

# Introduction

Guido Bonino and Paolo Tripodi

Over the last thirty years historical attention has been directed toward analytic philosophy: some analytic philosophers have begun reflecting on the philosophical tradition they belong to, while many other scholars have been working on what has now become a well-established discipline known as “history of analytic philosophy” (for a comprehensive bibliography see Beaney 2013). Yet this historiographical perspective mainly focuses on the origins of analytic philosophy or on the central decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These two periods can be labelled respectively as early analytic philosophy (Frege, Russell, Moore, the early Wittgenstein, etc.) and as middle analytic philosophy (Carnap, Ryle, the later Wittgenstein, Quine, etc.) The use of the former label is firmly established, whereas the latter is less common, yet fairly natural. By contrast, a proper historical investigation of the most recent stages of analytic philosophy is greatly needed. Some contributions towards a better understanding of this issue are available. Among them: Baldwin (2001), Priest (2003), Soames (2003: vol. II, 461-476), Williamson (2007, chapter i and “Afterword”), Beaney (2013), Williamson (2014), Tripodi (2015, chapter iv). But they are still few and far between. This special issue of *Philosophical Inquiries* is intended to be a further stimulus for such an investigation.

The issue includes a series of interviews with contemporary philosophers, based on a fixed set of questions:

- (1) What are the main philosophical and metaphilosophical similarities and differences between early analytic philosophy and late analytic philosophy?
- (2) Is it possible to identify a mainstream in late analytic philosophy? If so, what are its main (cultural, ideological, philosophical, methodological, metaphilosophical) features?
- (3) What are the main critical and controversial aspects of late analytic philosophy?

It seems to us that these interviews can be instructive not only – as is obvious – by virtue of the content expressed in each of them, and the pondered

views and reflections of each of the interviewees, but also when considered together as a sort of sociological survey, revealing the main convergences and divergences among “experts”.

The central part of the issue is composed of five articles, which investigate the topic under discussion from very different points of view. “Past Present”, a customary section of *Philosophical Inquiries*, comprises the first English translation of the “Discussion générale” of the fourth Colloque philosophique de Royaumont (1958), in which some well-known analytic philosophers met with representatives of various “continental” traditions; the translation is accompanied by a revealing introduction by Mathieu Marion. The issue ends with the reviews of two recently published collections of essays that are especially relevant for the history of analytic philosophy.

Following a suggestion made by Weatherson (2014: 517), we refer to the most recent period of analytic philosophy as *late* analytic philosophy; more precisely, we propose to apply this formula to the analytic philosophy developed approximately over the last forty years, which would seem to be a long enough period of time to deserve a separate investigation. It might be argued (and it has been argued in some of the interviews) that the term “late” sounds tendentious, in that it suggests that the phenomenon at issue is in its last stages. This is certainly true when the phenomenon is irremediably past, as in “late Renaissance”. While aware of these possible undertones, we do not wish to suggest that analytic philosophy is finished or is finishing. The term “late” must therefore be understood in a purely chronological way, as a stage of development that simply succeeds the early and middle stages, and that happens to be the last only in relation to the present time, which is of course our viewpoint.

It should be made explicit, however, that the present issue is based on the working assumption that late analytic philosophy is a quite distinct phenomenon. Of course, this assumption mainly rests on impressions, rather than on a preliminary study, and could be questioned itself. For example, as Timothy Williamson suggested in his interview, perhaps from a more distant perspective in the future we would say that the period 1970-2010 belongs to the last phase of the history of *early* analytic philosophy. As Eric Schliesser wrote some months ago [on his blog commenting on our call for papers](http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsnimpresions/2016/05/on-late-analytic-philosophy-or-the-age-of-david-lewis.html)<sup>1</sup>, perhaps we should wait “until a future philosopher or philosophical movement/network gives a philosophical reason to rewrite our times in light of their understanding of the direction of philosophical telos.” When reviewing the interviews and the articles published in this issue, however, it is possible to select a list of recurrent views,

<sup>1</sup> <http://digressionsnimpresions.typepad.com/digressionsnimpresions/2016/05/on-late-analytic-philosophy-or-the-age-of-david-lewis.html>

on which several (though by no means all) authors seem to agree, thus providing an initial, provisional picture of the history of late analytic philosophy.

One aspect of this picture is that over the last forty years analytic philosophy has been more historically self-conscious than it used to be in previous decades. Not only is the rise of a specific sub-discipline called “history of early analytic philosophy” significant in itself, but historical awareness makes it easier to realize that – as held by some interviewees – late analytic philosophy can be regarded as more similar, under several respects, to analytic philosophy in the early period than to middle analytic philosophy. The main reason for this is that early and late analytic philosophy came respectively before and after the so-called Linguistic Turn, which took place in the middle period (Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, Oxford ordinary language philosophy). The flourishing of metaphysics – and, more generally, the tendency to answer genuine substantive questions, rather than to dissolve philosophical problems by means of linguistic and conceptual analysis – seems to be a distinctive feature of both early and late, as opposed to middle, analytic philosophy. Substantive philosophical theory in the later period, however, is different from that of the early period, not only because of the refinement and expansion of the analytic *methodological* toolbox, but also because of new *contents* of philosophical theories. The philosophical treatment of necessity and possibility is an instance of such innovation, both from a methodological and a substantive point of view. As suggested by Nicholas Rescher in his interview, another example is the growing importance of the study of normativity.

If the picture of late analytic philosophy that has just been outlined – the predominance of substantive philosophy, the centrality of metaphysics, the importance of modalities – is even approximately correct, then it is all too natural for all the articles and most of the interviews in the present issue to touch upon the figure of David K. Lewis. Lewis’s contribution to late analytic philosophy is worth investigating under several respects: not only is Lewis’s work central to many debates (such as the debate over realism), but it also seems to establish several parameters of philosophical research, both by formulating an explicit methodology and by providing an implicit model. The recognition of Lewis’s centrality is confirmed by the undertaking of projects such as “[The Age of Metaphysical Revolution. David Lewis and His Place in the History of Philosophy](#)”, directed by Prof. Helen Beebe and Prof. Fraser MacBride at the University of Manchester<sup>2</sup>. It seems to us that a study of the relationship between Lewis and Quine would be particularly relevant for understanding late

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/philosophy/research/projects/age-of-metaphysical-revolution/>

analytic philosophy. The reason for this is not only that Lewis studied under Quine, and much of his work can be seen as a development and a radicalization of his teacher's work (Divers 2018; Janssen-Lauret 2017); but also that their names are often associated with two of the main meta-philosophical options available in analytic philosophy in the last decades: airmchair metaphysics, based on (a difficult equilibrium between) intuitions and theory-building, on the one hand, and methodological naturalism, based on the elimination of any conceptual/factual divide and on the continuity between philosophy and science, on the other hand.

Although this Lewis-centered picture of late analytic philosophy seems to be widely shared (at least in our sample, that is, among the contributors to this issue), and even though only few of the interviewees explicitly maintained that there is no mainstream in late analytic philosophy, most of them were cautious with respect to the very notion of a mainstream. The main motivation for this attitude is the extreme fragmentation of late analytic philosophy, which in turn likely depends on sociological factors such as professionalization and specialization. Philosophy of language seems now to lack the privileged role it used to have in the middle period, and no other sub-discipline took a comparable position, not even metaphysics: for example, as Brian Weatherson points out in his interview, in the early period philosophy of science was a large part of philosophy, and some took it to be central to all philosophy, whereas today it has mostly turned into a cluster of more particular and less central philosophies of the different sciences.

Having declared what our objectives were in designing this special issue, we are now left to consider to what extent such objectives have been met. It seems that we face a sort of mixed picture. On the one hand, the contributed articles and the interviews provide an array of interesting analyses, reflections, suggestions, etc. As has just been shown, it is also possible to discern an inchoate consensus concerning the relative importance of some questions or themes. On the other hand, there are still significant questions that have not been addressed at all, or for which no answer is available, and there are entire areas of the history of late analytic philosophy that still await a thorough scholarly investigation. The legitimacy itself – and the usefulness – of the label “late analytic philosophy” is still in need of full justification. It seems to us that the present issue has two main inadequacies.

The first inadequacy is a methodological one. We would have liked to have more “external” history, both because it is interesting *per se*, and because the sheer quantity of philosophical production in the recent phase of analytic philosophy, together with its progressive specialization and fragmentation, makes it peculiarly difficult to pursue the traditional kind of (internal) history of phi-

losophy, and especially to assess the role of particular philosophical episodes within the overall picture. We are convinced that the contributions of the sociology of knowledge, the institutional history of science and of education, the social epistemology, etc. would be of considerable help in tackling the complicated tasks and questions involved in investigating the history of late analytic philosophy. We are also convinced that a quantitative approach to the history of philosophy could be profitably combined with the attention to external factors shaping late analytic philosophy. This is in fact the approach taken by Bonomo and Petrovich in their paper, which is mainly based on scientometrics, though other “quantitative” methods are probably equally feasible, such as *distant reading*, originally fashioned by Franco Moretti for the study of literature.

The second inadequacy is thematic. In this issue there is much less moral and political philosophy than we would have wished for. This is likely due, at least in part, to mere chance. Yet, maybe there are also more interesting reasons: perhaps an appropriate periodization for moral and political philosophy should be somewhat different from that which is suggested here, or perhaps – a more radical reason – the category itself of “analytic philosophy” applies to moral and political philosophy in a different way than, say, to metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, etc. (see Jonathan Wolff’s interview).

Talk of inadequacies should not be taken to mean we are in any way disappointed with the result of our efforts and of those of the contributors. Rather, it is a way to point to prospective lines of research, to further questions that need to be asked, to problems that still wait for a solution. The main purpose of this issue is to open a debate and certainly not to have the last word. In addition to the questions concerning the history of late analytic *practical* philosophy – Does it deserve a separate investigation? What are its peculiar features? Does it share historical framework and periodization with the history of late analytic metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language and mind? – there are several further questions that the present issue has brought to our attention and that are still waiting to be taken in serious consideration by the scholars. To conclude this brief introduction, we would like to point out a few of them, which we consider to be particularly interesting.

The first question for future research concerns conceptual analysis. Several interviewees seem to agree that its role and status in analytic philosophy have changed since the earlier period (for a comprehensive account of conceptual analysis in the early and middle period, see the works of Michael Beaney, for example Beaney 2007 and 2017). However, it is still controversial and not entirely clear how this difference should be described. Perhaps the point is that late analytic philosophers do *less* conceptual analysis than they used to when taking the Linguistic Turn; therefore, a better understanding

of the main methodological aspects of their work requires different categories, such as the notion of inference to the best explanation. Perhaps, on the contrary, late analytic philosophers practice traditional, armchair versions of conceptual analysis as much as they always have, but they interpret the results differently, that is, as genuine and substantive answers rather than as ways to dissolve philosophical problems.

A second question that has yet to be addressed concerns formalization and mathematization: How do they take place in late analytic philosophy? Have any similarities and differences with analogous processes occurred in disciplines such as economics and linguistics during the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Formalization and mathematization are often associated with professionalization, a process that in turn is strictly related to fragmentation and specialization. Therefore, a further question arises: are fragmentation and specialization a real trademark of late analytic philosophy? The maps provided by Buonomo and Petrovich at the end of their paper suggest that things are not as simple as one might initially believe: the diachronic application of clustering techniques seems to indicate that sub-disciplinary fragmentation strongly characterizes the last decade but is not equally significant in the eighties and the nineties. We consider this result to be very interesting. It certainly provides a stimulus for further investigation, better if sociologically well-informed, which could also shed some light on the relative weight, in the history of late analytic philosophy, of philosophical sub-disciplines such as metaphysics, logic, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, moral and political philosophy, so as to understand whether there is any sort of hierarchy among them. Ultimately, however, the clusters provided by Buonomo and Petrovich can even put in doubt the usefulness of the very chronological notion of late analytic philosophy, on the basis of the claim that such a difference and such a divide (the presence versus the absence of great fragmentation and specialization) are too big to be regarded as part of a single homogeneous historical-philosophical phenomenon.

All things considered, however, it seems to us that most of those who have contributed to the present issue – either as interviewees or as authors – regard the chronological notion of late analytic philosophy, analytic philosophy over the last forty years, as potentially fruitful and, more generally, that many of them seem to share the impression that late analytic philosophy is, at least to a certain extent, a sufficiently uniform phenomenon, both methodologically and sociologically. Among them, however, we find very different ways to interpret and evaluate this alleged uniformity. The third question we posed in the interview, What are the critical aspects of late analytic philosophy?, was meant as an attempt to bring out such different evaluative attitudes. One kind of attitude is exemplified by Williamson who, in his influential book from 2007,

*The Philosophy of Philosophy*, when speaking of the present state of analytic philosophy stated: “This is not the end of philosophy. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”. Williamson’s Churchill-inspired remark is paradigmatic of the view according to which late analytic philosophy has achieved the suggested status of scientific maturity and can be regarded as a normal science. Another sympathetic but more critical attitude towards late analytic philosophy is that taken by Weatherson, who in his interview points out that the sociology of late analytic philosophy has an effect not only on the kind of *questions* that analytic philosophers ask but also on the *answers*. We believe this remark is worth examining in depth. On the opposite end of the evaluative spectrum there are those who interpret the methodological agreement among late analytic philosophers as a form of scholasticism (the other face of the science-like nature of their work). According to such critics, recent analytic philosophy fails to be “critical” or, as Cora Diamond puts it in her interview, “responsive”, in that it is not capable of challenging its own assumptions, presuppositions and prejudices. Unless one takes an external history approach, gaining a clearer view of these issues and becoming at least somewhat able to understand which interpretation and attitude is most reasonable is likely to be a difficult task. Such an approach might perhaps make it feasible to answer some yet unexplored questions such as, What kind of philosophical work do late analytic philosophers regard as an innovation or progress in philosophy? What is the role of intellectual cooperation and peer review? What is the role of “philosophical fashions”? Are there any philosophical taboos in late analytic philosophy? Are there any periods/subjects in the history of philosophy that have been neglected by the analytic tradition? What has the role of leading departments been in the development of late analytic philosophy? How have funding policies influenced such development? More generally, one might outline an answer to what we consider to be *the* big questions concerning the history of late analytic philosophy: How has late analytic philosophy been influenced by the socio-economic and political context in which it has developed? In what sense and to what extent can we see it as “its own time comprehended in thoughts”?

Guido Bonino  
guido.bonino@unito.it  
Università di Torino

Paolo Tripodi  
paolo.tripodi@unito.it  
Università di Torino

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