

# Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century – A Review\*

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After more than a century of its development, philosophers working in the analytic tradition have recently begun to consider its history as an object of philosophical investigation.<sup>1</sup> This development, particularly significant in the context of a tradition of inquiry that has often conceived of its own problems as ahistorical, is salutary in that it offers to show what, within the tradition, remains rich and vital for philosophy today, as well as to extract the significant theoretical and doctrinal results that can be considered to have been achieved in its itinerary so far. The appearance of a comprehensive, two-volume consideration of the history of analytic philosophy in the twentieth century, written by one of the tradition's leading contemporary practitioners, is therefore cause for excitement. And Scott Soames' two-volume *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century* is, by any measure, an impressive work. Running to almost 900 pages, it assembles careful, meticulous and detailed expositions and analyses of the arguments and positions of a wide variety of thinkers within the analytic tradition, evaluating the extent of their insight and suggesting implications for philosophical thought today. The analysis is uniformly lucid and clearly written, offering the student of the analytic tradition an indispensable source of arguments she may want to consider in her own work, as well as, in its own argumentation, a suggestive model of at least one way of doing analytic philosophy. Over the course of his reconstructive and evaluative analysis, Soames considers the views and arguments of early analytic philosophers like Russell and Moore, logical positivists like Ayer and

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Hempel, mid-century proponents of the “ordinary language” school (Austin, Ryle, and Strawson), the early and late Wittgenstein and post-positivist American philosophers like Quine, Davidson, and Kripke. One of the best distinctive features of the analysis is its sustained consideration of early analytic ethics, a field that has received short shrift in other historical treatments of the tradition. Throughout all of these discussions, Soames develops careful analyses of the implications of the views of these historical philosophers for questions about the nature of truth, language and meaning, and reference, necessity, possibility and normativity, analyses which will be useful for anyone practicing analytic philosophy in any of these areas today.

Nevertheless, Soames’ work is not really a contribution to the philosophical *historiography* of the analytic tradition, and the student or philosopher who seeks a serious, sustained reflection on the philosophical character of the tradition as a whole, its origin and relation to other historical and contemporary projects, the underlying motivations of its diachronic developments, or its positive legacy for philosophical thought today, will come away disappointed. Its rigorous analyses of typically isolated arguments drawn from the work of philosophers who are “historical” in the sense of having written and worked before 1975 exemplifies what is, at best, *one* style and method of philosophical inquiry, a style that historically arose *within* the tradition of analytic philosophy but is by no means exhaustive of it. Unfortunately, Soames’ rigor and precision when considering various claims and substantive positions on the nature of truth, necessity, knowledge, language and cognition does not extend to any correspondingly clear or general consideration of the implications of the particular method he employs, or indeed of any of the various methods and conceptions of method that have defined analytic philosophers’ own diverse understandings of the nature of philosophy and philosophical analysis. As a result, Soames misses the opportunity to engage with much of the useful historiographical work that is now emerging on the shape of the tradition as a whole, and his lack of attention to broader issues of philosophical methodology produces readings of particular philosophers that in many cases fail adequately to represent, and in some cases actually distort, these philosophers’ own conceptions of their projects and results. In other ways, as well, Soames’ analysis is out of touch with any broader project of reflection on the enduring legacy of the tradition. It makes virtually no mention, for instance, of the broader philosophical and cultural surroundings of the analytic tradition as it has historically developed, and it ignores entirely the historical and conceptual links that connect it to the various practices and schools of “continental” philosophy in the twentieth century, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics.

More generally, where philosophers’ presentations of their own arguments are relatively clear and straightforward, and do not require a great deal of methodological or rhetorical context for their interpretation,

Soames' rehearsal and evaluation of these arguments is consistently first-rate. But where, in addition to (or in preparation for) the deliberative weighing of arguments, interpretation of their broader textual context and philosophical surroundings would be helpful in establishing the nature of their significance, the analysis often falters. This produces a discussion which, read as an evaluative history, at many points seems to be prejudicially determined by Soames' own particular conception of the proper methods and most important enduring results of the tradition as a whole, a conception that largely stems from his adherence to the particular picture of reference, necessity, and metaphysics that was first articulated by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* and has developed in the work of those theorists who believe that direct referential relations between referring terms and their objects can play an important role in understanding the relationship between language and the world more generally. In the context of historical reflection about the broad contours of the tradition, however, this adherence is unfortunate, since it amounts to prejudicing substantial philosophical questions that remain open today, and obscuring the contours of the genuine and interesting historical debates about them that first made Kripke's work – as well as a variety of other configurations of methodological and doctrinal views about language, reference, and analysis – possible.

## I.

On the first page of his far-ranging analysis, Soames suggests two main results that he considers his re-telling of the course of the analytic tradition to establish:

To my mind the two most important achievements that have emerged from the analytic tradition in this period are (i) the recognition that philosophical speculation must be grounded in pre-philosophical thought, and (ii) the success achieved in understanding, and separating one from another, the fundamental methodological notions of logical consequence, logical truth, necessary truth, and apriori truth.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, these two points are substantially drawn, respectively, from the first and last of the philosophers Soames considers in depth. The first is Soames' gloss on G. E. Moore's defense of common sense against the claims of philosophical skepticism, and the second, despite other significant antecedents, can be seen as the fundamental accomplishment of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*. Together, these two points orient, in one way or another, the majority of Soames' evaluative analyses of texts and thinkers in the analytic tradition. The first point, for instance, which Soames takes to have been established by Moore's anti-skeptical argument in "Proof of an

External World”, provides a basis for Soames’ criticisms of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, whose denial of the meaningfulness of statements about the relationship between language and the world is seen as absurd, and of the more revisionary and counter-intuitive implications of Quine’s argument for the indeterminacy of radical translation. The second point, repeatedly applied retrospectively to criticize philosophers’ conceptions of the scope and subject matter of their own results about logic and the structure of language, allows Soames to echo Quine’s criticism of the logical positivists’ unrestrained use of the analytic/synthetic distinction and to challenge what he supposes to have been the methodological assumptions of ordinary language philosophy, including the guiding assumption that necessity is fundamentally a linguistic phenomenon. Given Kripke’s insight into the existence of metaphysically necessary truths that are in no sense artifacts of language, Soames argues, we can justifiably reject the ordinary language school’s program of reflection on the ordinary meaning of linguistic terms, along with the whole linguistic conception of the source of philosophical problems that provided its historical basis. His repeated evaluative application of the two principles to arguments and positions within the analytic tradition allows Soames to portray its history as a protracted, hard-fought struggle for some of the methods and insights that are most characteristic of mainstream analytic philosophy today, including the conception of philosophy as inquiry into substantial metaphysical (rather than linguistic or logical) necessities and the ascendancy of naturalistic and causal theories of meaning, mind, and reference.

With respect to the first of Soames’ principles, however, despite the generality of its application within his analysis to the tradition’s main arguments and positions, it is somewhat difficult, even after this repeated application, to see exactly what it amounts to. As philosophical commentators have known, at least since Berkeley and Hume employed a similar gesture in their defense of a phenomenalist idealism, the philosopher’s appeal to the commonsensical knowledge of the ordinary man is often an ambiguous one, more likely to shed light on the philosophers’ own construction of theoretical foundations than actually to reveal their neutral, pre-theoretic basis in ordinary language or practices. In the case of Soames’ analysis, the appeal to common sense subsumes what is in fact a variety of different philosophical claims and conclusions, difficult to unify, beyond its specific Moorean application against skepticism, into any single, univocal claim or maxim. At times, Soames takes it to undermine negative philosophical claims about the nature and existence of facts about the relation between language and the world, as if the ordinary man’s commonsensical knowledge comprised a specific and well-defined theory of reference and meaning, violated by these revisionary claims. At other times, however, Soames’ appeal to the “pre-philosophical” amounts to a methodological maxim that philosophical results must be continuous with

the best results of *empirical* and *scientific* theorizing, in line with a broadly naturalistic orientation for philosophical analysis. In any case, though he consistently employs Moore's defense of common sense as a critical resource in discussing the claims of logical positivists and ordinary language philosophers, Soames makes little mention of the complexity and sophistication of ordinary language philosophers' own methodological response to Moore's conception of common sense. A more explicit discussion of the role of the appeal to the "ordinary" in the practices of ordinary language philosophy, as discussed and debated in significant works by Austin, Ryle, and the late Wittgenstein (including Wittgenstein's detailed treatment of Moore's position in *On Certainty*), might have provided not only more insight into the internal motivation of these practices, but also a clearer sense of Soames' understanding of his own guiding principle.

The second principle, that of the distinction between various kinds of modality and the different epistemic, semantic, and metaphysical notions of implication, necessitation, and inferential structure that go along with them, is even more central to Soames' overall evaluative conclusions. He uses it to good effect in criticizing the assumption, implicit in many early analytic projects, that questions about the truth and necessity of philosophical claims can be reduced to linguistic questions of definition and strict logical implication. In these analyses, Soames shows repeatedly how little these philosophers understood the limitations of the Fregean logic then available to them in establishing their grander constructive or reductive claims about the actual logical forms of various kinds of discourse. And Soames' repeated application of Kripke's distinction between the necessary and the *a priori* aptly reveals how differently many historical analytic philosophers might have conceived of truth and of the nature of philosophical analysis, had they not been convinced that analysis is, in some sense, the clarification of language. Nevertheless, Soames' evaluative application of the Kripkean apparatus of distinctions to criticize theories that are historically anterior to it inevitably presents this apparatus as having the status of a straightforward discovery or achievement, a distinction of real and intuitive differences that earlier philosophers somehow, contingently, missed. This is misleading not only in that it suggests (what is false) that Kripke's apparatus is completely uncontroversial today, but also in that it precludes the possibility of a genuine *methodological* debate between its contemporary adherents and those who still cleave to the more traditional conception of analytic philosophy as linguistic analysis. Instead, Soames constantly presupposes the methodology of metaphysical (rather than semantic or linguistic) reflection that is only implied by Kripke's set of distinctions. And the many good arguments (many of which are in no sense dependent on the analytic/synthetic distinction, or on the identification of the necessary with the *a priori*) that historically consolidated analytic philosophers' conception of

philosophy as inherently an exercise of linguistic reflection receive little or no attention.

More generally, despite their repeated application to provide him with terms of criticism, it is actually not easy to understand how Soames conceives of the argumentative role of his two guiding conclusions in his analysis as a whole. The trouble is that, since they are stated at the outset and then repeatedly applied to the *evaluation* of arguments within the analytic tradition, they cannot reasonably be taken to be the overall *results* or *conclusions* of these historical arguments. Soames' constant employment of them, instead, seems to treat them as methodological *presuppositions* adopted at the outset of the analysis, presuppositions whose utility for the practice of analysis or for the reading of its history has not been argued here. Of course, as students of Gadamerian hermeneutics know well, the successful interpretation of philosophical texts often requires that the interpreter antecedently project certain methodological or structural presuppositions onto the interpreted text, hermeneutical "fore-structures" which will then subsequently be confirmed in the circular movement of interpretation. But if this hermeneutical projection of fore-structures is indeed part of Soames' own method in adopting methodical presuppositions which guide both his selection of relevant arguments from the tradition and his critical evaluation of it, the reader would certainly have benefited from a more explicit and transparent declaration of the principles of this reading practice.

There is, moreover, a *third* methodological presupposition that, just as centrally, underlies many of Soames' evaluative claims, although it is nowhere stated as explicitly as the other two. The principle is that useful philosophical analyses, whether of linguistic meaning or non-linguistic structures, must have a systematic, theoretically substantial character. Thus, Soames praises post-positivist American philosophers like Quine and Davidson for their insight into the "need" for a systematic theory of meaning with an axiomatic, descriptive structure. And he uses the principle to criticize what he sees as the substantial methodological failings of the later Wittgenstein and other "ordinary language" philosophers. According to Soames' reconstruction, the guiding principles of the "ordinary language" school included the claims:

- (i) that philosophical problems arise from the misuse of language and are to be solved by getting clear about the meanings of words, (ii) that philosophical analysis consists less in uncovering hidden logical forms and formulating precise necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a word or concept, than in opportunistically assembling reminders about how philosophically significant words are used in ordinary settings, (iii) that meaning is use, (iv) that the philosophical study of meaning is to proceed by informal, case-by-case

investigations, and (v) that systematic theories of meaning are not required and are not to be sought. (Vol. II, p. 216)

According to Soames, however, these principles were eventually undermined from within by ordinary language philosophers' own commitment to "discovering truth about meaning," (Vol. II, p. 216) a commitment which eventually necessitated a more systematic and theoretical account of the underlying basis and structure of linguistic meaning, leading to the more comprehensive accounts of meaning and use offered by Grice, Quine, and Davidson. This sketch of the methods of ordinary language philosophy, however, is a caricature; and its portrayal of ordinary language philosophers as "opportunisticly" offering scattered reminders about the proper use of individual words misses both the significant systematic ambitions of philosophers like Austin and, even more importantly, the substantial *internal* methodological reasons, within the projects of Wittgenstein and other philosophers influenced by him, for resisting such a systematic, structuralist conception of the work of analysis. In chronicling the development of thinking about language and use in the 1950s and '60s, Soames emphasizes the good point that philosophers who held that meaning must be understood in terms of social practice and use became increasingly aware of the need to distinguish between the meaning of a sentence *itself* and the various factors of context, socially established usage, and background knowledge that determine the likelihood of its use on any particular occasion. But he mistakes this good point for the different and stronger requirement of a general, systematic theoretical *description* of the relation between meaning and use in the language as a whole.

As I have attempted to document elsewhere, in fact, much of the story of the thinkers and projects Soames chronicles throughout his analysis could be told in terms of the struggle of a typically presumed semantic *structuralism* – the claim that understanding of meaning must take the form of the description of the overall logical or grammatical structure of language – with those elements of language and practice that seem recalcitrant to explanation in such a structural order.<sup>3</sup> The rejection of this structuralism as a paradigm of philosophical understanding was one of the overriding goals of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and the ordinary language philosophers who were influenced by him often sought interpretive methods of reflection on language whose aim was to produce clarity in our ordinary uses of words, even as they criticized the theoretical ambition of discovering systematic "truth about meaning". But because Soames pays little attention to the arguments and motivations that supported these interpretive methods, his own portrayal of philosophical history remains caught within the assumption that understanding of meaning can only be produced by comprehensive, systematic theorizing of it, an assumption that he actually does little to support. For decades,

philosophers within the analytic tradition have assumed that significant insight into language and meaning necessarily depends on the description of a comprehensive structure characteristic of the logic and grammar of language; but some of the most striking and important results of the tradition undermine, from within, the assumption that any such description should even be possible. Because Soames tends to assume the structuralist picture of language and semantic understanding that he shares with some of his analytic forebears, his analysis is not always capable of portraying the actual force and basis of these negative results; still less does it reveal the extent of their continuing significance.

## II.

The philosophical method of careful, structured presentation and evaluation of arguments, with its attendant juridical and martial metaphors of struggle and dominance, has indeed produced some of the best insights of the analytic tradition, in line with the tradition's underlying commitment to clarity, rational insight, and the production of intelligibility and conviction by the force of the better reason. So it would be unfair to criticize Soames for ceaselessly applying this method to the history of analytic philosophy, if the application did not so often obscure the presence of other, partially overlapping but distinct methods of rational criticism, reflection, and interpretation that have played an equally important role in the history of the projects that Soames discusses. This obscuration tends at many points to make Soames' history blind to the merits of alternative conceptions of philosophical discovery and to the existence, within the tradition, of substantial and considerable strands of criticism of the method he favors. This difficulty is greatest with respect to Wittgenstein, who from the beginning of his philosophical life made methodological reflections about the *possibility* of philosophical insight central to his linguistic project. For Wittgenstein, the depth of the origination of philosophical "problems" within the forms and pictures of everyday life and speech constantly called for the innovation of methods and practices of linguistic reflection and interpretation that were, at the same time, "philosophical" in their relevance to those problems and fully "ordinary" in their struggle with the misleading implications of everyday terms and concepts. Ultimately, this led him to realize that the systematic, structural clarification of the "logical form" of language which he had attempted (on one reading) to produce in the *Tractatus* could itself only lead to further philosophical obfuscation of the grammar of everyday life, and hence to adopt the even more radical methodological innovations of the *Investigations*. These innovations include internal dialogue, relentless appeals to the reader's *own* sense of what is normal and appropriate or strange and unusual in the ways of ordinary life, and a proliferation of voices that shows beyond a doubt that the method of

the *Investigations* is not to communicate the single, linearly structured “argument” of a particular philosopher named Wittgenstein. But because he misses the depth and uniqueness of Wittgenstein’s vision of language, Soames consistently fails to give an accurate portrayal of the significance and force of his methods. As a result, the effect of Soames’ reading of Wittgenstein, both early and late, is rather like that of witnessing a reading of *Hamlet*, in monotone, without stage, set, or actors: the words are all there, but the literary and aesthetic context that would give them their point, and so provide a necessary precondition for a reasonable evaluation, is almost wholly lacking.

The difficulty begins early in Soames’ discussion of the *Tractatus*. Following his discussion of Russell’s logical atomism, Soames portrays the *Tractatus* as an important step forward for the methods of semantic analysis, but one that is fundamentally flawed in requiring an implausible metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic picture of the world. But the implausible picture that Soames criticizes is itself a consequence of the *Tractatus* only on *one* way of reading its substantive and methodological claims, and there are exegetical alternatives that make for a much more charitable reading. In fact, in several cases all that would be needed for a more sympathetic exegetical picture is for the arguments that Soames extracts to be supplemented by *some* sense, no matter how vague, of the larger philosophical task that Wittgenstein is trying to accomplish. For instance, early in his reconstruction of what he supposes to be the “metaphysics” of the *Tractatus*, Soames considers the famous argument at *TLP* 2.02-2.0211 for the existence of metaphysically simple objects. Together with subsidiary premises elsewhere in the text, the argument has the form of a transcendental argument from the possibility of determinate sense. If metaphysical simples did not exist, then the simple names of language would refer, at least in some cases, to complex objects whose existence depended on the further, contingent fact of the combination of their simpler constituents. But if this were the case, Wittgenstein held, the sense of these simple names would not be determinate, and it would follow that sense would be indeterminate for language as a whole. Soames notes that the argument is “replete with assumptions about language” which the argument itself does not establish and which, he holds “are neither obvious in themselves, nor given persuasive independent justifications” (Vol. I, p. 201). For instance, the assumption that it is absurd to suppose that whether a simple proposition has sense could depend on whether certain contingent facts obtain is obviously requisite to make the argument follow.

In fact, this assumption, though not explicitly stated in the argument itself, goes to the heart of the philosophical *praxis* of the *Tractatus*. For if the meaningfulness of simple signs did in fact depend on the obtaining of contingent, empirical facts, it would not be possible to maintain the distinction, central to the Tractarian conception of logical analysis, between

sentences that state facts and those (such as tautologies and contradictions) that, in failing to do so, show something of the logical form shared by language and the world. The requirement that leads to this assumption is therefore not, as Soames supposes, that the correct analysis of the meaning of a sentence must (on pain of vicious infinite regress) bottom out in simple names whose meaningfulness is assumed, but rather that semantic or logical analysis of the sort that Wittgenstein is practicing in the *Tractatus* be possible at all.<sup>4</sup> This methodical distinction between logical analysis and empirical description, first enforced by Frege and central to the projects of the first analytic philosophers, might of course be questioned on other grounds, and perhaps Soames thinks that subsequent philosophical insights have discredited it. But accuracy in reporting Wittgenstein's position requires at least a sense of the way in which this distinction underlies both his particular argument here, and of his broader philosophical goals in the *Tractatus*.

More generally, Soames tends to read the individual arguments of the *Tractatus* straightforwardly and out of the context of a larger consideration of the aims of the work as a whole. This is particularly problematic in the context of the *Tractatus*, since, as commentators have noted, the introductory and concluding remarks of the work strongly indicate that its claims are misunderstood if they are read only in this straightforward way. The semantic theory of the *Tractatus*, with its prominent distinction between sense and nonsense, renders most or all of its own individual claims strictly nonsensical, and it seems plausible that any reading that does not respect the level of interpretive complexity that is thereby introduced to the work fails to comprehend at least one important dimension of its significance. In particular, a reading that acknowledges the significant *performative* dimension of self-undermining that is suggested, in particular, by its final remarks, can more consistently portray the *Tractatus* as accomplishing the work of clarifying and dissolving philosophical problems that it purports to perform, without incurring the implausibilities of the metaphysical picture of the world that Soames supposes Wittgenstein must be committed to. Since this alternative reading is prominent in the recent literature on the *Tractatus*, it is surprising that Soames does not so much as mention it.<sup>5</sup> In the single, brief, section where Soames does admit that the argument of the *Tractatus* might be seen as productively self-undermining, he holds that its potential to undermine itself is a consequence, not of the necessary unrepresentability of logical form, but of Wittgenstein's erroneous identification of the metaphysically necessary with the epistemically *a priori*, and claims that Wittgenstein himself, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, did not believe his argument to be self-undermining but only came to see it as such later.<sup>6</sup> Soames' failure, in this instance, to engage with the broader possibility that the argument of the *Tractatus* itself bears interpretive implications for the question of how it should be read seems, again,

symptomatic of a failure to engage with larger interpretive and methodological questions about the setting of the arguments he does consider within broader projects and conceptions of philosophical methodology.

The exegetical distortions produced in Soames' reading of Wittgenstein by this failure to engage Wittgenstein's own methodological reflections deepen in the course of his reading of the *Philosophical Investigations*, which Soames treats as capturing some of the key commitments of the ordinary language school. In particular, Soames regards the three main "topics" of *PI* as:

- (i) a critique of what Wittgenstein regards as the dominant referential conception of meaning, and a proposal to replace it with a conception in which to use language meaningfully is to master a certain kind of social practice; (ii) a critique of the previously dominant conception of philosophical analysis, and the substitution of a new conception of analysis to play the central role in philosophy; and (iii) the development of a new philosophical psychology in which what appear to be sentences that report private sensations and other internal mental events or states are viewed as having meanings which license their assertion on the basis of public criteria having to do with behavior and external circumstances. (Vol. II, pp. 3–4)

On Soames' reading, the result of Wittgenstein's concern with these topics is a sustained defense of a variety of descriptive and explanatory theses about language, meaning, and mind, central to which is Wittgenstein's theoretical claim that "meaning is use" and an accordant theory of thought and language as determined by social practices. Additionally, Soames interprets Wittgenstein's private language argument as amounting to the defense of a behaviorist theory of sensation-language and other seeming reports of "internal" states and events in terms of primitive behaviors, behavioral dispositions, and other "external" facts. The interpretation cleaves to a more or less standard way of interpreting the claims and ambitions of the *Investigations*, the pattern for which was set by early interpretive works appearing soon after its initial publication. This standard interpretation is marked not only by the overall implausibility of the positive theoretical claims that it extracts from the *Investigations*, but also by its inability to account for the nonlinear and dialectical presentation of what it takes to be Wittgenstein's arguments and its disregard for Wittgenstein's own striking methodological directives about how the work of his own text should be understood, especially at *PI* 91-133. Here, in line with a "therapeutic" conception of the task of philosophical elucidation, Wittgenstein notably holds that

- 128. If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.

The correct interpretation of this remark is a matter of some controversy, but it obviously accords with a conception of philosophical practice, already suggested by the *Tractatus*, according to which philosophical “claims” are not straightforward factual descriptions of how things are, even in a general sense, but are rather (where they are meaningful at all) misrepresentations of compelling bits of the logical and practical grammar of our ordinary lives. If this is even roughly correct as an interpretation of the work of the text, of course, then it cannot bear the kind of substantialist theoretical interpretation that Soames gives it. The supposed claims that Soames extracts should not be treated as straightforward theses advanced by Wittgenstein, but rather as partial expressions of subtle philosophical temptations and tendencies to confusion that Wittgenstein’s philosophical therapy is in fact aiming to diagnose and subsequently dissolve. Instead of attending to this substantial sophistication of philosophical methodology that is defended by Wittgenstein’s own remarks in the text, however, Soames treats Wittgenstein’s rejection of substantial philosophical theses as if it were simply the expression of an “anti-theoretical” attitude adopted without any particular positive justification. Though he occasionally expresses puzzlement at this methodical refusal, on Wittgenstein’s part, to offer reasoned, ordered justifications for his philosophical “claims”, Soames’ interpretation, abounding in constructions like “Wittgenstein’s view must have been...”, most often simply takes it for granted that he must have intended to offer such justifications nevertheless. Occasionally this interpretive strategy achieves a certain self-undermining absurdity, as for instance when Soames offers the claim that there can be no positive philosophical theses in philosophy as, itself, a positive methodological thesis of the *Investigations*:

### **Thesis 3**

The philosophical analysis of language does not aim at, and cannot issue in, theories of any kind... (Vol. II, p. 27)

Clearly, a reading that paid more attention to Wittgenstein’s own stated conception of philosophical method and practice could avoid the need for such self-undermining interpretation, as well as present a more sympathetic and revealing reading of the innovations of the *Investigations* with respect to the tradition as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

With respect to Soames’ specific interpretation of the skein of passages standardly discussed as Wittgenstein’s “private language argument”, it is surprising indeed, in view of Wittgenstein’s consistent maintenance of the distinction between psychological and philosophical claims and explanations, to see his view treated as a “philosophical psychology” of a behaviorist kind. Indeed, Wittgenstein protests repeatedly in the *Investigations* against just such a misinterpretation, and the only positive

justification on Soames' part for attributing this view to Wittgenstein seems to be offered by taking *PI* 244 out of context:

How do words refer to sensations? – There doesn't seem to be any problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day, and give them names? But how is the connexion between the name and the thing set up? This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations?—of the word "pain" for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.

"So you are saying that the word 'pain' really means crying?"—On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.

Soames follows some early interpreters of this remark in taking it to commit Wittgenstein to a behaviorist "replacement" view of sensation-language according to which the meaning of expressions of sensation is to be understood in terms of their replacement of earlier, more primitive, immediate vocalizations and behaviors. But in context, and set against a proper sense of Wittgenstein's therapeutic method, it is clear that this remark in the interlocutor's voice does not express a substantial, positive theory to which Wittgenstein himself is committed, but rather a philosophical temptation to be interpreted, and diagnosed, along with the various other tempting pictures of privacy, interiority, and subjectivity that other interlocutory voices express in the course of these passages. Given this way of understanding Wittgenstein's philosophical aims, it is possible to see the argument as critically targeting the *semantic* assumption that the relation of sensation-terms and other psychological descriptors to their objects must be one of direct reference or designation, *regardless* of whether these objects are taken to be "inner", introspectively accessible phenomena or "outward", behavioral ones. This clarifies, again, that it is no part of Wittgenstein's project to assume untenable "verificationist" theses about the psychological, or indeed *any* substantial epistemological theses, in his rigorous attempts at semantic analysis and linguistic clarification.

Moving beyond Wittgenstein himself, Soames' general tendency to miss the methodological sophistication of the linguistic practices of ordinary language philosophers produces, in other instances as well, significant distortions in his descriptions of their claims and projects. Most notably, Soames treats Ryle's comprehensive consideration of the linguistic and practical grammar of the various concepts of thinking, cognition, perception and volition in *The Concept of Mind* as itself embodying an anti-Cartesian

behaviorist theory of mental states in terms of behaviors and behavioral dispositions. The dispositionalist account is then criticized as failing for familiar reasons, but in fact, as he makes clear in various passages of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle never held any such view. It is true that Ryle offers to analyze the ascription of various mentalistic descriptions, including for instance the description of a performance as “intelligent”, in terms of the implicit ascription of an open list of categorical hypotheticals attributing propensities and likelihoods to respond in particular ways to particular situations. But the logical force of these ascriptions is explicitly *not* to report the presence of some underlying mental or neurophysiological structure thought to underlie the totality of these propensities and dispositions. In fact, Ryle devotes considerable attention, including an entire chapter on the logical grammar of dispositional terms, to making it clear that these terms can be understood as logical operators that do *not* have the task of referring to substantial underlying structures.<sup>8</sup> Ryle emphasizes this point in part to portray what he takes to be the real logical status of disposition-terms in ordinary discourse, but also to show that the sort of deflationary analysis he presupposes of the logical/linguistic functioning of normal psychological terms and concepts need not be a reductive one, either of a Cartesian or of a behaviorist character. Missing this, Soames takes it as an *objection* to the coherence of Ryle’s analysis that he never provides a reductive analysis of any mental concept in terms of a closed list of dispositional claims asserted to hold of anyone to whom that concept is correctly attributed. Here, again, what appears in Soames’ analysis as a failure in the theoretical yield of the methods of ordinary language philosophy is in fact simply the more consistent and coherent expression of methodological sophistications that he fails adequately to portray.

### III.

In these determinate ways, I have suggested that Soames’ typical lack of attention to internal reflections about philosophical methodology prevents him from seeing some of the substantial reasoning behind philosophical claims and practices, especially when, as in the ordinary language school, these reflections reached a high degree of internal methodological sophistication. Even where this is not the case, however, Soames’ analysis tends to repeat and consolidate a familiar and received story of the trajectory of the analytic tradition as a whole, one which also obscures many actually historically important themes, motivations, and questions, some of which are still substantially unresolved today. According to this more or less received story, the history of the tradition as a whole consists in two broad phases, roughly coincident, as it happens, with the two volumes of Soames’ work. In the first phase, philosophers are supposed to have been committed to an empiricist program of reductive logical analysis of ordinary and

empirical propositions into a phenomenalist basis of sentences directly characteristic of immediate experience, in line with a verificationist theory of meaning that was supposedly the centerpiece of the project of the logical positivists. The second phase of the tradition is then thought to begin with the repudiation of this project, largely at the hands of Quine, and the attendant development of more fluid and holistic conceptions of logical analysis and reflection. Despite elements of truth, this standard story, as I have argued elsewhere, was produced more or less in order to consolidate and support some of the very results it retells, and so privileges certain local strands of theory within the tradition at the expense of others that were historically just as significant in the determinations of the claims and projects of analytic philosophers.<sup>9</sup> Fortunately, recent historiographical work is just now beginning to bring out the real complexity of the story of these intersecting motivations; less fortunately, Soames' own retelling repeatedly opts for a version of the standard story, even where closer historical attention would have produced a more telling treatment of these and other issues.

One particularly unfortunate feature of Soames' analysis, in this connection, is his decision to treat the complex and conflicting positions of members of the Vienna Circle solely in terms of the perennially popular but actually rather unrepresentative description given by one of the Circle's most junior adherents, A. J. Ayer. In the four chapters of his discussion of logical positivism, Soames relies almost entirely for his presentation of the school's core commitments on Ayer's compressed presentation of these commitments in the two editions of *Language, Truth, and Logic*. Soon after its initial publication in 1936, Ayer's work was widely taken to be a canonical presentation of the doctrines of logical positivism, a status which it retains in many circles today. But because Ayer's presentation gives the program of positivism a strongly empiricist and phenomenalist bent, taking it as canonical, as Soames does, means eliding the Kantian, rationalist, and structuralist elements of theory that figured prominently in the thinking of leading positivists like Carnap, Schlick, and Neurath over the period of the Circle's regular meetings. Recent commentaries on the Circle have begun to document the significance of these elements for the origination and fate of the positivists' overlapping but distinct projects; bringing them out, as this recent work has done, produces a very different picture of the school's main concerns and motivations than the one that is familiar from Ayer's presentation.<sup>10</sup> In particular, as the recent commentary brings out, the most prominent early projects of the Vienna Circle philosophers, and the subject of the substantial debates that ultimately divided the Circle, turned more on the attempt to reflect on and theorize the logical and structural foundations and preconditions of objective, scientific knowledge than on the reductive, phenomenalist analytic project that Ayer espouses. Reflection on the basis and fate of this project of structuralist analysis, particularly during the long

and ultimately divisive debate between the Vienna Circle principals over the logic and status of protocol sentences (or sentences reporting the immediate experiential basis of empirical claims), brings out fascinating and still-unresolved issues about the logical grammar of objective explanation and the nature and structure of descriptions of subjective experience, issues that a more historically perspicuous account of this period might aptly have engaged more directly.

Since he follows Ayer's presentation so closely, Soames can present the ill-fated verification theory of meaning (the theory that holds that the meaning of an empirical sentence is to be stated in terms of its method of verification) as "the central doctrine of logical positivism" (Vol. I, p. 259). Because of this interpretation, he treats the project of logical positivism as having been determined, ultimately, by the rise and fall of this criterion. But although Soames assembles good and ultimately convincing arguments that tell against both stronger and weaker formulations of the verification principle, the reading of logical positivism as a movement according to which it stood or fell with this principle is, despite its continuing historical popularity, significantly misleading. The principle, which Wittgenstein himself seems to have held only for a brief time in 1929 and 1930, actually seldom figures centrally in the main constructive and analytic projects of the Vienna Circle principals. Privileging it, as Soames does, as the central principle of logical positivism means privileging the more polemic and categorical arguments against metaphysics in which these philosophers sometimes engaged over their more systematic and constructive ambitions for a positive understanding of the structure of logic and scientific objectivity. In any case, treating the Vienna Circle as uniform in its adherence to some version or other of the verification theory means ignoring the wholly anti-phenomenalist and structurally holistic orientation of Neurath's philosophical project over the entire period of the Circle's existence, as well as the extent to which this orientation increasingly affected Carnap's work after the publication of his first book, *The Logical Structure of the World*. These omissions make the claims and recommendations of logical positivism seem significantly less attractive than they historically were, and prevent Soames from treating some of the more interesting and enduring issues about linguistic meaning and scientific objectivity that could otherwise still emerge from them.

#### IV.

In 1951, when Quine wrote "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", he already had in mind, in rough outline, a comprehensive story about the development of the analytic tradition that presents his own repudiation of the analytic/synthetic distinction, in that article, as the inevitable negative outcome and conclusion of the tradition's first, positivistic phase. That this story subsequently set the pattern for the most usual and received way of

understanding the history of the analytic tradition bears witness to the profound impact of the views of meaning and philosophical insight that Quine developed beginning in that article, and culminating nine years later in his masterpiece, *Word and Object*. Since Soames' own way of understanding the overall trajectory of the tradition, as discussed, stands squarely within the field of influence of these views, it is no surprise that the readings of Quine, Davidson and Kripke which conclude the second volume of his work are generally more charitable, and more revealing of the actual historical contours of the developments they discuss, than the readings of earlier figures so far considered. With Soames' account of these thinkers, whose work is close to his own favored conception of philosophical methodology, one feels as if the retrospective, projective historicizing has finally paid off. We witness, in these final sections, the beginning in Quine, and the full development in Kripke, of Soames' vaunted distinction among the necessary, the analytic, and the *a priori*. And Davidson's project vindicates the search for systematicity that Soames has consistently demanded in earlier analyses of linguistic meaning. The sections on Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* contain much rich discussion of the implications for metaphysics and theories of truth and propositional content of Kripke's influential criticism of traditional descriptivist theories of naming in that work, with implications for the meaning and reference of natural kind terms. Since Soames has himself made important contributions to the contemporary discussion of these issues, students and readers who are interested in the current state of mainstream analytic thought on them will find the discussion here rewarding.

In fact, as already mentioned, Soames stands so centrally within the field of influence of Kripke and other representatives of the backlash against descriptivism that he takes the prospect of pursuing analytic philosophy in the way that they do – as a metaphysical inquiry into the structure of possibilities and necessities, rather than in any sense a *linguistic* practice of analysis, reflection, or reduction – to repudiate methodologically what might otherwise have seemed the single distinctive commitment most characteristic of the tradition as a whole, the commitment to considering philosophical problems and issues in a linguistic mode. As we have seen, this way of conceiving of philosophical practice sometimes prevents Soames from seeing the depth and intrinsic interest of historical philosophers' various positive conceptions of language, and accordant conceptions of linguistic analysis, within the tradition; just as significantly, it occasionally prevents him from appreciating the deep and far-ranging implications of some of the significant *negative* results about language that have emerged from it. This is the case, for instance, with respect to Soames' discussion of Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. Here, after a helpful and accurate discussion of the underlying theoretical sources and structure of Quine's argument for the thesis that alternative translations can be

produced for any sentences, Soames applies his Moorean commitment to respect pre-philosophical, commonsensical knowledge in order to criticize the argument as a *reductio* of its premises. Since the argument appears to establish, Soames holds, that “no one ever uses a word to refer to anything” (Vol. II, p. 264), and indeed that such commonsensical distinctions as that between a rabbit and an undetached rabbit part fail to obtain, there *must* be something wrong with the argument. In particular, Soames takes issue with Quine’s underlying claim that, given the argument from the position of the radical interpreter, facts about interpretation are underdetermined by the totality of actual or possible physical facts; the notion of “physical determination” requisite to specify this conclusion is not, Soames objects, adequately clarified, and on some readings of it the underdetermination thesis is rendered extremely implausible. In particular, if the relevant determination relation is not one of logical or *a priori* determinable consequence, but rather one of metaphysical supervenience, Soames argues, then the claim that the facts about meaning are underdetermined (in this sense) by the totality of physical facts becomes highly implausible. For,

Whatever any of us means by rabbit, it is natural to suppose that our meaning what we do depends ultimately on the physical facts. For example, we may ask whether a physically identical twin – someone (in a physically identical possible world-state) whose utterances, behavior, brain states, causal and historical relations to the environment, and interactions with other speakers (who themselves are physically identical with speakers in the world as it actually is) completely and exactly match mine (in the world as it actually is) – could mean by ‘rabbit’ what I actually mean by, say, ‘undetached rabbit part’. It seems to me that the answer to this question must be “No” – for the very same reason that physicalism itself seems acceptable on this interpretation. This suggests that whatever meaning turns out to be, it is something which – like everything else – supervenes on the physical. But if this is right, then we have reason to reject the underdetermination of translation by physics. (p. 251)

In arguing this way, Soames places himself within a long line of interpretations of Quine’s indeterminacy argument which criticize it, in a similar fashion, for the antecedent implausibility of its results. But in assuming the metaphysical supervenience of facts about meaning on the physical, the argument actually begs the question against the deep and radical character of Quine’s result. Doubtless, it is apparent to anyone who shares Quine’s own deep physicalist intuitions that facts about *almost* everything in the world supervene on the physical; but the force of the indeterminacy argument, properly understood, bears witness (as do other significant results within the analytic tradition) to the unusual and

problematic status of “facts about meaning”. Followed out to its conclusion, the indeterminacy argument itself yields what Soames thinks cannot be found, consistently with physicalism: reason for believing that two total scenarios might be identical with respect to all physical facts, yet differ with respect to the meanings of the words employed within them. That is because Quine’s argument purports to show that there are no “facts about meaning” in any straightforward sense, for determinations of meaning are always relative to a total interpretation, imposed from outside.

The result that there are no straightforward “facts about meaning” is certainly not unique to Quine; most obviously, it closely resembles the upshot of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations, at least as it was portrayed by Kripke himself in his other major work, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.<sup>11</sup> It is not at all obvious that this conclusion entails the radical skeptical conclusion that nobody has ever meant anything by any word (any more than that an anti-Platonist or eliminativist position with respect to the existence of numbers would entail that nobody has ever counted); in any case, doing justice to the arguments here would require more attention than Soames is prepared to give to questions about the way in which ordinary intuitions and assumptions about meaning and meaningfulness interact with the prospects for descriptive philosophical theorizing about the structure of language overall. Instead of reflecting on this interaction, Soames seems to assume that anyone who criticizes the latter must reject the former as well, and so fails to entertain the possibility that the Quinean and Wittgensteinian arguments might be taken as substantial internal critiques of the structuralist picture of meaning that philosophers elsewhere in the tradition had constantly assumed and that seems to form the background of Soames’ own theoretical goals.

## V.

Since analytic philosophy, however conceived, remains the dominant tradition of academic philosophy through much of the world today, it is inevitable that any comprehensive attempt to retell its history will involve a certain degree of implicit and explicit reflection about its current status and future prospects. This reflection, now increasingly aided by a developing historiography of the tradition, doubtless represents one of the richest contemporary sites at which the ongoing metaphilosophical discussion of the proper nature, aims, and results of philosophical practice can yield new projects and insights for the future. Soames’ own explicit methodological reflections come mostly at the end of his work; in a final “epilogue”, he describes and recommends the growing specialization and fragmentation, at least with respect to subject matter, that has characterized work in the tradition over the past twenty-five years. This specialization, he suggests, may yield important new insights in a variety of directions; he singles out, as

particularly promising areas of contemporary research, recent work in the philosophy of logic and language on the Liar paradox, vagueness and vague predicates, possible-worlds semantics and other intensional logics, and the underlying logic of propositional attitude ascriptions. Together, these and allied developments witness, according to Soames, an increasing transition toward a more organized and specialized practice of philosophy overall, as well as a “less introspective, more theoretical and scientific, perspective on meaning” (p. 476). The extent of this specialization of problems and subject matters is today getting to be so great, Soames suggests, that it may no longer be possible to tell the ongoing story of the analytic tradition in any single, unified way.

Soames’ picture of increasing specialization and rigorous, systematic work within narrower and more diverse sub-specialities is a fair portrait of the methodological trend that predominates in at least some of the prominent universities whose philosophy departments are primarily devoted to analytic philosophy. Like his historical account as a whole, it is very much an “insider’s” story, and the widespread acceptance of the praxiological assumptions it embodies might lead to a further consolidation of this already more or less dominant methodological style. The ultimate vindication of the pursuit of each of the particular sub-specialities he mentions, as well as of the specialist style in analytic philosophy as a whole, will of course depend on the ability of currently working and future philosophers to produce significant, compelling, and accurate discoveries, insights, and results about each of the specialized regions of phenomena under consideration in each case. But as I have attempted to show in discussing some of the methodological presuppositions and necessary biases that underlie Soames’ own historical analysis, the standards, criteria and dimensions of argumentative and interpretative significance and relevance by means of which the extent of these successes will be determined are themselves the product of a long and philosophically rich history, one which it may behoove even specialists to understand better.

The immanent historiography of the analytic tradition that has begun to be written over the last couple of decades offers an unprecedented opportunity for practitioners of the tradition to reflect on its overall shape as a historical movement, including the many specific conceptions of philosophical practice that it has embodied. In line with the linguistic turn itself, this reflection offers the tradition – whose large contours, if not all its moments of detail, have indeed been determined by issues of language and interpretation – the opportunity to take up the self-reflective question of the significance of linguistic meaning within the broader history of the best and deepest thought of our times. This question, if set within the broader contexts and sites of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, geopolitical and technological thought and discourse that today increasingly define the age, might turn out to be one of the most pivotal and precipitous ones that

philosophy, however one defines and polices its boundaries as a field, today has to offer. Reading Soames' history, one may have reason to hope that analytic philosophers, skilled as they have become at *arguing*, may also learn better from the profound and radical texts of their own discourse to *read* the plurality of signs and contexts, both inside and outside academia, that more and more surround it. Whatever the failings of its own practiced method of historical reading, Soames' exhaustive analysis at least succeeds in making available much of the descriptive and argumentative material that would be requisite for this kind of improved, and urgently needed, reading of the significance of the tradition of linguistic philosophy as a whole; it would be a pity if Soames' own way of presenting this material, or the canonization of the method he practices here, were to prevent philosophers inside and outside the analytic tradition from pursuing it further.

## Notes

1. Prominent recent contributions to this historiography include Coffa (1991), Hylton (1990), Rorty (1979), Friedman (1999), Soames (2003), and Dummett (1996).
2. Vol. I, p. xi.
3. Livingston (2004).
4. For more on the structure and implications of this argument, see Livingston (2001).
5. For this reading, see, e.g., Diamond (1991) and (2000), Conant (1998) and (2000), Ricketts (1996), and Ostrow (2001).
6. Vol. I, pp. 252–53. In fact, consistent with his steadfast refusal, throughout the *Tractatus*, to engage in any form of psychological or epistemological reasoning, Wittgenstein says very little about what is *a priori* or only *a posteriori* knowable.
7. In addition, Soames holds that Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, took the necessary and the *a priori* to be identical, although there is little evidence within the text for this.
8. For more on Ryle's view, and on how a misunderstanding of it along these lines led to the first formulations of the psychophysical identity theory, see Livingston (2004), chapter 4.
9. Livingston (2005).
10. See, e.g., Friedman (1999), Richardson (1998), Uebel (1992), and the essays collected in Giere and Richardson (1996).
11. Unlike *Naming and Necessity*, Soames does not discuss this work in any detail.

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