistaken notion that certain philosophers shared a certain view and thus constituted a school, and later by the firmly entrenched habits of (i) holding these philosophers together under the label "analytic phi-

losophy" and – in violation of traditional philosophical principles concerning philosophical terminology – of (ii) extending membership to an open class of cases along lines of influence and overlapping similarity rather than lines of ideational identity.

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NOTES

[1] I have developed many of the points made here at greater length elsewhere [Preston (2005), (2006-07), (2007), (2007-08)]. Unfortunately, these pieces were published too late for Glock to have taken stock of them before his book went to press.

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are to Glock (2008).

[3] See my "Conformism in Analytic Philosophy", *The Monist*, 88:2 (April 2005) and Francisco Gil-White, "Common Misunderstandings of Memes and Genes: The Promise and the Limits of the Genetic Analogy to Cultural Transmission Processes" in S. Hurley and N. Chater (eds.), *Perspectives on Imitation: Form Mirror Neurons to Memes*, MIT Press, 2004.

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RESUMEN

En este artículo defiendo (i) que la definición híbrida dada por Glock de "filosofía analítica" no funciona a menos que esté circunscrita por una definición más fundamental que trate a "filosofía analítica como algo análogo a un término de género natural, (ii) que, en contra de Glock, tales definiciones de escuelas filosóficas son legítimas, y (iii) que sin tal definición resulta ininteligible que se haya originado nunca entre los filósofos la práctica de agrupar ciertos filósofos, cadenas de influencia y puntos de similitud entrecruzada bajo el rótulo "filosofía analítica".

PALABRAS CLAVE: *filosofía analítica, escuelas filosóficas, sociología de la filosofía, Hans-Johan Glock*.

ABSTRACT

I argue (i) that Glock's hybrid definition of "analytic philosophy" fails unless it is circumscribed by a more fundamental definition that treats "analytic philosophy" as analogous to a natural kind term, (ii) that, contra Glock, such definitions for philosophical schools are legitimate, and(iii) without such a definition, it becomes unintelligible that the practice of holding together certain philosophers, chains of influence, and points of overlapping similarity under the banner of "analytic philosophy" should ever have originated among philosophers.

KEY WORDS: *Analytic Philosophy, Philosophical Schools, Sociology of Philosophy, Hans-Johann Glock*.