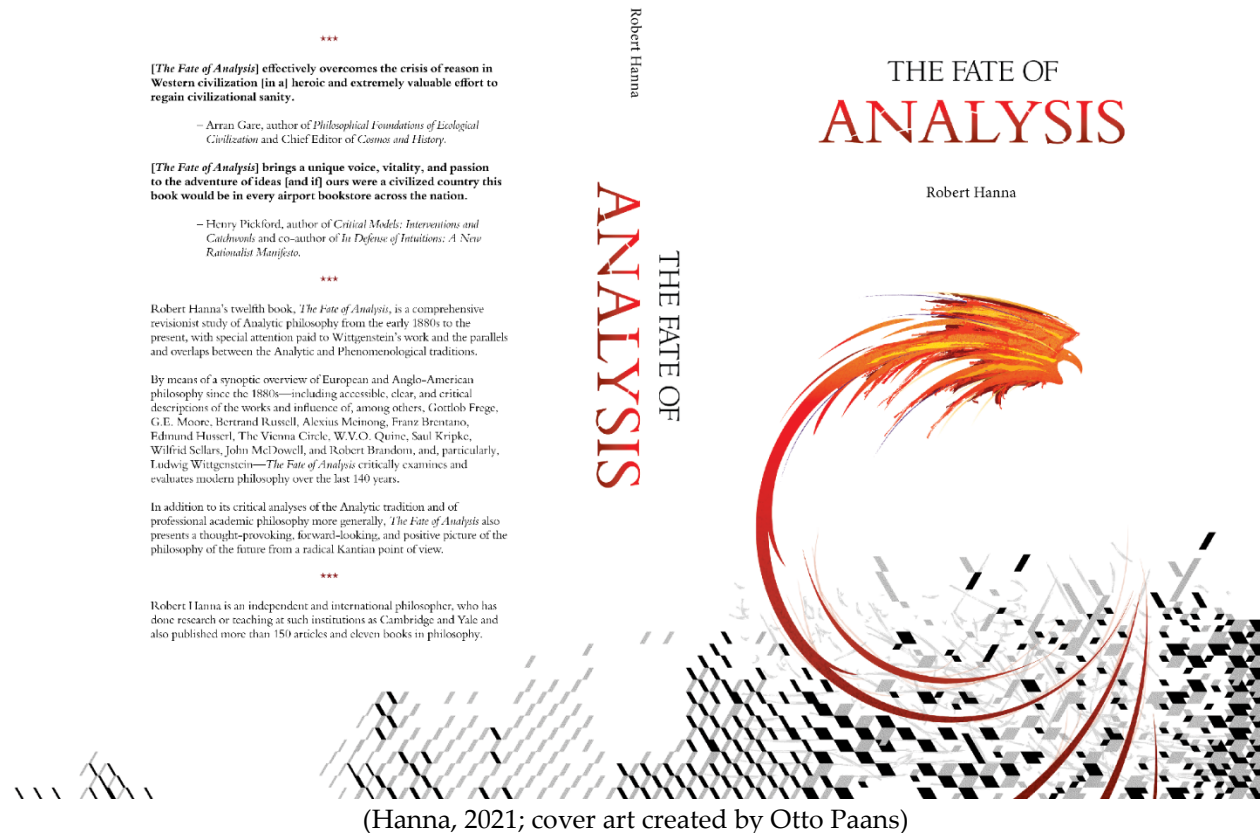


The Rise and Fall of Analytic Philosophy

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(Hanna, 2021; cover art created by Otto Paans)

I've argued in my first book, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Hanna, 2001), a longish article seven years later, "Kant in the Twentieth Century" (Hanna, 2008), and again in my more recent book, *The Fate of Analysis* (Hanna, 2021), that the origins of the Analytic tradition lie fundamentally in an extended intellectual struggle, driven by the "anxiety of influence," between (i) some mid-to-late 19th and early 20th century philosophers—principally Bernard Bolzano, Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the philosophers associated with the Vienna Circle, especially Rudolf Carnap, A.J. Ayer, and W.V.O. Quine—and (ii) the Kantian, Hegelian, neo-Kantian, and neo-Hegelian philosophy that was institutionally dominant and culturally hegemonic in Europe and Anglo-America during the 19th century. Let's call this *classical Analytic philosophy*. Classical Analytic philosophy, as a substantive philosophical project, was triply constituted by (i) *Logicism* (the explanatory and ontological reduction of mathematics to logic), (ii) *the theory of the analytic propositions and knowledge* (that is, the

theory of a priori logically or conceptually necessary truths and knowledge-as-logic-linguistic analysis of propositions, in contrast to synthetic a posteriori contingent truths and empirical knowledge, especially in the natural sciences), and (iii) *Logical Empiricism/conventionalism* (including the analytic-synthetic distinction and the exact-sciences-valorizing or scientistic rejection of the very idea of synthetic a priori truths and knowledge and Kantian metaphysics more generally). Classical Analytic philosophy was defined in negative relation to Kantian philosophy and therefore couldn't have existed without it. Correspondingly, classical Analytic philosophers' passionate grapplings with Kantian philosophy were always as *implicitly concessive* to it as they were *overtly critical* of it. So classical Analytic philosophy was, in a broadly Freudian way, *kantalytic* philosophy.

Nevertheless classical Analytic philosophy was also an authentic, substantive, and (in its day) revolutionary post-Kantian philosophical project. Simultaneously, early or classical Analytic philosophy was also in a direct, fruitful dialogue with *pragmatism* and *organicist* philosophy—C.S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Henri Bergson, Samuel Alexander, A.N. Whitehead—and *phenomenology*—Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, Martin Heidegger—from the end of World War I right up to the outbreak of World War II.

But after World War II, things shifted dramatically. During the 1950s and 1960s, Analytic philosophy *itself* became the institutionally dominant, culturally hegemonic form of philosophy, at least in Anglo-America, in two special ways: (i) via its strong tendency to intellectual normalization, it was closely allied with McCarthyite anti-communist, big-capitalist, Cold War politics of the 1950s, and (ii) via its *scientism*, it was (and still is) fully entangled with what President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously called the “military-industrial complex”¹—now updated to what I call the *military-industrial-*

¹ This of course riffs on a famous phrase in US President Dwight D. Eisenhower's “Farewell Address” in 1961:

[The] conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together. (See, e.g., Wikipedia, 2024, underlining added)

digital complex—in neoliberal democratic States. Classical Analytic philosophy thus became *post-classical* Analytic philosophy. This is compellingly documented in two books by John McCumber (McCumber, 2001, 2016). And by the 1970s, the professional academic philosophical take-over in Anglo-America was complete: post-classical Analytic philosophers were The Man, The Establishment, The Power Elite.

Yet by the early 1980s, post-classical Analytic philosophers were shocked to discover that an internal push-back and indeed rebellion of sorts was emerging from a group of younger philosophers influenced by the later Wittgenstein's philosophy, existential phenomenology, Gadamerian hermeneutics, and Deweyan pragmatism. This revolt was epitomized and widely-publicized by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, and "Philosophy in America Today" (Rorty, 1979, 1982a, 1982b; see also Hanna, 1983, 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the mainstream Analytic response to Rorty was swift, critically uncharitable, and personally vituperative. For example, from my graduate student days, I vividly remember all the *ad hominem* garbage about "Rorty's mid-life crisis" that was circulating in the hallways and departmental lounges, and at post-talk receptions, at Yale in the mid-80s. — A much-used but rarely acknowledged professional academic philosophical argument-strategy: *refutation-by-trash-talk*. — And another is: *refutation-by-unjust-neglect*. And then, suddenly, Rorty was out of professional philosophy, powered by a MacArthur "genius" grant, forever self-exiled to various Humanities departments, by the end of the 1980s.

At roughly the same time, so around 1980, coinciding with the publication of Rorty's two controversial books, the term "Continental philosophy" came into common use in Anglo-American philosophy (Keller, 2018) as a *conceptual dumpster* into which every kind of *non-Analytic philosophy* could be tossed without differentiation, rejected without argument, scorned, and permitted to live only with the explicit permission of the Analytic mainstream, and only for the purposes of teaching undergraduates and filling the requisite number of lines on their CVs under "Research and Publications" on their annual departmental evaluations.

During Spring 2018, I read three excellent essays that collectively prompted me to start thinking about all this philosophically flammable material again: Walter Cerf's "Logical Positivism and Existentialism" (Cerf, 1951), Joel Katzav's and Krist Vaesen's "On the Emergence of American Analytic Philosophy" (Katzav and Vaesen, 2017), and Joel Katzav's "Analytic Philosophy 1925-1969: Emergence, Management, and Nature" (Katzav, 2018). And this led to some follow-up thoughts that formed an important part of the intellectual groundwork for *The Fate of Analysis* (Hanna, 2021).

Back in 1951, focusing on the two contemporaneous and culturally important subtypes of Analytic philosophy and so-called Continental philosophy—namely, (i) Logical Positivism, aka Logical Empiricism, and (ii) Existentialism—Cerf very correctly picked out the core substantive first-order philosophical issue at issue between Analytic philosophy and non-Analytic philosophy: *Scientism* vs. *Humanism*. This is also what Sellars later called the clash between *The Scientific Image* and *The Manifest Image*, in “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man” (Sellars, 1963). And it’s also nicely-captured, although somewhat less rigorously, in C.P. Snow’s famous lecture on “the two cultures” (Snow, 1959). But neither Cerf nor Sellars nor Snow has an adequate way of reconciling or unifying these two conflicting world-conceptions.

For better or worse, my own two-part solution to the “Two Images” problem is (i) to provide an adequate metaphysical, epistemic, and normative grounding for The Manifest Image, thereby thoroughly enhancing and enriching it, via an appropriately updated and refined version of Kant’s transcendental idealism, and then (ii) to embed the scientific *inside* the humane, but in a metaphysically, epistemically and normatively intact way, thereby thoroughly *re-enchanting* the scientific. Or in other words, *to humanize the scientific, without either reduction or relativism*. Correspondingly, I’ve worked out this idea in some detail in my book, *Science for Humans* (Hanna, 2024a).

But in any case, classical Analytic philosophy as a three-part substantive philosophical project was already effectively *dead* by the middle of the 20th century. Kurt Gödel seriously wounded it in 1931 by means of his two incompleteness theorems, thereby undermining Logicism. But Quine killed classical Analytic philosophy with a devastating 1-2 punch consisting of “Truth By Convention” in the mid-1930s and “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in the early 50s. After Quine, only three elements of the classical Analytic tradition remained in post-classical Analytic philosophy, each of which was originally parasitic on the substantive classical Analytic project—yet since that time, by a magical metamorphosis of social-institutional life, they’ve become collectively essential to its 70+-year survival as a zombie of its former self, the *Night of the Living Philosophical Dead*: (i) explanatory and ontological materialism or physicalism, conjoined with universal natural mechanism, as an unargued, dogmatic presupposition and sociocultural attitude or worldview, *the mechanistic world view*, (ii) *logical theory*, especially including conservative extensions of classical logic like modal logic, and, beyond that, “deviant logics,” i.e., non-conservative extensions of classical logic like intuitionist logic, and the logico-semantic analysis of natural language, as formal methods, but without any coherent, defensible metaphysical, epistemic, or normative foundations for logic, or any adequate solution for “the logocentric predicament,” which says that in order to explain or justify logic, unreduced logic must be presupposed and used, hence logic itself is inexplicable and unjustified (see, by sharp contrast, Hanna, 2006), and (iii) *professional*

academic institutional domination and hegemony, under the self-selected label “professional philosophy.”

In spelling out the historical foundations of this intellectual horror-story, I think that neither Cerf nor Katzav/Vaesens pays sufficient attention to the specifically *political* dimensions of The Great Divide between Analytic philosophy and so-called Continental philosophy. After World War II, as I’ve already mentioned, and as McCumber has compellingly documented, the scientism and institutional consolidation of the post-classical Analytic tradition closely mirrored the rise, dominance, and hegemony of McCarthy-style anti-communist, big-capitalist politics in the USA. This politics of course has its recent and contemporary analogues in neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and emergent Donald-Trump-style “populism” and neofascism.

After World War II and into the mid-1970s, so-called “Continental” philosophers were professional philosophy’s equivalent of intellectuals in Stalin’s Russia, and sooner or later coerced into an inner exile consisting of an “Area of Specialization,” aka an AOS, a “first circle” of academic hell, their very own little Gulag Archipelago. The emblematic career arc of the American existentialist philosopher Hazel Barnes epitomizes this process (Barnes, 1997).

What happened next? In the 1960s and early 70s people came out of their McCarthy-era deep freeze, discovered civil rights, neo-Marxism aka The New Left, personal liberation, sex, drugs, and rock-&-roll—and partied till dawn. But after they slept it off, and slowly turned into middle-aged and then late-middle-aged or even old-aged people, between the mid-1970s and the early decades of the 21st century, the emergent massive new political force was liberal (and now fully neoliberal) identity-politics, aka multi-culturalism, aka multi-culti, for example, Clinton(s)-Obama-Biden style Democratic politics.

By the mid-to-late 1990s and the turn of the millennium, this larger political dynamic was fully mirrored in the professional academy in general and professional philosophy in particular. So for at least the past twenty-five years, currently, and in the near future, and professional academic philosophy in Anglo-America has been, is, and will be, essentially, *a struggle-to-the-death* between on the one hand, (i) post-classical mainstream Analytic philosophy (*The Man*), with its roots in the anti-communist McCarthy period, under the banner of “Analytic Metaphysics,” and on the other, (ii) neoliberal-identitarian/multi-culturalist coercive moralist philosophy (*The Anti-Man*), with its roots in the Clinton(s)-Obama-Biden period, under the banner of “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Watching that professional academic apocalypse unfold, but also with their many surveillance devices constantly trained on the professional academy as

whole, the Reagan-Bush-style neoconservatives and the Trump-style populist/neofascist neoliberals have been, are, and will be lined up around the ivy-covered walls, waving their flags and guns, always ready to break in and take over. This will begin to happen when the terminal implosion of what Rorty in the mid-1990s somewhat misleadingly called “The Unpatriotic Academy” (Rorty, 1994)—a more accurate label would be *The Ivory Bunker*—finally occurs, in 2024 and 2025, in the wake of the campus Gaza War protests (Hanna, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d), and Trump’s impending (no doubt) re-election as President.

In any case, nowadays, post-classical Analytic philosophy, just like professional academic philosophy and higher education more generally, is careerist, hyper-specialized or scholastic, hence irrelevant to humankind, commodified, mechanized by digital technology, coercively moralistic, and dead as a doornail (Hanna, 2024d). Should we mourn the fall of Analytic philosophy? —*Hell no*. On the contrary. Bracketting classical Analytic philosophy, and some notable exceptions in the post-classical period—for example, undoubtedly original and important work by G.E.M. Anscombe, Peter Strawson, Ruth Barcan Marcus, Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, Gareth Evans, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Phillipa Foot, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Harry Frankfurt, Rorty, Bernard Williams, Thomas Nagel, Brian O’Shaughnessy, Richard Wollheim, David Lewis, Derek Parfit, John McDowell, Robert Brandom, Susan Haack, and a few others—my view is: *good riddance to bad rubbish*. For in my opinion, it’s only *after* the Analytic tradition has finally fallen, that 21st century philosophy can have an authentic, broadly-Kantian-philosophy-driven, and phoenix-like resurrection and future, as what I call *rational anthropology* (see, e.g., Hanna, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d) and *life-shaping philosophy* (see, e.g., Maiese et al., 2022), *outside* the professional academy (Hanna, 2021, 2024e²).

² For a similar view that’s non-Kantian or at least not explicitly Kantian, see also (Sanklecha, 2024).

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