

# Analytic Philosophy Without Naturalism

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## 4 What is naturalism? What is analytical philosophy?

*Peter van Inwagen*

The title of this conference is ‘Analytical Philosophy Without Naturalism?’, or, if I read the Italian title right, ‘Can Analytical Philosophy Be Other Than Naturalistic?’ Now I am an analytical philosopher, and I am not a naturalist – or, at any rate, I have not been a naturalist for at least twenty years. So I have been a practitioner of analytical philosophy without naturalism for twenty years. If I had ever been a naturalist, I certainly ceased to be one when I became a Christian. Before I was a Christian, I was neither an adherent of some other religion nor some sort of ‘philosophical’ theist. Nor did I hold any philosophical position – dualism, for example – that was inconsistent with naturalism. For all that, I’m not sure I ever was a fully paid-up card-carrying naturalist, but I can say that there was a time when I at least thought that naturalism was *probably* true.

My becoming a Christian had little or nothing to do with my philosophical work or my philosophical training – beyond the fact that I am the sort of person who is influenced by arguments, and all the arguments against Christianity that I knew of were, or so my philosophical training told me, either bad arguments (most of them) or inconclusive arguments (a few of them). But, of course, that all the arguments against some position are bad or inconclusive is hardly a reason for accepting it. (For one thing, at least in my view, to adopt the rule ‘Accept any position such that all the known arguments against that position are bad or inconclusive’ would lead to contradiction, since most if not all substantive philosophical positions have the following property: the arguments against them are at best inconclusive, and many of these positions are the denials of or are otherwise inconsistent with one another.)

When I became a Christian, I carried on with my philosophical work, just as physicians and cabinet-makers who have been converted to Christianity presumably carry on with theirs. In one sense, at least, my philosophical work did not seem deeply relevant to my religious convictions; no doubt most physicians and cabinet-makers would make a similar judgment. A physician who had been in the practice of providing the means of suicide to selected patients and who became a Christian would have to change his ways, of course, but he might well not have been doing that or anything

else inconsistent with Christian teaching. If I had been a defender of naturalism or of the moral permissibility of euthanasia, or of some other thesis inconsistent with Christian teaching, I too should have had to change my ways when I became a Christian. But, although I believed things inconsistent with Christian teaching before I became a Christian, I had never been interested in defending any of those things in my philosophical work. When, therefore, I ceased to be a naturalist I carried on being an analytical philosopher without noticing any break or discontinuity in my philosophical practice. And so I have done for twenty years. I have never seen any inconsistency in being both an analytical philosopher and a non-naturalist. (I should say that I don't see non-naturalism as a philosophical position as naturalism is a philosophical position. And I don't see opposition to naturalism as the constituting factor of any possible community of intellectual interest. If I learn that a notorious atheist is a Cartesian dualist, I don't say to myself, 'Well, at least he's a non-naturalist.' I say only: 'Well, that makes *two* things we disagree about.') I have never seen any connection between being an analytical philosopher and being a naturalist. Analytical philosophers, after all, disagree about a wide range of things; in my view, the truth or falsity of naturalism is one of them. There have been analytical philosophers who have believed that there were true contradictions, that unrealized possibilities were physical objects, that human persons were tiny material particles inside human brains, and that there were no such things as tables and chairs. If analytical philosophy is so tolerant a hostess as to admit such as these into her house, she will, surely, not gibe at granting entrance to a few non-naturalists.

It is of course true that most analytical philosophers are naturalists. Perhaps it is even true that most analytical philosophers are propagandists for naturalism, team players, proselytizing enthusiasts. (As I certainly was not when I was a naturalist – *if* I was a naturalist.) But the explanation of these facts, if the latter suggestion attains to facthood, must be psychological or sociological or something of that order. It is certainly not logical or philosophical, not even in part. Nelson Goodman once said that the opposition between empiricism and realism about universals (an opposition that in some sense certainly exists) was like the opposition between being a truck driver and being a lover of the ballet. That is, the opposition is real and undeniable, but to be explained otherwise than by appeal to the content of empiricism and realism. I would say the same about the connection between analytical philosophy and naturalism.

If I see matters this way, then, what in my view is there for a conference called 'Analytical Philosophy Without Naturalism?' to be *about?* – and what place is there in it for a philosopher with my views? I shall consider a few possibilities.

Someone might take the title of the conference to imply that a plausible *prima facie* case could be made for the thesis that there was an intimate connection (a logical or philosophical connection) between analytical philosophy and

naturalism. And that person might go on to infer that (because of the presence of the word ‘without’ in the conference title, and because the conference took place under the auspices of a Catholic university) the purpose of the conference was to provide a forum for philosophers who had something to say against this *prima facie* case. But if this is the purpose of the conference, I cannot contribute to it for the simple reason that I see no *prima facie* case for a philosophical connection between analytical philosophy and naturalism.

Here is a second possibility. Someone might suppose that the title of the conference was chosen in recognition of two facts: that most analytical philosophers are naturalists, and that this fact had no ground in the nature of analytical philosophy or in the content of naturalism. This person might suppose that the purpose of the conference was to underscore the second of these facts; that its purpose was to provide a forum for analytical philosophers who were not naturalists, to provide an occasion on which a series of philosophical papers were presented that were free from naturalistic presuppositions. Might I have something to say at a conference that fitted this description? I might indeed, but it is so easy to have something to say at such a conference that one can be reasonably certain that our second ‘someone’ has not got the intentions of the organizers of the conference right. Imagine that I had proposed to present a paper to you on one of the following topics:

- An examination of the account of variables given in Quine’s ‘Variables Explained Away’.
- An argument for the conclusion that agent-causation does not solve what writers on free will call ‘the control problem’.
- A discussion of David Lewis’s argument for the conclusion that any theory of composition besides universalism must have the consequence that the linguistic theory of vagueness is false.

(I have indeed written on each of these topics.) I can assure you that if I had presented a paper on any of these topics, it would have had no naturalistic presuppositions. And nor would it have had any non-naturalistic presuppositions. In fact, every proposition I should have defended in a paper on any of these topics would have been consistent both with naturalism and with the denial of naturalism. And that, I think, is exactly what would have rendered papers on these topics unsuitable for presentation at this conference. Whatever the purpose of the conference may be, it cannot be simply to afford philosophers an opportunity to present papers on topics that have nothing whatever to do with naturalism.

Here is a third possibility. It represents *my* guess as to the intention of the organizers of the conference: they propose to provide a forum for analytical philosophers who are anti-naturalists, to provide an occasion for the presentation of philosophical papers that presuppose or defend the denial of

naturalism. (If this is right, a better title for the conference would have been 'Analytical Philosophy with Anti-naturalism'.) Have I anything to contribute to a conference of that nature? Well, no, not really. As I have said, most of my philosophical work is simply irrelevant to naturalism. Most of my philosophical convictions, moreover, are regrettably close to those of the typical naturalist. True, I think that there are non-human immaterial intelligences, such as God and St Michael. I believe that Christ was raised from the dead, and that one day we, like him, shall be raised imperishable. I believe that every Sunday I eat and drink – in a mystery, but an entirely non-metaphorical mystery – the body and blood of Christ. These beliefs of mine are obviously inconsistent with naturalism; if I belonged to the Federated Society of People Who Are Naturalists Because They Are So Smart, and if I publicly confessed these beliefs, I should certainly be expelled. But these beliefs don't play any role in my philosophical work. It's true that I have written essays on topics like the Holy Trinity and biblical inspiration and miracles and the problem of evil. But I don't think that these essays contain much that couldn't be accepted by a naturalist. (At most, the occasional sentence.) The purpose of my essays on religious topics has always been apologetical. My purpose in each of them was to examine an attempt to demonstrate the falsity of some Christian doctrine: arguments for the incoherency of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for example, or various forms of the argument from evil. My conclusion in each case was that the argument under consideration was a failure. And that a certain argument for the falsity of some Christian doctrine is a failure is a conclusion that a naturalist can consistently, if not happily, accept.

If one turns from the title of the conference to the 'Presentation' that accompanies the conference materials, one finds that the subject-matter of the conference is there said to be those programs that propose to 'naturalize' some field of enquiry or some part of philosophy – to produce a naturalized epistemology, for example – or to provide naturalistic accounts of certain problematical concepts or entities or phenomena (of truth, of concepts, of intentionality). (The present paper is officially part of the 'Ontology' section of this conference, although I confess it contains little in the way of ontology, a fact I am now in the process of excusing.) There is, it seems to me, a certain tension between the title of the conference and the 'Presentation', for naturalization projects do not make up a very large part of analytical philosophy. If one opens a recent volume of any uncontroversially analytical journal to a randomly chosen page, one is not *very* likely to find on that page a part of some attempt to naturalize something. So, it would seem, a great deal of even the most recent analytical philosophy has no connection with the various naturalization projects that some analytical philosophers are engaged in. In any case, I have nothing to say about these projects. I know little of them, and what I do know of them suggests that they are vague, pretentious, amorphous, programmatic, and have not achieved anything of value. I should say, however, that, except on that ground, I am not

particularly opposed to them. (My attitude toward them is like Francis Bacon's attitude toward magic. 'Magicians', Bacon said, 'attain little to greatness and certainty of works.') In principle, I could accept the results of many of them, if they had results, although I'd probably balk at any attempt to naturalize religious belief. Suppose, for example, that someone proposed to naturalize morality. I am not thinking of someone like Michael Ruse, who has attempted to show that morality is an illusion that can be explained in naturalistic terms. I am rather thinking of someone whose project is to defend just that meta-ethical thesis that was called naturalism long before the current fashion for naturalizing things got under way: the thesis that moral properties are to be identified with certain natural properties. Grave difficulties attend this project, but, supposing them to have been overcome, I can see no objection to accepting its results.

So, this suggestion, too, the suggestion that the papers presented at this conference concern themselves with projects that propose to 'naturalize' various things offers me no prospect for contributing a paper to the conference.

What, then, am I to do? I can think of nothing to do but what my title suggests I am going to do: to try to say what naturalism is and what analytical philosophy is. If I cannot contribute directly, as it were, to what I take the purpose of this conference to be, at least I can try to say something that is relevant to that purpose.

I begin with naturalism. The word 'naturalism' obviously has something to do with 'nature'. There can, I think, be no objection to saying that a naturalist is someone who says that there is nothing besides nature, nothing in addition to nature, nothing outside or beyond nature – or no objection besides this one: it's not a very informative thing to say. For what is this 'nature' besides which, if the naturalists are right, there is nothing? The etymologies of the words '*natura*' and '*physis*' are connected with the ideas of birth and growth. And this root meaning is preserved in the usual understanding of the English word 'nature' by most people: as most people use the word 'nature', nature is something that is mostly green. (Indeed, in its primary sense, the English word 'naturalist' applies not to a person who holds a certain philosophical position but to a person who knows all about birds and flowers.) But if naturalism is the thesis that there is nothing besides nature, the word 'nature' must be understood as denoting something that is not mostly green but mostly black. (I owe the 'nature as green'/'nature as black' distinction to C.S. Lewis.) 'Nature', in the sense that interests us, is simply another name for the physical universe or the cosmos. Naturalism is, therefore, the thesis that there is nothing besides the physical universe. The physical universe is the sum total of all physical things. Naturalism is, therefore, the thesis that all things are physical things. Naturalism is, therefore, physicalism. (We should certainly be very puzzled if someone said, 'I'm not a naturalist, but I'm a physicalist' – or 'I'm not a physicalist, but I'm a naturalist.') But this is of very little help, for it

merely replaces the question, What does 'natural' mean? with the question, What does 'physical' mean? – and the latter word has come a very long way indeed from its archaic Greek genesis in the growth of plants. And what *does* 'physical' mean? Well, the word (in the sense that is of present interest) obviously has something to do with the science of physics. If we were satisfied with the current state of physics, of standard working physics, as opposed to speculative physics, we could define 'physical' this way. There are two basic kinds of physical entities: space-time and elementary particles. A physical thing is either space-time or some part of space-time or an elementary particle or something composed of elementary particles. But no one is in fact satisfied with the current state of physics, a composite of the general theory of relativity and the so-called standard theory of elementary particles. One very good reason for this is that the general theory of relativity and the standard theory of elementary particles are inconsistent with each other, although in most situations that physicists are concerned to study, the inconsistency can be walled off and ignored. A second reason is that, while the general theory of relativity is beautifully plausible, the standard theory, for all its effectiveness, contains much unlovely arbitrariness. It is hoped that one day physics will be a unified and beautiful whole, that the science of physics will be coextensive with a single theory that explains both gravity (the present business of general relativity) and everything else (the present business of the standard theory). But it is generally conceded that the ontology of this dreamt-of final theory will almost certainly be very unlike the ontologies of general relativity and the standard theory. Perhaps there will in the end be no space-time, but only particles (or something analogous to particles; maybe they won't be point-like); or perhaps there will be no particles but only space-time (particles being reduced to singularities in space-time); or perhaps there will be neither, but some third kind of thing, a kind of which we do not at present have a clear picture.

However this may be, most people would agree that we cannot plausibly define 'physical' by reference to the ontologies of the two components of present-day physics. What, then, are we to do if we wish to define 'physical'? Most thinkers who have tried to answer this question would say something like this: we must abstract from the physics we know its essential core, something that, because it is essential to physics, will survive any future transformation of physics. We can do this; and when we have done it, we shall not have something so abstract and general as to be philosophically uninteresting. We shall have a really interesting concept, and it will reveal to us the essence of or allow us plausibly to define the physical (and hence the natural and hence naturalism).

Attempts at 'abstracting the essential core' of present-day physics have been of two types: epistemological and ontological. The former finds the essence of physics in an unchanging method. Although (the proponents of the epistemological attempt say) the physics of the future will no doubt

employ concepts very different from those of the present day, physicists will always use the same methods in their investigations, and these methods will one day lead them to a final theory and this final theory will be a *physical* theory (and not something that grew out of physics but is not physics, as experimental psychology grew out of philosophy but is not philosophy) because it is historically continuous with the discipline now called ‘physics’, its continuity with present-day physics consisting precisely in the continued application of those unchanging methods of investigation. This final theory will postulate entities of certain sorts; it will assert their existence. We may therefore plausibly define physical things as things of the sorts that will be postulated by the final theory. Or, at any rate, we may define physical things as things that are composed of things of those sorts, for no doubt there are special contingent structures – human beings and stars, for example – whose existence will not be a consequence of the theory itself, although their existence will be a consequence of the theory plus certain boundary conditions. Naturalism, or physicalism, may be defined as the thesis that there exist only things of the sorts that will be postulated by the final theory or else things composed of those things.

I don’t know what to say about this suggestion, other than to voice some suspicions. I’m not a philosopher of science, after all, and I know little of these matters. My unschooled suspicions are these: I suspect that there may be no such thing as the unchanging methods of investigation in physics that the definition depends on; and I suspect that if there are such methods, human beings, even given world enough and time, may not be capable using them to reach a final theory. (Who knows?: maybe there will be competing candidates for the office ‘final theory’ such that the unchanging methods of investigation will tell physicists that one could choose between these candidates only by performing an experiment that would require a linear accelerator a thousand light-years long, a device human beings will never be in a position to construct.) I do not know what others would say about this, but, for my part, I should not want the validity of the account of naturalism I endorsed to depend on the assumption that the suspicions I have voiced are ungrounded.

The ontological approach seems to me to be the more promising. It is based on the following idea: to see what is essential to physics, look at the kinds of theoretical entities postulated by physics and ask what is essential to entities of those kinds. (I use ‘theoretical entity’ as an epistemological, not an ontological term: theoretical entities are entities such that our reasons for believing in them are theoretical.) When we do this, we find that the following things can be said about the theoretical entities of physics with such assurance that it seems reasonable to suppose that any possible future physics will postulate only entities that have these properties. First (whatever the ‘new pan-psychists’, people like David Chalmers, may try to tell us), nothing in the nature of these entities has anything to do with the mental: nothing in their nature pertains to personality, consciousness, or



intentionality. Human persons and all other entities that are conscious or have intentional states are complex, special, physically contingent structures composed of the fundamental entities postulated by physics. (It seems plausible to suppose that these structures will turn out to be very large relative to the fundamental entities. But this is uncertain: perhaps the fundamental entities are not the particles or tiny loops we are inclined to expect but all-pervasive fields or some such.) The mental properties of these complex structures must supervene on the properties of the entities physics postulates, of course, but those entities themselves do not have the least tincture of the mental about them. Just as the theoretical entities of physics are in no way alive (although all living things are ultimately composed of them), they in no way think or feel. The theoretical entities of physics, moreover, have no teleological properties. Even if certain complex structures entirely composed of these entities have ends or purposes or functions (even if the function of hearts is to pump blood, for example), teleology is in no way present in the theoretical entities that are the ultimate parts of these structures. Finally, these properties are numerically quantifiable. If, for example, the theoretical entities have mass or charge (properties that may not belong to the theoretical entities of future physics), one entity may have twice the charge or one-half the mass of another. And what applies to the properties of these entities applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the relations that they bear to one another. If, for example, one entity is separated from another by a certain space-time interval (a relation that may not figure in the theories of a future physics) – well, there is nothing mental or teleological about space-time intervals, and they have numerical measures.

Physicalism or naturalism may now be defined: nothing exists but (a) entities having such properties (non-mental, non-teleological, numerically quantifiable properties) and bearing such relations (non-mental, non-teleological, numerically quantifiable relations) to one another; and (b) composite objects that have these entities as their ultimate parts. Some among the mereological sums *may* have mental or teleological (and non-quantifiable) properties; whether they have such properties or not, their properties, *all* their properties, supervene on the properties of the entities that are their ultimate parts and the relations these ultimate parts bear to one another. The distribution of properties in any world depends on the distribution of properties among the ‘ultimate’ entities. As a matter of metaphysical necessity, two worlds that are alike in respect of the properties of and relations among their ultimate entities are alike in *every* respect. According to naturalism, the truth of what is expressed by any of the following sentences, supposing them to express truths, supervenes on the (non-mental, non-teleological, numerically quantifiable) properties of and the (non-mental, non-teleological, numerically quantifiable) relations that hold among the ultimate entities:

- Tokyo is the capital of Japan.
- Alice’s favorite color is blue.

- It is wrong to bear false witness against one's neighbor.
- There are at least half a million species of beetles.
- It's easier for a German to learn Dutch than it is for an Italian.
- Most mathematicians have a low opinion of mathematical logic.

There is one issue that divides naturalists that I will simply note. Some naturalists are unhappy about affirming the real existence of platonic or abstract entities (such as properties or propositions or mathematical objects like numbers or functions or tensors) and some are not. Rather than take sides in this dispute, I will simply insert one additional word into my statement of naturalism: 'Nothing *concrete* exists but . . . ' This is naturalism *simpliciter*. We may then say that there are two schools of naturalism: anti-platonic naturalism, which insists that there are no platonic entities, and the more liberal school, which simply does not worry about platonic entities (which, after all, have no causal powers) and happily allows quantification over them. One might, of course, worry about what the opposed pair of terms 'concrete' and 'abstract' mean, but this is a problem that confronts everyone with ontological interests, and there is no reason to suppose that a naturalist and a non-naturalist (or an anti-platonic and a 'liberal' naturalist) would disagree about the merits of any proposed way of making the abstract/concrete distinction clear.

This, then, is naturalism. I turn now to the topic of analytical philosophy. It used to be, until quite recently I think, that the general public, insofar as they were even vaguely aware of them, referred to analytical philosophers as logical positivists, whether they were logical positivists or not, rather as some people refer to citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as 'Englishmen'. And the label 'logical positivist' fits most analytical philosophers about as well as 'Englishman' fits a schoolgirl in the Scottish Highlands. Calling all analytical philosophers logical positivists is, in fact, even more misleading than calling all Britons Englishmen, for while lots of Britons are Englishmen, few if any of the analytical philosophers of the present day are logical positivists. The application of 'logical positivist' to analytical philosophers generally is important for our present concerns, because a commitment to naturalism (in the form of the following thesis, which the logical positivists shared with the nineteenth-century positivists: scientific knowledge is the only knowledge) really is an essential component of logical positivism. The logical positivists were, properly speaking, a school of philosophers that originated in Vienna in the 1920s. The members of this school were murdered or driven from the European continent by the Nazis (many of them were Jews; they were all liberals or socialists). Logical positivism in exile, so to call it, flourished briefly in the English-speaking countries till the late 1940s, and was then abandoned by its former adherents for purely philosophical reasons. (We should honor the logical positivists for this. I believe that logical positivism is the only important philosophical position to have been abandoned by its own inventors because rational argument convinced them that it was false.)

Although the widespread identification of analytical philosophy with logical positivism was an error, it was not an inexplicable error. Logical positivists *were* what came to be called analytical philosophers (just as Englishmen *are* Britons). No doubt a page of philosophy written by a Viennese logical positivist in the early 1930s and a page of philosophy written by any analytical philosopher in the early twenty-first century would seem very much the same sort of thing to those philosophers whose primary twentieth-century texts are Husserl and Heidegger. Analytical philosophy is not in any useful sense of the word a school of philosophy (like Thomism); it is rather a philosophical community, a community of philosophical discourse (like scholasticism). It is because the logical positivists (on the one hand) and present-day analytical philosophers (on the other) belong to the same community of philosophical discourse that their respective writings can seem very much the same sort of thing to members of other communities of philosophical discourse.

What, then, is that defines this philosophical community to which both present-day analytical philosophers and the logical positivists belong? One obvious answer to this question is that, as the phrase 'analytical philosophy' suggests, this community is defined by the fact that it assigns a central place in philosophy to something called 'analysis'. Let us examine this suggestion.

The post-war popularity of the term 'analytical philosophy' was largely a product of the popularity of a certain answer to a question that troubled anglophone philosophers in the 1950s: What is it that we philosophers *do*, anyway? This was not, of course, the first time in the history of philosophy that this question had been posed. But, like all perennial philosophical questions, it had been answered in different ways in different eras in the history of philosophy. The following answer has had its advocates in every era: philosophy provides a special kind of knowledge. But this answer immediately raises a second question: How is this knowledge related to the knowledge provided by the other sciences (or disciplines, as we should say today)? In the Middle Ages it was said that philosophy was the handmaiden of theology, the queen of the sciences. When physical science had become the queen of the sciences, many said that philosophy was the handmaiden of science (in the modern sense of science): if biology and chemistry and astronomy are the branches of the tree of human knowledge (Descartes said) and physics is its trunk, philosophy comprises its roots. Others said that philosophy was not an indoor but a rather less prestigious outdoor servant of the sciences, the under-laborer of the sciences, whose job was to clear away intellectual litter that might cause science to stumble or otherwise impede its progress. A further view, perhaps not held to be inconsistent with the under-laborer view, was that it was the business of philosophy to understand the sources of human knowledge. And there was always a school that assigned a much grander role to philosophy: Spinoza and Leibniz believed, as Plato had, that philosophy could produce, that it was the

business of philosophy to produce, a kind of knowledge that would exhibit the whole of reality as a rational system. Or was the business of philosophy (as still others said) to show what we, we thinkers and knowers, must be like if we have the kinds of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge that we know we have? Well, you know the story of these conceptions of the purpose or function of philosophy as well as I (in many cases, no doubt, much better). The point is: they eventually came to be seen as wholly unsatisfactory by many who reflected on the nature of philosophy. Just as philosophy came to be seen by many as unable to provide indisputable knowledge of God, freedom, and immortality (not to mention morality, knowledge, and all the other matters of concern philosophy had once claimed to provide indisputable knowledge of), philosophy came to be seen by many as unable to provide indisputable knowledge of (or indeed any halfway satisfactory account of) itself, its own nature and function.

In the 1950s, as I have said, some anglophone philosophers became interested in finding some little thing for philosophy to 'do' that would not run afoul of the claims and accomplishments of the physical and biological and behavioral sciences. (And their interest was not in finding something for philosophy to do such that it would be clear that this was what philosophy had always done. Their interest was in finding something that philosophers could do *from then on*; something for philosophers – that is, members of university faculties of philosophy – to retreat to and occupy themselves with, as one might say.) And this was their solution: The business of philosophers, the *proper* business of philosophers, the only thing philosophers should ever have been concerned with (admittedly, philosophers have had other concerns, much grander and more ambitious concerns, concerns whose disastrous consequences are amply illustrated in the history of philosophy), what philosophers do whenever they produce anything of lasting value, is the analysis of concepts. This was not the first time this thesis had been put forward; it had been a central thesis of logical positivism. The post-positivist philosophers (who were for the most part the same people who had been the positivist philosophers) retained the thesis but did not retain the theory of meaning that had led the logical positivists to maintain that the proper vocation of philosophy was the analysis of concepts. (It had led them by the scruff of the neck: the verification theory of meaning, the central dogma of logical positivism, left no possible vocation for philosophy other than the analysis of concepts, unless it were as a kind of non-cognitive poetry.) The post-positivist account of philosophy had thus no theoretical basis (according to itself, it could have had no basis but an analysis of the concept 'proper vocation of philosophy', since the question, What is the proper vocation of philosophy? is pretty evidently a philosophical question.) And it soon became evident that philosophers, even English-speaking philosophers who were paradigmatically analytical philosophers, were not going to abide by it. There were theoretical attacks on the idea; certainly the attack on the idea of analyticity in Quine's enormously influential

essay 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' was, among other things, an attack on this conception of philosophy, for, if there is an unproblematical notion of the analysis of concepts, there is an unproblematical notion of analyticity. Much more important to my mind, however, is the fact that analytical philosophers, paradigmatically analytical philosophers, simply refused to restrict their activities to the analysis of concepts. One remembers A.J. Ayer's sad reaction to Alvin Plantinga's Oxford lectures on modality: 'I've lived in vain.' And Plantinga was hardly an isolated case: it could hardly be said that the writings of Chisholm and Kripke and David Lewis contained nothing but the analysis of concepts. In a way, this was a pity: that the proper business of philosophy is the analysis of concepts is a nice theory and a fairly clear theory as philosophical theories go. And if that is what philosophy is, it seems plausible to say that *analytical* philosophy is philosophy that, as a matter of self-conscious methodology, restricts itself to philosophy's proper business, the analysis of concepts. The only trouble with this is that it isn't true. The proper business of philosophy is not coextensive with the analysis of concepts, and many central figures of the analytical movement have demonstrated by their choices of topics and methods that they do not understand philosophy in that way.

If analytical philosophy cannot be defined by reference to its supposed method, the analysis of concepts, might it be defined by reference to its historical roots? Well, perhaps, but those roots are various and tangled. We certainly can't say that analytical philosophy is philosophy that is wholly rooted in the native philosophy of the British Isles. (I say 'the native philosophy' to take account of the fact that for a significant part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, British philosophy looked to Germany for its fundamental ideas.) It has for some time now been uncontroversial that analytical philosophy cannot be defined as that philosophy that has its roots in British empiricism and the work of Moore and Russell. Michael Dummett has said that analytical philosophy, which is sometimes called Anglo-American philosophy, would be better called Anglo-Austrian philosophy. There is something to this. The work of Bolzano and Brentano and Meinong is of immense importance to an understanding of the history of analytical philosophy. (The Viennese logical positivists, those of them who *were* Austrians, were not so much Austrian philosophers as philosophers who were Austrians. And, although it is unfashionable to say this, I will say it: I think that this is also true of Wittgenstein.) And of course, we must not forget the contributions of the great Polish philosophers and logicians between the wars to analytical philosophy and the important post-war contributions of Danish and Swedish and Finnish philosophers. And then there is Frege. If Germany, speaking generally, has had little influence on analytical philosophy until very recently, no one is more important to the history of analytical philosophy than Frege – not Hume, not Moore, not Russell, not even Wittgenstein. The history of analytical philosophy is so complex and involves so much historical contingency – from the point of

view of the history of *philosophy*, the Nazi control of the universities in Germany and other countries of central Europe, the Second World War, and the Soviet control of the nations of central Europe, are matters of historical contingency – that it is very hard to base any account of analytical philosophy on its history.

In the end, I think, we can say only that, although we can make some remarks about analytical philosophy, we can give no useful account of its essence – if it has an essence. We can say nothing that is as helpful to someone who wants to know what analytical philosophy is as statements like ‘Analytical philosophy is philosophy that, as a matter of self-conscious methodology, restricts itself to the analysis of concepts’ or ‘Analytical philosophy is philosophy that has its roots in British empiricism and the work of Moore and Russell’ would be if only they were true. But we can, as I say, make some remarks:

- Analytical philosophy, as a general rule, aspires to clarity of expression. This does not of course mean that the writings of analytical philosophers are always clear. Wilfrid Sellars, for example, was an analytical philosopher if anyone ever was, and he was notoriously obscure. But he was *trying* to be clear. (Still, how much help is this? Almost everyone admits that a piece of philosophy may be *unavoidably* hard to understand because the things it is about are by their very natures hard to understand. Would Heidegger not tell us that his work is not unnecessarily difficult to read, that its difficulties are necessitated by his subject matter and the Forgetfulness of Being that has pervaded the European consciousness since Plato? I have seen scattered remarks by Sartre that indicate that he believed his own philosophical prose to be extremely clear.) But, as a general rule, analytical philosophers think that philosophical sentences should be as simple as possible and that words should be used in their everyday senses or else explicitly defined.
- Analytical philosophy, insofar as it draws on anything outside philosophy, draws on formal logic and mathematics and the physical and biological sciences (and to some measure from experimental psychology and linguistics). It does not, as a general rule, draw inspiration or material from literature or art or history or the more ‘humanistic’ parts of the human sciences. (I do not mean to imply that this is a fact that analytical philosophers should be proud of.)
- Analytical philosophy, insofar as it involves the defense of theses, places a high value on explicit argument, on pieces of text that are identified by the author as arguments and whose validity is to be judged by the rules of logic.
- Analytical philosophers have a particularly collegial relationship with the great philosophers of history. I mean this almost literally: analytical philosophers tend to regard Plato and Occam and Descartes as *colleagues*, albeit colleagues who labor under the burden of being dead. Let me

present the fictional Winifred to you. Winifred, although she is a fiction, is a typical analytical philosopher, and at the moment she is studying Kant's theory of freedom. To understand the relationship of this typical analytical philosopher to the history of philosophy, it is necessary to understand why she is studying Kant's theory of freedom. It is not because she is interested in Kant's philosophy *per se*; it is not because she is interested in the historical development of the idea of freedom; it is not because she wishes to study Hegel's theory of freedom and regards a mastery of Kant's theory of freedom as a prerequisite for that project; it is not because she is interested in contrasting the metaphysical understanding of freedom of a representative philosopher of the Enlightenment with a post-modern anti-metaphysical understanding of freedom. It is for a reason quite unlike any of these reasons. It is because Winifred is possessed of a childlike desire to understand the things to be found in the world, and one of these things is freedom. Her desire is that very desire mentioned in the famous first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. She wants to understand freedom, and she is reading Kant because she thinks he may have something to teach her about this freedom. She would like to know whether Kant's theory of freedom is true or partly true or wholly false. If you tell her that her quest for the truth about freedom is indeed childlike, that it is not possible to undertake a project of that sort in today's post-something-or-other world, she will only smile at you. She will smile and ignore you or she will smile and treat what you have said as a thesis that is open to debate and proceed to present arguments against it, for all the world as if it were a thesis about second intentions and the two of you were opponents in a disputation in a medieval university.

I should add that although Winifred is a typical analytical philosopher, she does not represent the way every analytical philosopher approaches the history of philosophy. There are, of course, analytical philosophers who are historians of philosophy, and there are some reputable analytical philosophers who have no interest at all in the history of philosophy. But even those analytical philosophers who are historians have a tendency to approach the history of philosophy in ways that many non-analytical historians of philosophy regard as having the wrong aim, even a perverse aim. One non-analytical historian once directed the following charge at a former colleague of mine, Jonathan Bennett (who had written two books on Kant): 'Bennett is interested in Kant only insofar as he can extract from his writings concepts and arguments that are relevant to the philosophical controversies of the present day; he has no interest in Kant's philosophy itself.' Analytical philosophers (like the fictional Winifred or the real Jonathan Bennett) will reply that they know what it is to be interested in philosophical problems about space and time and knowledge *a priori* and causation, and they will say that they can understand why someone who was interested in these

things might be interested in what Kant had to say about them – but, they will say, they are less clear about what it is to be interested in something called ‘Kant’s philosophy itself’. And, they will go on to say, if there is such an interest as an interest in Kant’s philosophy itself, it is not a philosophical interest. After all, what *Kant* was interested in was philosophical problems about space and time and causation, and so on; *he* never wrote about anything called ‘Kant’s philosophy itself’. And, although Kant tells us that the philosophy of David Hume awakened him from his dogmatic slumbers, he was not interested in ‘Hume’s philosophy itself’. He was, rather, interested in what Hume’s philosophy was *about*. In this respect, at least, Kant was the reader Hume wrote for. Hume did not write for students of the philosophy of David Hume. He wrote for students of human nature and the human understanding. Analytical philosophers are (in this respect) like Kant and like Hume and like most other pre-Hegelian philosophers. When they read Plato or Occam or Descartes, their primary interest is not (not typically, at any rate) the philosophies of Plato or Occam or Descartes. Their primary interest lies rather in what the philosophies of Plato and Occam and Descartes were *about*.

This, then, is analytical philosophy, or as much as I am going to say about it. What is of central importance for this conference in what I have said about analytical philosophy is that, if what I have said is right, then being an analytical philosopher does not involve commitment to any philosophical doctrine. An analytical philosopher may be a platonic realist or a nominalist, may affirm or deny the freedom of the will, may believe in or deny the existence of an immaterial soul, may make the most dogmatic claims to knowledge or may embrace a thoroughgoing scepticism. An analytical philosopher may regard metaphysics as an illusion or be the most determined and ardent defender and practitioner of metaphysics imaginable. A philosopher may take any position on any philosophical question and still be an analytical philosopher in good standing. And this generalization applies to positions about the reality of a supernatural order. An analytical philosopher may (as I do) recite the Nicene Creed with conviction every Sunday or regard the Nicene Creed as an absurd vestige of a pernicious and dying superstition: nothing in the nature of analytical philosophy lends any support whatever to either of these positions. Analytical philosophy, by its very nature, is neither the friend nor the enemy of supernaturalism. And, by the same token, analytical philosophy can be neither the friend nor the enemy of naturalism.