

Analytic Philosophy As Metaphilosophy

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I. GLOCK'S TWO THESES

Two ideas stand out above the rest in *What is Analytic Philosophy?* [Glock (2008)]. I fully agree with one of them, perhaps the more relevant of the two, and so I shall do no more than state it without discussing it any further. My attitude with respect to the other is less sympathetic, although the difference might possibly rest on a basis that is not wholly objective. I shall call these two ideas the Thesis of History and the Thesis of Resemblance. The former states that the category of analytic philosophy is a historical or genetic category. The latter affirms that, among the particular ways that the different authors belonging to this tradition have of cultivating analytic philosophy, there is at most family resemblances.

To accept the Thesis of History means to accept that analytic philosophy is a tradition characterised by "a body of problems, methods and beliefs that is socially transmitted from the past and evolves over time" [Glock (2008), p. 221]. The bonds created by the influences exercised by authors and doctrines and the sharing to a certain degree of diverse methodological and stylistic guidelines give shape and content to an institutionalised, historically-shifting dialogue. In my opinion, the Thesis of History is the response to the question that serves as the title of Glock's book. The author himself rejects this conclusion. In his opinion, the Thesis of History needs the Thesis of Resemblance: what the tradition of analytic philosophy makes of the body of problems, findings, methods and styles is a web of family resemblances:

How do we draw the line between analytic and non-analytic philosophy? By reference to paradigmatic figures such as Russell, Carnap and Ryle on the one hand, paradigmatic features like logical analysis, sentential paraphrase, an interest in language and a suspicion of speculative metaphysics on the other. There is a finite list of candidates for the pantheon of analytic figures, and an even shorter list of candidates for relevant similarities. But this is no bar to analytic philosophy operating as a family resemblance concept, as long as peripheral cases can be added on the grounds of diverse similarities to distinct central

figures, without having to share a feature that is possessed by all and only analytic philosophers [Glock (2008), p. 215].

As to the Thesis of Resemblance, I do not share Glock's stance. The distance that separates Russell from Kripke or even from Frege goes further than that separating various ways of resolving specific problems regarding the analysis of definite descriptions or the constituents of propositions and thoughts. Such analysis belongs to ways of understanding the goals and nature of philosophy, among which there are abysmal differences. The Thesis of Resemblance upholds a view of the evolution of analytic philosophy that does no justice to the ruptures that have taken place within it.

II. ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AS METAPHILOSOPHY

Glock rebuts that there is a necessary and sufficient condition that distinguishes analytic philosophy from non-analytic philosophy by means of geographical and linguistic (chap. 3), historical and historiographical criteria (chap. 4) and denies that the difference is marked by diverse doctrines or the issues addressed (chaps. 5 and 7) and methodological and stylistic factors (chap. 6). Much may be learned from Glock's arguments concerning dividing lines based on geographical and linguistic, historical and historiographical conditions and those that point to the exclusion of ethical and political issues. However, the discussion of the criteria that resort to specific doctrines and topics, especially if these are combined with those that underscore the contribution of working methods and styles and the drawing of conclusions, is less conclusive and does not actually rule out the existence of a distinguishing feature of analytic philosophy. In my opinion, this feature exists and is more restrictive than what Glock appears willing to accept.¹

The reason underlying this discrepancy is the following. On the one hand, Glock discusses and rebuts the thesis that this distinguishing feature is the denial or rejection of metaphysics. On the other, he also discusses and rejects the thesis that the said feature is the linguistic turn. However, neither of the two arguments are characterised in a way that facilitates a truly fruitful discussion. Glock employs the term 'metaphysics' in a way that covers both the work of Heidegger and (part of that of) Russell,² a use that does no justice to either analytic philosophers or those who are not. As to the concept of linguistic turn, the only distinguishing, sufficiently general thesis that Glock takes as a reference point, he states "[t]he only proper way of analysing the structure of thought consists in analysing the structure of the linguistic expression of thought" [Glock (2008), p. 123]. As Dummett and his proposal that the philosophy of language is the core of philosophy occupy centre stage in the subsequent discussion, I shall call this criterion Dummett's Proposal.

The problem of characterising analytic philosophy in this way is that neither the rejection of metaphysics nor Dummett's Proposal focuses the analysis on the right spot. What is relevant in the rejection of metaphysics are not its supposedly controversial contents. The rejection of metaphysics is important due to its raising the question as to the *origin* of such contents. Likewise, what is relevant in Dummett's Proposal is not so much that he places the core of philosophical analysis in the theory of meaning, but rather that he somehow points to the appropriate way of facing or addressing the problems of philosophy once their origin has been diagnosed. Thus, the idea that best characterises analytic philosophy slips between the seams of rejecting metaphysics and Dummett's Proposal, namely: the *metaphilosophical* proposition that philosophical problems are due to inadequate understanding of the logic of our language.³ The reforming of this language or the achieving of a better understanding of its use constitutes the desired goal. The idea was pinned down by Rorty in the introductory essay to *The Linguistic Turn*, when he characterized the Linguistic Turn in the following way:

I shall mean by "linguistic philosophy" the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use [Rorty (1967), p. 3].

It is true that authors such as Moore, Russell, Strawson or Carnap understood the 'logic of language' in a different way. And it is also true that even this difference was seen by the protagonists themselves as insuperable barriers between them, especially regarding the systematic nature of philosophical analysis [see Dummett (1978)]. However, they all share the conviction that a philosophical question is solved not by contributing new facts or correcting those already known, but by highlighting the fact that a linguistic mechanism has not functioned correctly or that a piece of language has been given a use that is not its own. It is in this sense that philosophy is the analysis of language; and it is thus understood, though as Dummett did, that the distinguishing feature of analytic philosophy is the linguistic turn. A consequence of this metaphilosophical conception is that philosophy and science and *independent* philosophical enterprises. When the move towards naturalism – the doctrine that philosophy is continuous with science⁴ – became unstoppable on the philosophical stage of the second half of the 20th century, the fall of analytic philosophy had commenced. It is not unwarranted to speak of rupture in this sense.

III. WILLIAMSON'S ALTERNATIVE

Let us accept that the rejection of metaphysics is of importance to the extent it leads to the diagnosis that the problems of philosophy are problems

of language. I have argued that Dummett's Proposal is not sufficient to characterise analytic philosophy. One may situate the theory of meaning at the core of philosophical activity, but this does not answer the questions of what philosophical problems are solved by means of such a theory and how such a thing is achieved. Although a theory of meaning may be available to us and a philosophical problem may have been identified as such a problem, this does not solve the question of how to apply this theory to solving the problem. The construction of a theory of meaning does not have to have the broad philosophical scope that Dummett affords it.

Recently, Williamson has defined the linguistic turn – in fact, the *representational turn*, which adds a conceptual phrasing to the linguistic one itself – with an argument that goes further than just taking note of the fact that many philosophical problems deal with language. The main premise of his defence differs substantially from Dummett's Proposal, in that it is the result of detailed analysis of the phenomenon of vagueness. This is his alternative: in the attempt to solve a problem that does not deal with language, resort will need to be made to analyses and theories that deal with the workings of language, analyses and theories of formal semantics and the philosophy of language. If not all, many non-linguistic philosophical problems call for linguistic and conceptual theoretical methods and tools – of different kinds – for their solution. “Analytic philosophy at its best uses logical rigor and semantic sophistication to achieve a sharpness of philosophical vision unobtainable by other means” [Williamson (2007), p. 46]. In this sense, the linguistic turn continues to be a valid philosophical conception. However, neither Dummett's Proposal nor Williamson's alternative characterise analytic philosophy in a completely appropriate way. They do not coincide with the sense in which philosophers like Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap or Ryle considered the problems of philosophy to be problems of language. In Williamson's case, this is due to the lack of a metaphilosophical conception that gives sense to the analyses of these authors. The philosophical problems addressed by Williamson are not characterised by their origin, but rather by the sort of resources put into play when seeking a solution for such problems. It is these resources that make them topics of analytic philosophy.

I thus conclude that Glock's question – What is analytic philosophy? – is partially misleading. In a strict sense, analytic philosophy is defined by a metaphysical proposal regarding how philosophical problems originate and by an array of methods to solve them. In this sense, the linguistic turn is neither what Dummett proposes nor Williamson's alternative. Hence, I shall talk in what follows of analytic philosophy as metaphilosophy [= APM]. On the other hand, both Glock and Williamson are correct in pointing out that not all philosophical problems are problems of language and that they do not all form part of the APM agenda. If there exists a sense of ‘analytic philosophy’ that is sensitive to the scope and diversity of philosophical questions, APM is

not the place to seek it out. This other sense is what makes Glock's question an inquiry into something that those philosophers from Frege to Fodor or Williamson, who are considered analytic in one way or another, would assumedly share. Like Glock, I do not believe that there is anything, except for belonging to a tradition, that they all share. And if we ask ourselves what they might have in common, by virtue of which they would all be analytic philosophers, the sought-after answer is now the Thesis of History. The words "What is analytic philosophy?" ask things that are far from being equivalent. This gives rise to the possibility of speaking of analytic philosophy as *metaphilosophy* and of analytic philosophy as *tradition* [= APT].⁵

IV. TWO VIEWS OF SEMANTIC ASCENT

Glock does not think that naturalism brought on a crisis in analytic philosophy. (For him, all philosophy is APT.⁶) The reason why Glock does not consider this crisis to arise is that he identifies the linguistic turn with semantic ascent, "the shift from talking in certain terms to talking about them" [Quine (1960), p. 271]. This identification [Glock (2008), p. 121] indicates the high point of my disagreement with the argument Glock develops in his book. My objection to this identification is that, placed in the hands of a naturalist, semantic ascent is totally alien to the spirit of APM.

Carnap – as acknowledged by Quine – carried out the manoeuvre of semantic ascent when defending [in Carnap (1950)] the position that the problems of philosophy are linguistic problems, in the sense that they do not refer to extralinguistic reality, but rather to what best fits our linguistic framework (or conceptual system). In Carnap's terminology: they are not *internal* problems to a linguistic framework, i.e., problems that are posed after the linguistic framework has been fixed, but rather *external* problems to said framework, i.e., problems regarding the ideal framework within which to proceed with certain research or to better interpret the results of some prior investigation. The step from the material mode to the formal mode of speech, which Carnap developed in *Die Logische Syntax von Sprache* (1928), is only one of the approaches that semantic ascent may adopt.

Quine also recommends semantic ascent as a way of approaching ontological questions, but he differs from Carnap in one decisive point. Unlike the latter, Quine does not distinguish between philosophical and scientific problems, as he understands that there is no solution of continuity between the two. In one way or another, all problems are empirical problems, because the Carnapian distinction between questions that are internal to and questions that are external to a linguistic framework are lacking in fundament. For Carnap, ontological problems appear to be problems concerning classes or types of objects, though in fact they are pragmatic problems regarding the use of

language. Quine, on the other hand, asks, in the final section of *Word and Object*, “why should this be true of the philosophical questions and not theoretical questions generally? [Quine (1960), p. 271]. More than just another step in the evolution of APM, the defence that analytic philosophy has no place of its own might constitute a sharp rupture with the tradition to which Quine belongs.

V. APM WITHOUT MEANING?

The question as to why Quine contests the dividing line between questions that are external to and questions that are internal to a linguistic framework bolsters this conclusion. The reason is that this dividing line presupposes the analytic-synthetic distinction, i.e., the distinction between truths (or falsehoods) in virtue of meaning, or in virtue of language, and truths (or falsehoods) in virtue of facts. (The internal questions to a linguistic framework are only those that would be decided by showing the truth of synthetic propositions.) As Quine believes there to be no basis for this distinction, the very concept of truth in virtue of meaning is lacking in content. This is not just another moment in the development of APM. On the contrary, the project of analytic philosophy collapses if the assumption on which its distinguishing metaphilosophical feature rests – that there is a specifically philosophical work, which consists in the analysis of language, as something opposed to the investigation of the world, or in the separation of analytic truths from those that are synthetic – is questioned.⁷

VI. THE NATURALISATION OF LOGICAL FORM

The argument that I have just presented concludes that APM entered a *cul de sac* the moment the analytic-synthetic distinction was questioned. This was not the only dead-end. Another way of placing the APM programme against the ropes does not decry the concept of meaning, but minimizes its content to the point of excluding it from any philosophical project that demands a substantive concept. A clear illustration of this deflationist approach is provided by the notion of *logical form*.⁸ Invoked to designate a level of representation of the conditions of truth of a proposition, the concept of logical form is of major value in understanding the analytic way of proceeding of some of the high points in the production of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein or Carnap. In all these cases, the search for logical form has two notable characteristics: (i) it is a logical-semantic property of propositions that maintains a correspondence with some feature or property of philosophical interest – most likely metaphysical –; (ii) propositions do not always exhibit their logical

form openly, this only emerges after analysing them by means of suitable techniques. Characteristic (i) reveals the philosophical interest of logical form. If (ii) is added to (i), then there can be no doubt regarding the interest of logical form for APM.

Currently, the concept of logical form has disappeared from the analytic glossaries and indices of guides and reference works in the philosophy of language.⁹ This is due to the fact that the concept has been naturalized: it has become an ingredient in some scientific theory of some aspect, preferably syntactic or semantic, of natural language. At the same time as this has occurred, all links between the logical form of propositions and the goals of some philosophical project or other have been severed. The result of all this is that, once (i) is ignored, the investigation of logical form – (ii) – is no longer of *philosophical* interest. The naturalisation of logical form had effectively been consummated towards the end of the 1960's. Thus, in Harman (1968, 1975) there is no trace at all of philosophical positioning or commitment that informs of the notion of logical form. The search for the logical form of the propositions of a language aims to account for the relation of logical consequence between the propositions of said language. This is a form that naturalisation adopts. In the GB model of grammar, logical form is of importance to the degree that it helps explain a certain aspect of the linguistic competence of the speakers of that language. It seems reasonable to conclude that there is a clear-cut rupture between the ways of understanding and using logical form on the part of APM philosophers and those in vogue in recent decades.¹⁰

VII. A QUICK COMPARISON OF THE THEORIES OF DESCRIPTIONS OF RUSSELL AND NEALE

This conclusion becomes even more evident as one descends down to the details of the case. A very brief comparison of the theories of descriptions of Russell and of a current-day philosopher will serve here.

Russell and Neale respectively analyse propositions of the form

[Desc] the F that is G is H

in the following way:

[DescRus] $\exists x((Fx \wedge Gx) \wedge \forall y(Fy \wedge Gy \rightarrow y = x) \wedge Hx)$

[DescNea] $|(F \cap G) - H| = 0 \ \& \ |F \cap G| = 1$

What is relevant in the comparison is not that [DescRus] analyses the propositions of the form [Desc] in terms of a logical schema of first-order predicates, while [DescNea] does so by establishing conditions that make use of the operations of the algebra of sets. These resources serve other ideas. [DescRus] translates the way in which these propositions are subject to the Fundamental Principle of the Theory of Denotation, according to which expressions of the form ‘the F that is G’ do not have meaning in themselves. Consequently, they are not afforded the status of referential expression and are not classified together with other nominal syntagms. (These expressions do not stand for Russellian terms, but for Russellian denotative concepts.) Underpinning this diagnosis, there are philosophical commitments that have to do with the type of entities that Russell thinks may be known directly. Neale, in contrast, treats the defined descriptions as complete symbols and leaves the Fundamental Principle of the Theory of Denotation to one side. In Neale’s opinion, Russell’s option “is too cumbersome and unwieldy to merit a place in a serious compositional semantics” [Neale (1990), p. 44]. The price to be paid to ensure that the semantics of natural language is compositional is that of rejecting the condition that expressions of the form [Desc] must be treated in an analogous way to expressions like ‘Some F that G’, ‘An F that G’, ‘The F that G’, etc. Thus, as opposed to what occurs with [DescRus], underlying [DescNea] is obedience to what is known as the Grammatical Constraint: that a semantic theory that explains any generalisation whatsoever of lexis and grammar which would otherwise be arbitrary should take preference [see Jackendoff (1983)]. Russell gave more weight to philosophical than to grammatical considerations, which is the same, from the present perspective, as turning a deaf ear to the Grammatical Constraint. Neale, however, adopts the contrary option. He is convinced that the logical form of propositions of the class [Desc] is the one that best accounts for the generalisations of a grammatical theory. Once the step of accepting this methodological maxim has been taken, the naturalisation of logical form has been consummated.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In Glock (2008), the author asks the question as to what analytic philosophy is. The debatable part of his answer is that which states that what links different authors, schools and trends of this philosophical tradition to one another are family resemblances. This diagnosis does not sufficiently highlight the ruptures that have occurred in the development of this tradition. In particular, this aspect of Glock’s answer does not afford a sufficiently prominent role to the metaphilosophical aspects of the case. Specifically, what is the nature of the problems of philosophy: that is, how do they arise and by what means are they to be solved? The metaphilosophy of analytic

philosophy clearly distinguishes philosophy from science. When the thesis that philosophy is continuous with science gained ground – approximately half a century ago now – analytic philosophy became a very different thing. It ceased to be APM to become APT. This rupture has been illustrated by very succinctly drawing attention to the change in the notion of semantic ascent, the attack on the idea of truth in virtue of meaning and the naturalisation of logical form.

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NOTES

¹ But even in this part of his book, the author contributes ideas and discussions of major interest. For example, his discussion of naturalism and of the relations between philosophy and science [see Glock (2008), pp. 134-46] is very valuable.

² As regards the resort to the work of Russell to reject this characterisation of AP, see Glock (2008), p. 119.

³ I defended this proposition in Acero (1985).

⁴ This is what Glock calls “metaphilosophical naturalism”. See Glock (2008), pp. 138ff.

⁵ Williamson (2007), p. 21, illustrates Williamson’s adhesion to the Thesis of History. If to this we add the fact that for Williamson language is a way of apprehending what things are [Williamson (2007), p. 46], the Thesis of History may go hand in hand with *another* way of understanding the *dictum* that philosophical problems are linguistic problems.

⁶ The same occurs with other authors. Cf. Soames (2003), p. xiii.

⁷ Hacker (1996), pp. 193ff., argues in depth along the same lines, though without resting his argument on the idea that APM is defined by its particular metaphilosophical project. Instead, Hacker takes into account the premise that APM categorically separates science from philosophy. Cf. Hacker (1996), p. 195.

⁸ A parallel conclusion may be reached by examining the evolution of the analysis of the concepts of truth and of the condition of truth.

⁹ See, for example, Hale and Wright (1997); Devitt and Hanley (2006). The only exception I know is Pietrowski (2006), which addresses the questions of “how logical structure is related to grammar, and how grammatical structure is related to thought and truth” [Pietrowski (2006), p. 822]. In spite of such a declaration of intent, Pietrowski’s essay follows the nowadays prevailing naturalistic trend, and does not go beyond reviewing classical analytic attitudes concerning matters of criticism and reform of language.

¹⁰ However, Montague (1974) and Davidson (1980), originally published in 1960 and 1967, respectively, conserved the spirit of APM to a certain degree.

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RESUMEN

En su libro Glock responde a la pregunta de qué es la filosofía analítica mediante dos tesis. La primera es la Tesis de la Historia: la categoría de la filosofía analítica es una categoría histórica o genética. La segunda es la tesis del parecido: entre los autores y escuelas que forman la tradición de la filosofía analítica no hay más que un parecido de familia. Aunque la presente contribución acepta la primera tesis, rechaza la segunda al insistir en que entre las diversas contribuciones y desarrollos de la filosofía analítica hubo rupturas muy significativas y, por tanto, menos continuidad de la propugnada.

Palabras clave: *filosofía analítica, significado, ascenso semántico, naturalismo.*

ABSTRACT

In his book Glock answers the question “what is analytic philosophy?” with two theses. The first is the Thesis of History, i.e. analytic philosophy is a historical or genetic category. The second is the Thesis of Resemblance: namely, that there is only a family resemblance between the authors and schools that make up the analytic tradition in philosophy. Although this paper accepts the first thesis, it rejects the second by insisting that there are highly significant disruptions and therefore less continuity than advocated by Glock, between the various contributions and developments of analytic philosophy.

KEYWORDS: *Analytic Philosophy, Meaning, Semantic Ascent, Naturalism.*