

The Rise of the Term “Analytic Philosophy” in Britain in the Early 1930s and Its Contemporary Evolution Conceptual Creativity and Conceptual Engineering¹

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ABSTRACT Ernest Nagel’s two-part article entitled “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe” undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development of analytic philosophy in both Europe and the United States. Nagel articulates the shared metaphilosophical assumptions embraced by philosophers from various centres, including Prague, Vienna, Lviv, Warsaw, and Cambridge. Nevertheless, it is important to note that philosophers began to describe themselves using the term “analytical philosopher,” or a similar term, particularly within the intellectual centre of Cambridge, in the early 1930s in Britain.

In this article, I shall compare how these philosophers conceptualized “analytic philosophy” with the metaphilosophical assumptions outlined by Nagel. Then, I shall draw a comparison between the understanding of analytic philosophy in the early 1930s in Britain, and contemporary conceptions such as “conceptual creativity” and “conceptual engineering.” As it turns out, a part of contemporary analytic philosophy is more open to social-practical issues than it was in the early 1930s in Britain, especially in the intellectual centre that was Cambridge.

KEYWORDS analytic philosophy; Cambridge School of Analysis; conceptually creative; conceptual engineering; metaphilosophy; Vienna Circle

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INTRODUCTION

The term “analytic philosophy,” or a closely related one, appeared in the early 1930s, when some philosophers began to describe themselves as such.² It is worth noting that this trend was particularly noticeable among British philosophers affiliated with the Cambridge School of Analysis. One of the first philosophers associated with this intellectual centre to employ this term in the 1930s³ was John Terence Dibben Wisdom (see Beaney 2013, 42; Wisdom 1931; 1934),⁴ and S.L. Stebbing (1930; 1932; 1933)⁵ also made a significant contribution to the development of this movement (Beaney 2003; Beaney & Chapman 2022). Additionally, of particular interest in this context is Oxford’s A.J. Ayer (1936a) with his essay “The Analytic Movement in Contemporary British Philosophy.” In that paper, he distinguishes the “analytic movement” centred in Cambridge from the philosophical considerations carried out within the Vienna Circle (Ayer 1936a, 57).

The most significant contribution to identifying philosophers as “analytic philosophers” in Europe was Ernest Nagel’s (1936a; 1936b) two-part article “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe.” This work provides an intellectual account of his journey through Europe in 1934–1935 and articulates the widespread metaphilosophical assumptions present in the centres where “analytic philosophy” was practised. It thus raises an interesting question about the origin of the term. It is worth noting that Nagel highly valued his interactions with Stebbing, attended Wisdom’s lectures, and listened to Ayer’s speech within the Aristotelian Society (see Verhaegh 2022). It seems reasonable to conduct a comparative analysis of how these philosophers might have understood “analytic

2. Although it is worth noting that this term appeared in 19th century philosophy, we would not consider that use to be close to its contemporary equivalent. I shall discuss this at the beginning of Section 2.

3. Beaney also highlights the fact that the term emerged in Robin George Collingwood’s *An Essay on Philosophical Method* of 1933, in which he critiques Moore’s and Stebbing’s approaches to the analysis of knowledge. As Beaney points out, there is in that work already a contemporary understanding of the term, while terms denoting philosophical positions often arise when we aim to criticize them (Beaney 2013, 42–43).

4. It is worth noting that from 1929 to 1934 Wisdom was a lecturer in the Department of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of St. Andrews. After publishing *Interpretation and Analysis* (1931), and a series of five articles on “Logical Constructions” (1931–1933), he was appointed as a lecturer at Cambridge and a member of Trinity College (see Milkov 2019, §1).

5. It is worth adding that despite working at Bedford College in London, Stebbing is associated with the Cambridge School of Analysis (Baldwin 2013). It is important to stress that G.E. Moore had a considerable influence on her work. Additionally, her *alma mater* was Girton College, Cambridge.

philosophy,” taking into consideration the metaphilosophical assumptions presented by Nagel.

In contemporary philosophy we encounter a certain focus on the idea that part of the history of analytic philosophy could be considered through the prism of “conceptual engineering” (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020) or “conceptual creativity” (Beaney 2017; 2018), where this includes the work of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap and Stebbing. It will surely be worthwhile to compare how analytic philosophy is currently conceived in terms of ideas about conceptual creativity and conceptual engineering with how it was understood in the early 1930s in Britain. To this end, I shall refer to Michael Beaney’s book on analytic philosophy (2017), and his article on creativity in analytic philosophy (2018), as well as to Cappelen and Plunkett’s introduction to a volume on conceptual engineering (Burgess, Cappelen & Plunkett 2020). For the purposes of analysis, I shall note that the concept of “conceptual creativity” is broader and encompasses various different projects within conceptual engineering.⁶ The models of analysis developed by Beaney (2021)—decompositional, regressive and interpretative—may also prove useful in this context.

Thus, this paper is structured as follows: in the first section, I shall describe the metaphilosophical assumptions presented by Nagel in his seminal 1936 article, and briefly report on his journey around Europe. In the second section, I shall describe the contributions of Wisdom, Stebbing and Ayer to the discussion of “analytic philosophy.” I shall compare their assumptions from the early 1930s with those articulated by Nagel.

This analysis does not fully confirm Nagel’s observation in the context of the Cambridge School of Analysis. While this intellectual centre was characterised by its emphasis on methods of analysis, it is doubtful whether it placed as much emphasis on elucidating the meaning and implications of the empirical sciences and on collaborative work, which were more characteristic of logical positivism. On the other hand, the approach of common-sense naturalism was not typical of the Vienna Circle philosophers, being more characteristic of those from Cambridge. Common-sense naturalism can already be viewed as a “philosophical” attitude towards reality. Nevertheless, such an analysis will shed light on the understanding of “analytic philosophy” in Britain in the early 1930s.

In the third section, I shall describe the concept of conceptual creativity in analytic philosophy, mention some projects from conceptual engineering,

6. I will be referring not only to conceptual engineering, but also to what is known in the literature as *re-engineering*, or ameliorative projects. More on this in Section 3.

and discuss emerging subdisciplines such as social epistemology and social ontology. I shall then compare how analytic philosophy was understood in the early 1930s with how it is perceived today through the lens of these concepts. Based on this comparison, I shall indicate that contemporary analytic philosophy is more open to social-practical issues than it was in the early 1930s in Britain, especially within the Cambridge School of Analysis.

1. THE METAPHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE 1930s

Nagel was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in order to spend a year in Europe to familiarise himself with the continent's latest philosophical trends. From August 1934 to July 1935 he embarked on a journey. He visited various academic centres, including Prague, Vienna, Lviv, Warsaw and Cambridge. Upon returning, he played a crucial role in disseminating European philosophical research among American readers. He authored published reviews of works by philosophers like Rudolf Carnap (1935), Hans Reichenbach (1936c), Alfred Tarski (1938a) and Max Black (1938b).

However, the most significant achievement from this period is Nagel's (1936a, 1936b) two-part article entitled "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe," which was published in *The Journal of Philosophy*. Despite the diverse philosophical approaches found in these centres, Nagel observed similarities in terms of the method and doctrine that characterised philosophy in these regions. Undoubtedly, this paper stands as the first presentation of the shared metaphilosophical assumptions of analytic philosophy across these centres during the 1930s (1936a, 6–8):

- (1) Proponents of this approach ascribe paramount importance to the empirical sciences.
- (2) Within this philosophy, there is a growing emphasis on the development of a method of philosophical analysis. Additionally, it is recommended that philosophy be practised collaboratively and that its results be open to discussion.
- (3) "Analytical philosophers" frequently ignore the history of philosophy since they view it as a compilation of flawed philosophical concepts, arguments, and poorly executed conceptual distinctions.
- (4) This philosophy follows a perspective named "common-sense naturalism," which regards the daily world not as an illusion; therefore, in their considerations, they do not seem to focus on radical scepticism.

The first point (1), which I shall refer to as the *limitation of philosophy*, illustrates that philosophers from these centres acknowledge that the empirical sciences provide an accurate description of the world:

The men with whom I have talked are impatient with philosophic systems built in the traditionally grand manner. Their preoccupation is with philosophy as analysis; they take for granted a body of authentic knowledge acquired by the special sciences and are concerned not with adding to it in the way research in these sciences adds to it, but with clarifying its meaning and implications. Philosophy for these men holds out no promise of settling questions that only the empirical sciences are competent to settle, nor does it assume the function of legislating what sort of things are permissible or possible for the empirical sciences to investigate (Nagel 1936a, 6).

In the above quote, it is emphasized that proponents of the analytic approach attribute great importance to the empirical sciences. In this context, philosophers do not aim to add new knowledge to the empirical sciences, but focus instead on elucidating the meaning and implications of scientific knowledge.⁷

The second point (2) focuses on methodological issues. Within this philosophy, the aim is to develop a proper *method*. Additionally, Nagel emphasizes that this philosophy engages in collaboration, where results are treated as subject to continuous discussion: “Among many of these men there is a constant exchange of ideas and a cooperative attack on problems, which is still rare in philosophy, however common it may be in the physical sciences” (Nagel 1936a, 6).

The third point (3), which I shall call the *anti-historical perspective*, stems from the intention of philosophers to distance themselves from the previous approach to philosophy, which relied heavily on appeals to the history of philosophy. Thus, in the “analytic philosophy” of the 1930s, “the great figures of the history of philosophy and the traditional problems associated with them receive only negative attention” (Nagel 1936a, 7).

7. It is worth noting that Carnap, a prominent representative of logical positivism, firmly rejected the view that philosophy provides knowledge about the world. He believed that the activity of discovering the world is the task of the scientist, whereas the role of philosophy is to be a higher-order activity that organizes and systematizes this first-order knowledge, as Peter Hylton has described (Hylton 2007, 6). To my mind, this distinction between first-order knowledge and philosophy as a higher-order activity illuminates what is at stake in point (1) of Nagel’s discussion of the importance of the empirical sciences.

The fourth point (4), which following Nagel I shall refer to as *common-sense naturalism*, means that they do not consider the everyday world to be an illusion, nor do they believe that science or philosophy reveals a contrasting reality, and they do not seem to be interested in the issue of radical scepticism.

At first glance, points (1) and (4) may seem indistinguishable. However, the difference between them lies in the fact that the former concerns the role and *limitations of philosophy* in relation to the empirical sciences, whereas the latter focuses on the philosophical approach to everyday reality and its alignment with *common-sense naturalism*. The first is characteristic of logical positivism, while the second is characteristic of G.E. Moore and the philosophers from Cambridge. Point (4) already expresses a “philosophical” stance towards reality, whereas point (1) asserts that it is the sciences that actually describe the nature of the world, and philosophy does not contribute any new knowledge in this regard.

Construed as corresponding to points (1)–(4) above, analytic philosophy emerges in the 1930s as a movement practised in an “academic” manner, avoiding the endorsement of dogmas about the meaning of life or the role of religion in human existence. Its primary aim is to provide philosophers with the intellectual tools necessary to question and undermine these dogmas. Nagel outlines the functions of analytic philosophy as follows:

Analytic philosophy has a double function. It provides quite green pastures for intellectual analysis, wherein its practitioners can find refuge from a troubled world and cultivate their intellectual games with chess-like indifference to its course. It is also a keen, shining sword helping to dispel irrational beliefs and to make evident the structure of ideas. It is at once the pastime of a recluse and a terribly serious adventure. It aims to make as clear as possible what it is we really know (Nagel 1936a, 9).

The philosophy thus conceived stood in opposition to speculative philosophy. Furthermore, it is worth noting that, according to the popular historical narrative, analytic philosophy emerged in response to neo-idealism in Britain, as a reaction to existentialism and phenomenology in Germany and Austria, and as a counter to modernist and romantic tendencies in Poland.⁸

8. A quite interesting work that points out the similarities and differences between analytic and continental philosophy is *Analytic versus Continental: Arguments of the Methods and Value of Philosophy* (2010) by James Chase and Jack Reynolds. Also, Hans-Johann Glock (2008) writes about the similarities between these two traditions in *What is Analytic Philosophy?*

1.1. Historical Background: Some Remarks⁹

The metaphilosophical theses (1)–(4) are descriptive rather than normative. They are based on Nagel’s experiences while visiting intellectual centres in Europe. On August 18, 1934, he arrived in France, and subsequently had a meeting with the Unity of Science movement in Prague (see Verhaegh 2022, 54). He also had brief meetings with Reichenbach and Carnap, with the latter having the greatest influence on him. It is worth emphasizing that before his departure, Nagel was already familiar with the works of members of the Vienna Circle. He was the first American to publish an article in *Erkenntnis* (1931). Nagel also cited the works of Moritz Schlick and Reichenbach (Nagel 1929; 1930), with the latter’s works influencing him during his studies.¹⁰

Following his time in Prague, Nagel spent some months in Vienna, Warsaw and Lviv, before returning to Prague to meet with Carnap again. During his initial weeks abroad, he read Carnap’s (1934) *Logische Syntax der Sprache* (see Verhaegh 2022, 54). It was in Prague that Carnap explained to him his views on ontology and syntax from that book. Nagel, in a letter to Sidney Hook, even described himself as being “under the influence of the positivists,” and wondered whether Carnap’s approach offered a stronger foundation for naturalism than the “muddy” philosophy of his teachers, John Dewey and Morris R. Cohen (see Verhaegh 2022, 54). He departed from Prague in early December and returned to Austria, where he had two meetings with the Vienna Circle.

Nagel then spent the first four months of 1935 in France and Italy with his future wife, the physicist Edith Haggstrom, during which period he did not engage in any philosophical activities. Later, he also paid a brief visit to the Netherlands, where he had meetings with Arend Heyting and Otto Neurath.

However, the most significant aspect for this article is that Nagel spent his final period in Europe in Cambridge. He is considered the “holy of

9. This short account of Nagel’s stay in Europe is based on Sander Verhaegh’s (2022) paper, “Nagel’s Philosophical Development.”

10. This is how Nagel wrote about Reichenbach in his memoirs: “I ... studied with enormous profit *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre* shortly after the book appeared in 1928... Here is a philosopher after my own heart, I remember thinking, who takes seriously the classical conception of the task of philosophy to provide a solidly based interpretation of science and its logic” (Nagel 1978, 42). The literature notes that while it is unclear whether Reichenbach’s works directly influenced Nagel’s development, there are connections between their views and research interests (see Verhaegh 2022, 51). For instance, both were interested in aspects of conventionalism in science (e.g., Nagel 1929; Reichenbach 1928), and both defended a frequentist interpretation of probability (e.g., Nagel 1933; Reichenbach 1932).

holies in philosophy,” due to his association with Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, the authors of *Principia Mathematica* (1911–1913). During his time in Cambridge, Nagel attended lectures by Moore, Wisdom, and C.D. Broad, but he was disappointed by what is known as the Cambridge School of Analysis. In one of his letters to Hook (May 26, 1935), he reported the following:

I ... must say that on the whole I am disappointed. It is just analysis after analysis, but nothing seems to come out of it, and in the end they are less clear what it is they really mean than in the beginning (cited in Verhaegh 2022, 56).

In that same letter, he wrote that while some people consider Wittgenstein a genius, he would like to see evidence for that (see Verhaegh 2022, 56). He became disillusioned with him.¹¹

However, during his time in England, Nagel had several positive experiences. He thoroughly enjoyed talking with Stebbing, and was particularly impressed by the talk given by Ayer and Max Black at a gathering of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association (see Verhaegh 2022, 56).

Nagel returned to New York in July 1935, and authored the articles in which he discussed “analytic philosophy” and “logical empiricism” in Europe. He published the two-part “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe.” It is worth stressing that he uses the term “analytic philosophy” eight times in his article. This is the first paper to employ the term “analytic philosophy” in its main title (Beaney 2013, 44). In this article, Nagel criticised the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Moore, while admiring Carnap’s approach. The publication appears to have contributed to a more favourable reception of Carnap’s philosophy in the United States (see Verhaegh 2022, 57).¹²

However, Wisdom, associated with the Cambridge School of Analysis, appears to have been one of the first in early-1930s Britain to use this term to designate a specific group of philosophers (see Beaney 2013).¹³ Stebbing made a significant contribution to the development of this movement, while Ayer used the term “analytic movement” to characterise certain

11. As he wrote in his letter to Hook, Wittgenstein is said to have refused permission for him to attend his lectures (see Verhaegh 2022, 56).

12. Even so, it is worth noting that a still more significant influence on the reception of Carnap’s philosophy might have been Willard Van Orman Quine, who visited Carnap in Prague in 1933. Upon his return, he penned an enthusiastic review of Carnap’s work *Syntax* (Quine 1935). Additionally, he delivered a series of lectures on his philosophy at Harvard.

13. In particular, this refers to Russell (1905) and his theory of descriptions.

philosophers working in Cambridge. The aim of the next section of this paper will be to outline their conception of “analytic philosophy,” and then compare it with Nagel’s articulated metaphilosophical assumptions (1)–(4). The comparison is interesting because Nagel had conversations with and listened to the British philosophers during his stay in Cambridge.

2. THE USAGE OF THE TERM “ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY” IN THE EARLY 1930s
It is worth noting that the term “analytic philosophy” originated in Britain in the 19th century. John Stuart Mill ([1843] 1974, 112), for example, described John Locke as “the undisputed founder of the analytic philosophy of mind.” Yet, it is difficult to classify Locke as an “analytic philosopher” in the same sense as Moore, Wittgenstein, or Carnap (cf. Frost-Arnold 2017, 32).

Another example of its usage can be found in Shadsworth H. Hodgson’s (1876) work on philosophy and science, published in the first volume of *Mind*. In this work, Hodgson divided philosophy into two branches: the constructive approach, which involves formulating hypotheses and concepts, and the analytic approach, which subjects these hypotheses and concepts to philosophical analysis. It is interesting because Hodgson associated the latter with metaphysics. However, this conception differs from the contemporary conception of “analytic philosophy” (see Szubka 2009, 12).

It is also worth noting that Thomas Case (1888), a proponent of realism, used the term “analytical philosophy” in the subtitle of his book from the end of the 19th century, *Physical Realism Being an Analytical Philosophy from the Physical Objects of Science to the Physical Data of Sense*. In the literature, it is emphasized that Russell and Moore made significant contributions to combating neo-idealism and laying the groundwork for analytic philosophy as an analytical tradition. However, thanks to criticisms, including those by Case in Oxford, neo-idealism was already in decline (Beaney 2013, 40).¹⁴ Additionally, it is worth emphasizing that Case used the term “analytic philosophy” in the subtitle of the book, something that Russell and Moore did not.

Russell did not identify himself as an “analytic philosopher,” but rather as one sympathetic to logical positivism (see Frost-Arnold 2017, 39). In his 1940 work, *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, he expressed a favourable stance towards logical positivism, stating that “[a]s will be evident to the reader, I am, as regards method, more in sympathy with *logical positivism* than any other existing school” (1940, 7).

14. Francis Herbert Bradley was among the Oxford idealists who were active during this period. However, it was Thomas Hill Green who, in the latter half of the 19th century, played a significant role in Oxford, establishing neo-idealism as an academic philosophy.

Nevertheless, he often used terms such as “logico-analytic philosophy,” “analytic method,” “analytic type” or “analysis.” These terms can be found, at least, in the works and lectures stretching up to the 1930s mentioned below. In 1911 he gave a lecture entitled “Analytic Realism” at *the Société Française de Philosophie*, and in his 1914 book entitled *Our Knowledge of the External World*, he referred to it as “logico-analytic philosophy.” He also used the term “the analytic type” in his 1922 review, “Analytic and Synthetic Philosophers” (Russell [1922] 1988). In this work, he pointed out the methodological differences between Moore’s work and Karin Stephen’s study of Bergson’s philosophy (see Potter 2018, 307). Furthermore, in his 1924 review article entitled “Philosophy of the Twentieth Century,” he associated “realism” with the analytic method and metaphysical pluralism as one of the currents within academic philosophy (Russell [1924] 1988). Moreover, the term “analysis” appeared in the titles of two of his books in the 1920s: *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) and *The Analysis of Matter* (1927).

Meanwhile, the term “analytic philosophy” is absent from Moore’s works, although he made significant contributions to the development of considerations regarding methods of analysis and had a huge impact on the generation of philosophers from the Cambridge School of Analysis (see Baldwin 2013). However, he strongly protested when a member of this school, Wisdom, used the phrase “Moore’s account of philosophy as analysis” in the article “Moore’s Technique” (Wisdom 1942, 425). In response, Moore reportedly wrote, “But it is not true that I have ever either said or thought, or implied that analysis is the only proper business of philosophy” (see Baldwin 2013, 440; Moore 1942, 675–76).

On the other hand, the manifesto entitled *Die Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung, Der Wiener Kreis* by the Vienna Circle (1929) focuses more on the notions of “scientific philosophy” or “scientific world-conception” than “analytic philosophy.”¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that Carnap, during the early 1930s and later years, also did not identify himself as an “analytical philosopher.” Significant is the letter that Carnap wrote to Quine on July 28, 1935, inquiring about the translation of one of his courses and mentioning that Nagel suggested using the term “analytic philosophy”:¹⁶

Thanks for your suggestions concerning the titles of my courses. As to the elementary one, Nagel wrote me that there are difficulties in translating “wissenschaftliche Philosophie”; therefore, he proposes “analytic philosophy.”

15. It is worth noting that philosophers in the Lvov-Warsaw School tended more towards the term “scientific philosophy” (see Szubka 2022).

16. In his autobiography, Carnap (1963) emphasized that he never employed the term “analytic philosophy.”

But I should not like this title very much. Would you think that “Introduction to Scientific Philosophy” would not be quite suitable? Does it sound for American ears as meaning “Philosophy of Natural Sciences,” which of course would be—though not quite false—nevertheless too narrow. Or how would you translate “wissenschaftliche Philosophie”? (see Creath 1990, 181)

This letter was written at the end of July 1935, when Nagel had already returned to New York after spending time in Cambridge.

2.1. *Wisdom*

In the early 1930s, philosophers in Britain, particularly those at Cambridge, began to refer to themselves as “analytic philosophers.” As previously mentioned, Wisdom was among the first leading philosophers of the Cambridge School of Analysis to utilize the term “analytic philosophers.” This is evidenced by his 1931 publication, *Interpretation and Analysis in Relation to Bentham’s Theory of Definition* (see Beaney 2013, 42; Wisdom 1931, 13–15). It is important to emphasize that in this work he does not define the philosophical movement itself, but uses the term in the context of Jeremy Bentham’s method, which Wisdom refers to as “paraphrase.” This method involves employing contextual definitions to eliminate references to unwanted entities:

that sort of exposition which may be afforded by transmuting into a proposition, having for its subject some real entity, a proposition which has not for its subject any other than a fictitious entity (Bentham 1843, 246, cited in Wisdom 1931, 92).

Wisdom argues that this method anticipated Russell’s theory of descriptions (1905), as presented in his article “On Denoting,” published in *Mind* (see Beaney 2013, 44). In a broader sense, Russell’s method can be outlined as follows:¹⁷

- (TD1) The present King of France is bald.
- (TD2) There is one and only one King of France, and whoever is King of France is bald.
- (TD3) $(\exists x)\{Kx \wedge (\forall y)[Ky \rightarrow (y = x) \wedge Bx]\}$.

According to Russell, the grammatical form of the sentence (TD1) is misleading as it implies that even if there is no King of France, there must still be

17. When discussing the theory of descriptions, I refer to Beaney’s (2021) entry on “Analysis” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. More specifically, I refer to the section titled “Conceptions of Analysis in Analytic Philosophy,” which is a supplement to the main entry on “Analysis.”

some “entity” that refers to it. Nevertheless, paraphrasing sentence (TD1) into (TD2) does not reveal these ontological commitments, while (TD3) represents a formalization of (TD2). Thus, until the 1930s, the theory of descriptions was regarded by philosophers as a paradigm of analysis (Ramsay [1929] 1990, 1).

Returning to Wisdom’s (1931) work, he first wrote about “logico-analytic philosophers” (13), and then about “analytic philosophers” (15), whose analysis does not solely focus on language but also on presenting the results of these analyses in systems of symbols (15). Furthermore, in the paper we are discussing, he presents analytic philosophers as those who understand “analysis” to refer to the analysis of facts we already know (see Beaney 2013, 42; Wisdom 1931, 15).

Wisdom, in fact, primarily used the term “analytic philosophers” to refer to those who practiced philosophy in this manner at Cambridge. He understood analytic philosophy more narrowly than Nagel. Thus, regarding (1) the limitation of philosophy, Nagel was describing the assumptions adopted by the logical positivists rather than the Cambridge philosophers. Within the Vienna Circle, the role of the empirical sciences and the limitations of philosophy were emphasized.

However, regarding point (2), both would agree that an analytic philosopher is someone who focuses on the method of analysis. Yet, one might have reservations because Nagel also mentioned working “collaboratively” in point (2), which was more characteristic of the regular meetings of the Vienna Circle. Regarding point (4), Wisdom did not write explicitly about common-sense naturalism or scepticism; however, he focused on the idea of engaging in the analysis of facts we already know.

In another important work, *Problems of Mind and Matter*, Wisdom (1934, 1) states: “it is to analytic philosophy that this book is intended to be an introduction.” In this publication, he had already made a clear distinction between the speculative and the analytical approaches to philosophy. He categorised issues such as “What is the ultimate nature of the soul?” or “What is the ultimate nature of matter, time and space?” as falling under speculative philosophy. In contrast, analytic philosophy does not have a special subject matter: “You can philosophise about Tuesday, the pound sterling, and lozenges and philosophy itself. This is because the analytic philosopher, unlike the scientist, is not one who learns new truths, but one who gains new insight into old truths” (Wisdom 1934, 2).¹⁸

18. It is also worth noting that this quote appeared in Arthur Pap’s book *Elements of Analytic Philosophy* (1949), which significantly contributed to the popularization of the term “analytic philosophy” after World War II. The quote appeared towards the end of the book (Pap 1949,

In a subsequent step, Wisdom discusses two methods of teaching philosophy: one can either teach philosophy through practical application, demonstrating how to apply methods to solve problems, or teach the history of philosophy. In his book, Wisdom is primarily interested in the former approach, which is typically favoured by practitioners. This is his perspective on the matter as expressed in the book:

My performance will (I trust) give the reader some idea of what the goal of the analytic philosopher is and how it is reached. I can, of course, say here and now that (i) the goal of the analytic philosopher is insight into facts; and that (ii) insight is clear apprehension of the ultimate structure of facts; and that (iii) the structure of a fact is clearly apprehended when one apprehends clearly the form, the elements, and the arrangement of the elements of that fact (Wisdom 1934, 3).

In the book under discussion, Wisdom focuses on the *method* of analysis, showing how it can be applied to mind and matter, thus viewing analytic philosophy through the lens of point (2). However, it is worth noting that point (3), the *anti-historical perspective*, is also present. Wisdom portrays analytic philosophy as a practical approach focused on problem-solving rather than relying on the history of philosophy.

While Wisdom does not explicitly defend “common sense” or criticize scepticism in his work, there are fragments that implicitly support the former and reject the latter. He notes in the “Preface” to the first edition of his book that his analysis of perception is based on the works of Moore (Wisdom 1934, vii). Meanwhile, in the “Preface” to the paperback edition of 1963, an interesting note regarding knowledge appears:

Consider—the following propositions: (1) Mathematics is magnificent but it isn’t knowledge. (2) History is magnificent but it isn’t knowledge. (3) All our so called knowledge of the minds of others isn’t knowledge. (4) All our so called knowledge of material things isn’t knowledge. In the case of each of these propositions one may notice that its contradictory is correct and that therefore any argument for it must involve a *non sequitur*. (Wisdom 1963, v)

In this passage, Wisdom argues that scepticism about these fields of knowledge is unjustified. He points out that the contradictory of each sceptical proposition is actually correct, implying that any argument

478), but without a specific source attribution. Tadeusz Szubka hypothesizes that Pap might have borrowed this term from Wisdom (Szubka 2009, 13).

supporting these sceptical views must involve a logical fallacy, specifically a *non sequitur*.

2.2. Stebbing

Stebbing was a significant contributor to the development of analytic philosophy in the 1930s, but her involvement is often overlooked in historical studies (see Beaney 2013, 43). She authored a textbook entitled *A Modern Introduction to Logic*, published in 1930,¹⁹ where she elaborated on the application of logical tools, including the theory of descriptions and the logical achievements of Russell and Alfred North Whitehead from *Principia Mathematica*.²⁰

According to Beaney (2013, 43; Beaney & Chapman 2022, §2), this book can be considered the first textbook on analytic philosophy. Based on this remark, Stebbing can be regarded as the first, before Wisdom, to write a textbook on analytic philosophy.

Interestingly, she did not use the terms “analytic philosophy” or “analytic philosopher” in her official papers in the early 1930s. Indeed, her focus was on metaphilosophical considerations pertaining to methods of analysis. Two of her papers hold particular importance in this regard: “The Method of Analysis in Metaphysics” (Stebbing 1932) and “Logical Positivism and Analysis” (Stebbing 1933). These articles are historically significant as they present the methodological assumptions of the philosophers of the Cambridge School of Analysis and compare them to the methodological assumptions put forth by members of the Vienna Circle. However, what is particularly interesting is that in 1938, in the article “Some Puzzles about Analysis,” which reflects on the works mentioned above, she used the term “analytic philosophers” (Stebbing 1938, 84).²¹

19. The first edition was already published in 1930, and the second edition, which was revised, followed in 1933. In the 1960s, reprints of the editions were released.

20. The book consists of three parts. The first presents the tools of the analytic philosopher, including names, descriptions, logical form, the theory of descriptions, inference, and implication, and gives an account of syllogistic theory. In the second, she discusses scientific methodology, covering induction and causality. The third part includes discussions of definition, abstraction, and the nature and historical development of logic.

21. She used this term in the following context: “However, Duncan-Jones himself considers that the analytic philosophers (anyhow up to July 1937) sought to tell every one what they really meant by what they said. I have given reasons for disagreeing with this, at least so far as new-level analysis is concerned. I should myself say that the purpose of analysis as practiced by philosophers is to enable us to learn how to avoid asking misleading questions to which we are only too likely to find senseless answers and to encourage us to ask sensible questions” (Stebbing 1938, 84).

In her articles “The Method of Analysis in Metaphysics” and “Logical Positivism and Analysis” she thus presented the “metaphysical” or “reductive” analysis that characterised the Cambridge School of Analysis. She contrasted this method with “paraphrase,” which can be associated with the theory of descriptions. The distinctions between “metaphysical” and “paraphrase” analysis were made under the influence of Wisdom (see Beaney 2003, 340). The difference between these methods is as follows: in the paraphrase, simply put, the sentence (TD₁) was translated into (TD₂) to unveil its proper logical form and thereby avoid ontological commitments to unwanted entities. On the other hand, by means of reductive analysis, the objective was to identify the “ultimate constituents” of our propositions—the primitive elements making up the “facts” that these propositions represent.

In her article, “The Method of Analysis in Metaphysics,” she expounded on the concept of “metaphysical analysis.” Within this method, she identified three main assumptions: one logical and two metaphysical (see Beaney 2003, 340; Beaney & Chapman 2022, §3; Stebbing 1932, 85):²²

- (a) If *p* is to be analysed, then *p* must be understood. It follows that there is at least one expression that unambiguously expresses *p*.
- (b) If *p* is to be analysed, then it is not always the case that *p* is known to be false, and it is sometimes the case that *p* is known to be true.
- (c) Directional analysis is possible.

The assumption (a) is obvious in symbolic analysis (Beaney 2003, 340), as it states that less clear expressions should be expressed in a clearer manner: for example, using symbolic language from logic.

Assumptions (b) and (c) have a metaphysical character. Assumption (b), known as the Moorean one, asserts that every process of analysis must assume that the proposition we are attempting to analyse can be known to be true.²³ As for assumption (c), the key premise is that there exist elementary facts upon which all the facts referred to by true propositions are based. The aim of the analysis is to uncover these facts. We can see here the influence of Russell’s and the early Wittgenstein’s logical atomism. According to Stebbing, what sets metaphysical analysis apart from symbolic analysis is the notion that analysis has a “direction,” with the aim of

22. In my paper, I refer to the presentation given in Beaney (2003) and by Beaney and Chapman (2022), as these authors offer a concise rendition of this analysis in their publications.

23. It is worth noting that it is not only metaphysical but also partially epistemological (see Beaney and Chapman 2022, §3).

reaching the “ultimate constituents” of the world. To achieve this, reductive analysis, rather than mere “paraphrasing” or “translating,” is required. Stebbing asserts that examples of directional analysis can be found in Moore’s works. Additionally, in the Cambridge School of Analysis, paraphrase (a) and reductive analysis (b–c) were combined (see Beaney 2003, 340).

In her article “Logical Positivism and Analysis” Stebbing criticizes the methodological assumptions of Wittgenstein and the philosophers associated with the Vienna Circle:

In my opinion Logical Positivism fails in its treatment of analysis. Wittgenstein and the other Logical Positivists talk much about analysis, but they do not consider the various kinds of analysis, nor do they show in what sense philosophy is the analysis of facts. They make use of analytic definition of a symbolic expression, and of the analytic clarification of a concept, but they do not distinguish between them. (Stebbing 1933, 32–33)

This is what Stebbing (1933, 29–33) seeks to distinguish in her article:

- (A₁) Analytic definition of a symbolic expression.
- (A₂) Analytic clarification of a concept.
- (A₃) Postulational analysis.
- (A₄) Directional analysis.

An example of (A₁) can be found in the theory of descriptions and assumption (a). Similarly, (A₂) corresponds to what we would now refer to as the method of explication, which involves replacing a less clear concept with a clearer counterpart, such as Einstein’s analysis of the concept of *simultaneity*. Postulation analysis (A₃), on the other hand, is employed in the construction of deductive systems. As for (A₄), it has been discussed earlier, and according to Stebbing this analysis holds significance for metaphysics—something that Wittgenstein and the proponents of logical positivism failed to acknowledge, as they tended to view all analysis as linguistic.

Stebbing’s metaphilosophical contributions regarding analysis, which we are currently discussing, serve as a representative example of the intellectual climate in early-1930s Cambridge. At that time, extensive debates were taking place within this academic centre concerning the nature of “analysis” itself. As regards their philosophical approaches, Stebbing makes a clear distinction between the Cambridge School of Analysis and logical positivism.²⁴

24. It is worth noting that she was more favourably inclined towards the term “logical empiricism” than “logical positivism” (see Beaney & Chapman 2022, §4).

It is important to note, however, that her authored papers were themselves influenced by the "outdated" logical atomism. Later, she distanced herself from directional analysis and postulated elementary facts. As a result, she began to incline towards a reliance on the first three varieties of analysis in philosophy (A_1)–(A_3).

Moving on to the metaphysical assumptions outlined by Nagel in the early 1930s, Stebbing did not emphasize the empirical sciences or claim that the focus was on elucidating the meaning and implications of scientific knowledge.²⁵ As I mentioned earlier, the point regarding the *limitation of philosophy* (1) describes logical positivism rather than the philosophers from Cambridge. In the works discussed above, there is a greater emphasis on (2) *methods* of analysis. She endeavoured to describe and systematize them meticulously. In the article "Logical Positivism and Analysis" especially, she detailed the methods characteristic of logical positivism and what distinguished the Cambridge philosophers. She also criticized logical positivism for often mentioning analysis without distinguishing its different types.

Furthermore, British philosophy was not as extremely anti-metaphysical as logical positivism. Some view analytic philosophy stereotypically through the lens of the Vienna Circle and understand it as an anti-metaphysical approach in philosophy. In describing "directional analysis," Stebbing indicated that this metaphysical reflection was present in the Cambridge School of Analysis. However, it should be distinguished from speculative reflections on the nature of the soul or the world conducted in the classical manner. In terms of Moore's philosophy, it was possible to reach the ultimate constituents of the world by means of analysis.

On the other hand, it is difficult to determine whether Stebbing adopted the same (3) *anti-historical perspective* as Wisdom, as represented in *Problems of Mind and Matter*. However, when it comes to (4) *common-sense naturalism*, she was significantly influenced by Moore, with whom she corresponded and met in Cambridge. It is important to note one of the key concepts she embraced from the latter: namely, the distinction between understanding a proposition and knowing its analysis. Moore introduced this distinction in his 1925 article "A Defence of Common Sense," where he argued that one can be certain of the truth of various common-sense

25. However, it is worth noting that in 1937 she published the book *Philosophy and the Physicists*, in which she criticized two popular science books: *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928) by Arthur Stanley Eddington and *The Mysterious Universe* (1930) by James Hopwood Jeans. She criticized these works for drawing philosophical implications from discussions of the contemporary state of physics, which she argued were presented in an unclear manner. Nevertheless, in the early 1930s, her primary focus was on analysis.

propositions, such as one's own existence or having a body, even if these cannot be analysed. Stebbing highlighted this concept in her article "The Method of Analysis in Metaphysics," specifically in connection with point (b), concerning the assumption that the proposition we want to analyse can be known to be true (see Beaney & Chapman 2022, §3).

2.3. Ayer

As was previously mentioned, Nagel attended a lecture by Ayer and was impressed. Furthermore, he provided a description of the latter in his article "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe":²⁶

it was reported to me that in England some of the older men were dumb-founded and scandalised when, at a public meeting, a brilliant young adherent of the Wiener Kreis threatened them with early extinction since "the armies of Cambridge and Vienna were already upon them" (Nagel 1936a, 9).

While Wisdom and Stebbing were associated with the Cambridge School of Analysis, Ayer held a position as a lecturer at Oxford. At the encouragement of his tutor at Christ Church, Gilbert Ryle, Ayer spent four months in Vienna from 1932 to 1933, attending meetings of the Vienna Circle and engaging with notable figures such as Schlick, Friedrich Waismann, Hans Hahn, Carl Menger, Kurt Gödel, Otto Neurath, and possibly Quine. After his return, Ayer wrote a series of papers and delivered lectures, including "The Philosophy of Analysis (Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap)," as noted by Ayer's biographer, Ben Rogers (1999, 99), who remarked that it was probably the first lecture series on living philosophers ever given in Oxford.

While Stebbing highlighted the distinctions between logical positivism and the Cambridge School of Analysis, Ayer's ([1936b] 2001) publication, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, played a crucial role in popularizing the ideas of the Vienna Circle in Britain. In the preface to the first edition of this book, Ayer discussed the metaphilosophy he espoused:

As for the propositions of philosophy themselves, they are held to be linguistically necessary, and so analytic. And with regard to the relationship of philosophy and empirical science, it is, shown that the philosopher is not in a position to furnish speculative truths, which would, as it were, compete with the hypotheses of science, nor yet to pass a priori judgements upon the

26. Ayer was identified in this passage by his biographer, Ben Rogers (see Tuboly 2021, 1; Rogers 1999, 104).

validity of scientific theories, but that his function is to clarify the propositions of science, by exhibiting their logical relationships, and by defining the symbols which occur in them. Consequently I maintain that there is nothing in the nature of philosophy to warrant the existence of conflicting philosophical “schools” (Ayer [1936b] 2001, 10).

This passage encompasses assumptions (1)–(3) discussed by Nagel in his article. As a proponent of logical positivism, Ayer emphasizes the *limitation of philosophy*, specifically point (1), and adopts a scientific perspective. The function of philosophy is to clarify the propositions of science. Furthermore, he underlines the importance of (2) the *method* of analysis as a tool to free ourselves from speculative metaphysics. Ayer is also a proponent of the *anti-historical perspective* in philosophy (3). All these viewpoints align with the tenets of logical positivism, with which Nagel himself is sympathetic.

As I have previously emphasized, point (4) is characteristic of Moore and the Cambridge philosophers. Ayer himself did not address issues relating to *common-sense naturalism*. The acceptance of certain propositions as true and the questioning of scepticism distinguished the intellectual centre of Cambridge²⁷ during that period from the philosophers associated with the Vienna Circle. As is well known, the logical positivists challenged any claims that bore the marks of metaphysics.

It is worth noting that Ayer did not explicitly use the term “analytical philosophy” in *Language, Truth, and Logic*; however, he frequently employed the term “analysis.” In 1935, during the International Congress of Scientific Philosophy held at the Sorbonne, he delivered a lecture titled “The Analytic Movement in Contemporary British Philosophy,” which was later published in 1936. In this lecture, he refers to the Cambridge philosophers, including Wisdom and Stebbing, as part of the “analytical movement”:

As both Russell and Moore have taught philosophy at Cambridge, where Moore remains to the present day, it is with Cambridge University that the analytic movement in contemporary British philosophy is chiefly associated. So much so indeed that it has become customary to speak of the philosophy of analysis in England as the philosophy of the Cambridge School. Of those who have actually studied under Moore in recent years, and follow him most closely, the most prominent are Professor Susan Stebbing, John Wisdom, C.E. Mace, and A. Duncan-Jones. These philosophers condemn metaphysics,

27. Above all, this is characteristic of Moore, who influenced philosophers such as Wisdom and Stebbing.

but find themselves unable to accept either the doctrine of physicalism, as developed by Neurath and Carnap, or the methodological solipsism which is adopted by those who profess to follow Wittgenstein (Ayer 1936a, 57).

In this article, Ayer referred to the “analytical movement,” which he associated with the philosophers of the Cambridge School of Analysis. He pointed out that they were unable to accept the views expressed by members of the Vienna Circle and Wittgenstein.

2.4. Metaphilosophy: Nagel, Wisdom, Stebbing, Ayer

The above reconstructions illustrate how “analytic philosophy” was understood in Britain in the early 1930s. Moreover, analyses of the works of Wisdom, Stebbing, and Ayer do not fully confirm Nagel’s observations in his article “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe.” There were differences between the centres in Cambridge and Vienna.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine from whom Nagel might have borrowed the term “analytic philosophy.” This is intriguing, because Nagel suggested using the term to Carnap, and Carnap inquired about it in the quoted letter to Quine. On the other hand, the term appears in the works of Wisdom, who lectured at Cambridge in 1934. In his memoirs, Black emphasizes that this term was not often used at Cambridge:²⁸

The most important thing that was happening as far as the Moral Sciences Club was concerned was the gradual coming into existence of something known as analytical philosophy. You see people had been practising this, but the very expression “analytical philosophy” hadn’t been used very much. And I think one of the big influences on that was the long series of papers that John Wisdom published about philosophical analysis. He had an extraordinary style in those days, but he was very conscientious. He was a bit older than the rest of us (Black 2015, 39).

Nevertheless, Nagel’s article undoubtedly contributed to the dissemination of this term and the consolidation of philosophers from various academic centres in Europe and the United States.

28. The quoted excerpt comes from an interview conducted in 1987.

Table 1. Analysis of the similarities and differences among Wisdom, Stebbing, and Ayer

	Wisdom	Stebbing	Ayer
Limitations of philosophy	X	X	✓
Method	✓	✓	✓
Anti-historical perspective	✓	?	✓
Common-sense naturalism	✓	✓	X

In the table above, I have summarized Nagel’s metaphilosophical assumptions, using “✓” to indicate where Wisdom, Stebbing, and Ayer align with Nagel’s points (1)–(4). I have expressed doubts about Stebbing’s anti-historical stance in philosophy using “?”. Meanwhile, I have used “X” to highlight disagreements with Nagel’s points (1)–(4).

So, on analysing the positions of Wisdom, Stebbing and Ayer it becomes apparent that their primary focus, in early-1930s Britain, was on the method of analysis (Wisdom, Stebbing, Ayer), which they applied to various subject matters (Wisdom) and to already known facts (Wisdom). However, there are differences among them; while Wisdom and Stebbing, associated with the Cambridge School of Analysis and inspired by Moore, emphasized *common-sense naturalism*, Ayer, influenced by logical positivism, highlighted the role of science, positing that philosophy should elucidate propositional statements from science. Consequently, Ayer may have referred to the Cambridge philosophers as part of the “analytical movement” because the Vienna Circle, as mentioned, preferred terms like “scientific philosophy” or “scientific world-conception.”

Additionally, it should be noted in relation to point (2) that Nagel described collaboration and exchanging of ideas modelled on the physical sciences, something more typical of the Vienna Circle seminars.

In the next section of the paper, my aim is to compare the understanding of “analytic philosophy” in Britain in the 1930s with contemporary conceptions of analytic philosophy, such as conceptual creativity and conceptual engineering. This comparison is interesting, because it sheds light on similarities and differences between the understanding of “analytic philosophy” in early-1930s Britain and today.

3. “ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY” IN THE EARLY 1930S AND TODAY

In his book *Analytic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Michael Beaney (2017) emphasizes analytic philosophy’s “conceptual creativity” (2). He discusses the philosophies of prominent figures such as Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and Stebbing. With regard to Frege, Beaney examines the definition of the concept of number presented in Frege’s ([1884] 1950) work

The Foundations of Arithmetic. He also looks at Russell's theory of descriptions and its practical applications. In addition, he explores Wittgenstein's ([1921] 2023) ideas on the limits of language and thought in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Stebbing's significant contributions to critical thinking are also presented in a separate section.

In the introduction, Beaney writes about conceptual creativity:

Clarity, precision, and rigour are not the only intellectual virtues, however. Creativity, fruitfulness, and systematicity are just three others that might be mentioned. I think the best analytic philosophy also exhibits these virtues, although this might be better appreciated. All good philosophy, in my view, is conceptually creative: it gives us new conceptual resources to think more carefully and deeply about things, which can in turn lead to fruitful applications and the development of more systematic theories. Analytic philosophy has not been known for its system-building in the grand style of some of the philosophers of the past. On the contrary, it has often been associated with a piecemeal approach: small problems are broken off to be chewed away at one by one (Beaney 2017, 2).

In other words, this eminent historian of analytic philosophy believes that despite the opposition between clarity and creativity, analytic philosophy done well is distinguished by creativity, which can be understood in different ways.²⁹ This is what he writes in another work on creativity in philosophy:

“Conceptual creativity” can mean a number of different things, all of which I include under this heading: creativity in the formation of new concepts, creativity in the modification of existing concepts, creativity in the application of concepts, and creativity in the development of new conceptual frameworks (Beaney 2018, 275).

The idea of being “conceptually creative” exhibits a resemblance to what is currently known as “conceptual engineering.” Hence, it also seems reasonable to juxtapose how philosophers in the early 1930s in Britain

29. However, it is worth noting that even though Beaney writes about conceptual creativity in the context of the founders of analytic philosophy, he also emphasizes that it occurs with the Copernican revolution of Kant (Beaney 2018). Therefore, conceptual creativity should not be exclusively identified with analytic philosophy. According to Beaney, good philosophy is philosophy that is conceptually creative.

conceived of “analytic philosophy” with its contemporary interpretation in the domain of “conceptual engineering.”

Recently, discussions of conceptual revision within the field of conceptual engineering (Burgess, Cappelen & Plunkett 2020) have gained significant attention in analytic philosophy. These discussions emphasize that certain concepts used in philosophical inquiry, science, or everyday life are often ambiguous or do not fully correspond to our intentions in their use. However, David Chalmers (2020), in his article “What is conceptual engineering and what should it be?,” emphasizes that philosophers engaged in conceptual engineering not only seek to revise existing concepts, but also to introduce new concepts into philosophical deliberations. As examples from philosophy, he mentions the concepts of *supervenience* and *rigid designators* (Chalmers 2020, 7). In the article, Chalmers distinguishes between *de novo* conceptual engineering, which involves the elaboration and implementation of entirely new concepts for philosophical inquiry, and “conceptual re-engineering,” which aims to improve and refine existing concepts (Chalmers 2020, 6–9). A proponent of the latter understanding of conceptual engineering is Herman Cappelen, who initiated methodological discussions on the feasibility of conceptual revision. In his book *Fixing Language*, Cappelen (2018) considers the most important question to be how far one can change a concept without changing the subject of discussion (97–136).³⁰

It is worth emphasizing that in the context of conceptual engineering, analytic philosophy is relevant not only to the philosophy of science (e.g., Scharp’s redefinition of the concept of truth, 2007; 2013a, 2013b), but also to social and practical issues. Thus, Sally Haslanger’s work on revising the concepts of race and gender deserves mention. Haslanger (2000; 2004) defines her philosophical approach as ameliorative,³¹ where this involves determining the purposes that a given concept serves and then proposing appropriate modifications to better meet our needs.³² A similar project, combining an ameliorative and a descriptive approach, is being developed by Esa Díaz-León (2020). Also worth mentioning is the pragmatic project of Amie Thomasson (2020).³³

30. This issue was revisited in the context of conceptual engineering by Cappelen. It originated from Strawson’s (1963) remarks on Carnapian explication.

31. Under the term “ameliorative,” one can understand the revision of a concept’s content while retaining the lexical unit, as in the case of the concepts “woman” and “race.”

32. To my knowledge, it was in her 2006 article “What Good are Our Intuitions?” that Haslanger first used the term “ameliorative.”

33. Thomasson advocates a project that focuses on the functions of concepts in our schemas and their utility (Thomasson 2020, 440). She describes her approach as “reverse engineering.”

Interestingly, according to Cappelen and Plunkett (2020, 18), the current notion of conceptual engineering is not as much of a “new hot topic” as some might assume.³⁴ They discuss this in the introduction to their book *Conceptual Engineering and Conceptual Ethics* (Burgess, Cappelen & Plunkett 2020):³⁵

One sense we sometimes get when talking to people about conceptual engineering and conceptual ethics is that they are “hot” new topics—a trendy new field. While we hope it is true that conceptual engineering and conceptual ethics are things that many philosophers will work on and think about, it would be misleading in the extreme if we gave the impression that these are topics/activities that haven’t been important throughout the history of philosophy. Many philosophers, working in many different theoretical traditions, across many centuries, have thought of their work as involving some kind of conceptual engineering or conceptual ethics, and/or conceived of the work of other philosophers along such lines (even if they didn’t use the terminology we use here) (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, 18).

Cappelen and Plunkett emphasize that Frege’s ([1879] 1967) work, *Begriffsschrift*, is paradigmatic for conceptual engineering, since its aim was to improve language for particular purposes. Similarly, they mention Wittgenstein’s reflections in the *Tractatus*. They also discuss Carnap’s reflections on the method of explication and his attempts to improve language by eliminating metaphysics, based on the theory of verification. They also emphasize that Stebbing’s investigations into key terms used in politics

A similar project is proposed by Matthieu Queloz, who refers to it as “pragmatic genealogy.” This approach aims to describe the practical origins of ideas, analyse why we need them, and how they may have developed in our conceptual schemas (Queloz 2021).

34. In contemporary literature, it is noted that the term “conceptual engineering” has two sources (see Isaac, Koch and Nefdt 2022). One source is research into Carnap’s philosophy: i.e. Richard Creath (1990, 2009) and André Carus (2007). The other source is the metaphilosophical reflections of Simon Blackburn (1999) and Luciano Floridi (2011). Historically, it is worth noting that the term “conceptual engineering” has appeared, more or less deliberately, in twentieth-century philosophy, for example, in Teresa Horowitz’s investigations of explication and *a priori* knowledge (1985) and in Alexander P.D. Mourelatos’s reflections on the philosophy of Parmenides (1979). Interestingly, conceptual engineering can be said to have its roots in ancient philosophy. Additionally, in private correspondence, Mourelatos mentioned that he might have borrowed the term “conceptual engineering” from Carnap or Quine, but tends to attribute it more to his thesis supervisor, Wilfrid Sellars.

35. In the literature, the term “conceptual ethics” (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, 2013b) is also used. This term refers to the normative aspect of conceptual engineering considerations.

(e.g., “democracy” and “freedom”) fall within the scope of conceptual engineering (Stebbing 1939; 1941).³⁶

These same authors write about their approach to the history of analytic philosophy in the context of conceptual engineering:³⁷

As this brings out, Frege, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Stebbing, and other founders of analytic philosophy were extensively engaged in conceptual engineering. So rather than describe conceptual engineering as a “hot” new topic in analytic philosophy, we could instead think of it as simply paying more attention to a key aspect of analytic philosophy that has been with us since its origins (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, 19).

Based on these remarks, it seems reasonable to draw a comparison between the understanding of “analytic philosophy” in Britain in the early 1930s, when philosophers began to identify themselves as such, and its contemporary understanding in the context of conceptual engineering. However, the concepts embraced by analytic philosophy, such as conceptual engineering, *re-engineering*, or ameliorative projects, seem to fit well with Beaney’s proposed term, “conceptually creative.” Moreover, Beaney applies this term to the founders of analytic philosophy in a way that is similar to how Cappelen and Plunkett (2020) use it. Therefore, when contrasting the historical and modern perspectives of analytic philosophy, I propose to adopt Beaney’s term, on account of its broader scope.

3.1. *Models of Analysis and Conceptual Creativity*

Beaney (2021) advances three models of analysis: decompositional, regressive and interpretive. Decompositional analysis involves breaking down a complex concept or proposition into its constituent parts to better understand its structure and underlying elements. Regressive analysis, characteristic of ancient philosophy, pertains to fundamental principles, causes,

36. It is worth noting, however, that in addition to the works already described here (Stebbing 1930; 1932; 1933) that address analysis and metaphysics, Stebbing’s later works, *Thinking to Some Purpose* (1939) and *Ideals and Illusions* (1941), are considered through the lens of conceptual engineering by Cappelen and Plunkett (2020, 18–19).

37. I notice, however, that they omitted the Lvov-Warsaw School. In the literature, Anna Brożek (2022) argues that the conceptual analysis applied in the Lvov-Warsaw School includes a constructive element and thus has an “engineering” character. She cites Jan Łukasiewicz (1906) as a forerunner of this approach. Additionally, in recent years, several publications have highlighted the contributions of the Lvov-Warsaw School. Notable among these are works on the methods employed at this intellectual center (Brożek et al. 2021) and a book on interdisciplinary investigations into the Lvov-Warsaw School (Drabarek, Woleński, and Radzki 2019).

or axioms, with Euclidean geometry being an example of its application. In analytic philosophy, this model is associated with a strictly logical approach. Interpretive analysis involves “translating” or transforming propositions that give rise to philosophical problems into a form in which these problems can be resolved or dissolved.

According to Beaney (2018, 274), both interpretive analysis and regressive analysis involve creativity. He also notes that a model of decomposition can support synthesis by explaining that the elements identified in decompositional analysis allow for new constructions (Beaney 2018, 274–275). Beaney considers Russell’s theory of descriptions, discussed earlier through the lens of the “interpretive” model, to be more creative than is commonly assumed (Beaney 2018, 281–283).

The decompositional model was used, among others, by Moore and Russell in their rejection of neo-idealism during the early period of analytic philosophy (see Griffin 2007). Although it is noted that Russell may not have distinguished between the models of analysis he employed in his philosophy, in Cambridge in the 1930s, different models were used or developed by philosophers associated with the Cambridge School of Analysis (Beaney 2007, 4–5). As Beaney (2007) notes, philosophers from this school began to distinguish between the decompositional model and the transformative model (5). During this period, there was much debate about the nature of “analysis.” Within this school, a distinction emerged between logical and metaphysical analysis:

In their terminology, there was a difference between “logical” or “same-level” analysis, which simply transformed one sentence into another, and “philosophical” or “metaphysical” or “reductive” or “directional” or “new-level” analysis, which revealed the underlying ontological commitments. (Beaney 2007, 5)

In his book *Language, Truth, and Logic*, where he presented his own version of the logical positivism characteristic of the Vienna Circle, Ayer outlined the criterion of verifiability.³⁸ Thus, in his work, like the representatives of the Vienna Circle, he was employing the decompositional model: for example, to demonstrate the meaninglessness of metaphysical statements. By analysing and breaking down individual propositions, he sought to show that they lack empirical significance.

38. Ayer’s criterion of verifiability can be distinguished from the verification principle of the Vienna Circle (see Hanfling 1997, 7–9).

Considering the early 1930s in Britain through the lens of the models of analysis discussed above that involve creativity, I propose supplementing the comparative “Table 1” with the descriptor “conceptually creative.”

Table 2. Differences and similarities in “analytic philosophy” in the early 1930s in Britain

	Wisdom	Stebbing	Ayer
Limitations of philosophy	X	X	✓
Method	✓	✓	✓
Anti-historical perspective	✓	?	✓
Common sense naturalism	✓	✓	X
Conceptually creative	✓	✓	✓

This becomes intriguing, precisely when we consider analytic philosophy in the early 1930s in Britain, particularly within the intellectual environment of the Cambridge School of Analysis, through the lens of models of analysis containing creative elements. Thus, to use Beaney’s term, this philosophy was indeed “conceptually creative.” Nevertheless, the philosophers were not as engaged in social-practical issues as contemporary analytic philosophy, as is evidenced by the development of projects in conceptual engineering whose findings have been applied to these issues.³⁹ Within the Cambridge School of Analysis, analytic philosophy was mainly perceived as “analysis” of a sort that could be applied to diverse subject matters.

In my view, contemporary analytic philosophy has begun to emphasize more social and practical dimensions, contrary to what Philip Kitcher (2023) argues in his book *What’s the Use of Philosophy?* This shift is evidenced by currently popular philosophical subdisciplines such as social epistemology and social ontology. In these subdisciplines, something I would term “analytic social philosophy” is developing.⁴⁰ These subdisciplines often align with projects in conceptual engineering. Recently, these fields have also shown a noticeable trend toward emphasizing so-called “nonideal” models, which aim to address various social harms and injustices, such

39. It is worth remembering that conceptual engineering itself is methodologically neutral, meaning its results can be applied to social or scientific issues.

40. It is also worth noting that the term “social turn” has recently emerged in the context of analytic philosophy, for example, in Kevin Richardson’s short essay “The Social Turn in Analytic Philosophy: Promises and Perils” (2023), posted on the Daily Nous website. The post has generated a great deal of comment and discussion on the topic. I can imagine that in a few decades, historians of analytic philosophy and scholars of current trends will use this term to describe contemporary analytic philosophy.

as racism and gender discrimination.⁴¹ From this perspective, contemporary analytic philosophy no longer seems to be perceived solely as “green pastures for intellectual analysis, wherein its practitioners can find refuge from a troubled world and cultivate their intellectual games with chess-like indifference to its course,” or as “at once the pastime of a recluse” (Nagel 1936a, 9).

CONCLUSION

In the first part of this article, I elaborated on the metaphilosophical assumptions of Nagel’s conception of analytic philosophy as found in his article “Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe” (Nagel 1936a, 1936b). He used the term “analytic philosophy” in the title of the article, but its source remains problematic to determine. One of the clues that emerged seems to have been Ayer’s (1936a) work, “The Analytic Movement in Contemporary British Philosophy,” where he distinguished the philosophy produced in Cambridge in the 1930s from that of the Vienna Circle, referring to the former as the “analytic movement.” During his time in Cambridge, Nagel met and listened to Wisdom, Stebbing, and Ayer. It therefore seemed reasonable to attempt to compare their understanding of “analytic philosophy” or “analysis” with Nagel’s description.

However, this comparison did not confirm Nagel’s metaphilosophical assumptions, and neither did it reflect what was advocated within logical positivism. Perhaps this is because Nagel’s assumptions were too general, as he was aiming to describe intellectual centres such as Prague, Vienna, Lviv, Warsaw and Cambridge. It is most likely that the term “analytic philosophy” had emerged from Cambridge. During that period, philosophers from that centre began to identify with this term, and it seems especially plausible given that Vienna Circle thinkers might well have preferred the term “scientific philosophy,” as expressing preferences similar to those of the Lvov-Warsaw School (see Szubka 2022).

In the next part of the paper, I compared how “analytic philosophy” was conceived in Britain in the early 1930s with contemporary understandings of the concept of analytic philosophy. With this goal in mind, I referred to

41. Ása Burman, in her book *Nonideal Social Ontology: The Power View* (2023), has presented a theory in line with the trend of nonideal models in social ontology. She proposes a theory of social ontology in which the central concept is “power,” and seeks to develop the concept of “telic power.” She also discusses other nonideal models, such as those put forward in Ásta (2018), Brännmark (2019a; 2019b) and Jenkins (2023). In social epistemology, the work of Robin McKenna (2023) is also noteworthy. Both Burman and McKenna draw on the works of Charles Mills (2005; 2007) in making a distinction between ideal and nonideal models.

the concepts of “conceptual creativity” and “conceptual engineering,” as some philosophers in the history of analytic philosophy are thought to have been conceptually creative (Beaney 2017; 2018) or engaged in conceptual engineering (Cappelen and Plunkett 2020). For my comparative purposes, I adopted the notion of conceptual creativity as being the broader one. It can be argued that the Cambridge philosophers, who developed and applied models of analysis such as decompositional and interpretive, demonstrated conceptual creativity.

I also noted that analytic philosophy in Britain, particularly within the Cambridge intellectual centre of the early 1930s, was less focused on social-practical issues than contemporary analytic philosophy.

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