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Conceptions of analysis in the analytic philosophical tradition

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Abstract

Analysis has been at the heart of philosophical method, though it has been understood and practiced in many different ways. This paper traces the historical conceptions of analysis in the analytic philosophical history, identified as: the Regressive Analysis, the Decompositional Analysis, and the Interpretative analysis. The key characteristic features and methodological approaches of each of these conceptions of analysis, as well as their relative era of historical significance, are explored in the paper. It concludes with the view that notwithstanding some objections against it, philosophical analysis is largely a fruitful method of philosophical inquiry, whose role in contributing to man's better comprehension of reality remains highly significant and desired in our contemporary age. The expository and analytic methods of research are adopted in the paper.

Keywords: Analysis; Regressive; Decompositional; Interpretative; Syncategoremata

1. Introduction

Philosophers of the analytic tradition, largely agree on the importance of analysis for clarification of meaning. Nevertheless, they embrace diverse conceptions regarding the process and method application of the term. Perhaps, in its broadest sense, analysis might be defined as a process of isolating or working back to what is more fundamental by means of which something, initially taken as given, can be explained or reconstructed (Beaney, 1). But this takes different forms depending on the conception of the analysis involved. This explains the variations of analysis in the analytic philosophy history, which philosophers have continually drawn upon and reconfigured in different ways. However, despite their variations, these conceptions are held together by both their shared history and their methodological interconnections.

It is the aim of this paper to expose this range of conceptions of conceptual analysis in the history of philosophical analysis and their historical application. In view of this, the key distinguishing features and the relevant logical methodologies implied in each of these conceptions of conceptual analysis as well as their historical era of relative emphasis shall be examined in the paper. The objections against the analytic tradition are also considered.

2. The Concept and Conceptions of Analysis in Philosophy

The word, 'analysis,' derives from the ancient Greek term '*analusis*'. The prefix '*ana*' means 'up', and '*lusis*' means "loosening", 'release' or 'separation'; so that '*analusis*' means 'loosening up' or 'dissolution' (Beaney, 2). The term was readily extended to the solving or dissolving of a problem, and as it relates to philosophy, it refers to any of the various techniques, typically used by philosophers in the analytic tradition, in order to "break down" (i.e. analyze) philosophical issues (Wikipedia, n. p.). According to Michael Beaney, "analysis in its basic sense, means a working back to what is more fundamental by means of which something, initially taken as given, can be explained or reconstructed" (*Conceptions of Analysis in Early...*, 97). Robert Audi conceives analysis as "the process of breaking up a concept, proposition, linguistic

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complex, or fact into its simple or ultimate constituents” (1.1). For James Mark Baldwin, “analysis is the isolation of what is more elementary from what is more complex by whatever method” (1.1). Simon Blackburn, defines the term as “the process of breaking a concept down into more simple parts, so that its logical structure is displayed” (14). Thomas Baldwin says that “philosophical analysis is a method of inquiry in which one seeks to assess complex systems of thought by ‘analyzing’ them into simpler elements whose relationships are thereby brought into focus” (1.1).

The above definitions evidence the fact that in its general sense the concept of analysis implies the resolution of concept or fact into simpler elements, or breaking something down into its components in order to display its logical, basic or fundamental structure. In their work, philosophers focus on different areas for analysis. One might analyze linguistic phenomena such as sentences, or psychological phenomena such as sense data. However, arguably the most prominent analyses involve concepts or propositions and are known as *conceptual analysis* (Foley, 19). Philosophical analysis, notably, differs from scientific analysis or investigations by focusing majorly in “conceptual analysis”, which is our major concern in this paper. Conceptual analysis consists primarily in breaking down or analyzing concepts into their constituent parts in order to gain knowledge or a better understanding of a particular philosophical issue in which the concept is involved (Beaney, 1.1). For example, the problem of free will in philosophy involves various key concepts, such as the concepts of freedom, moral responsibility, determinism, ability, choice, etc.

Conceptual analysis tends to approach such a problem by breaking down the key concepts pertaining to the problem and seeing how they interact. Thus, in the long-standing debate on whether freewill is compatible with the doctrine of determinism, several philosophers have proposed analyses of the relevant concepts to argue for either compatibilism or incompatibilism. Thus, conceptual analysis provides cognitive tools that allow one to perform wider and more in-depth studies of concepts and their constituents than empirical methods would ever enable on their own. In addition, the application of this method ensures a higher level of rationality (in terms of justification) of the relation between both. There are different ways this might be done, and which philosophers have identified and adopted in history. Prominent among these, about which this paper is pre-occupied are: The Regressive Analysis, the Decompositional Analysis, and the Interpretative Analysis. Philosophers have continually drawn upon these three conceptions of analysis in different ways and in varying degrees in philosophy history as we shall see.

3. Regressive Conception of Analysis

In philosophical analysis, regressive analysis refers to the analytic process concerned with identifying the ‘starting-points’ (principles, premises, causes, etc.). The key idea here is that of ‘working back’ to first principles, by means of which to solve a given problem (such as to construct a particular geometrical figure, derive a particular conclusion or explain a particular fact). Again, analysis in the regressive sense involves the working back from ‘what is sought’, taken as assumed, to something more fundamental by means of which it can then be established, through its converse, synthesis. This conception of analysis has its roots in ancient Greek geometry and philosophy and has had a significant influence throughout the history of philosophy (Beaney, *Conceptions of Analysis in Early Analytic...*, 98). In fact, in ancient Greek philosophical thought, ‘analysis’ referred primarily to the process of working back to first principles by means of which something could then be demonstrated, explained or generated.

4. Decompositional Conception of Analysis

The decompositional analysis in philosophical analysis is concerned with identifying the components – as well as structure – of something. Analysis is seen here as involving the decomposition of something (e.g., a concept or proposition) into its constituents. This second conception of analysis, emerging in the Medieval period, forms the core of what is undoubtedly the conception of analysis that prevails today. The distinction between these first two modes has been widely recognized by philosophers.

5. Interpretive Conception of Analysis

In philosophical analysis, the interpretative analysis is concerned with translating or interpreting something into a particular framework. This conception of analysis which emerges explicitly in the twentieth century, has always been around implicitly in earlier conceptions and projects of analysis. This is because, any analysis presupposes a particular framework of interpretation, and preliminary work is done in interpreting what it is we are seeking to analyse — the *analysandum* — before we engage in other processes of ‘working back to what is more fundamental’. For instance, in the work of Frege and Russell, before the process of decomposition could take place, the statements to be analyzed had first to be translated into their ‘correct’ logical form. This suggests that analysis also involves an *interpretive* dimension. As we will later see, it was this idea that came of age in early analytic philosophy.

5.1. Conception of Analysis in Ancient Period

Philosophers in the ancient period were basically concerned with the *regressive analysis*, concerned with identifying the 'starting-points' or 'working back' to first principles, by means of which something could then be demonstrated, explained or generated. This basic idea of regressive analysis in the ancient Greek philosophy is primarily reflected in the "dialectic" method employed by Socrates in Plato's early dialogues, which consists in asking questions of the form: 'What is *F*?', where '*F*' is typically the name of some virtue, and attempting to find a definition through dialogue with his interlocutors. For example, the question in the *Charmides* is 'What is temperance?', in the *Laches* 'What is courage?', in the *Euthyphro* 'What is piety?', and in the *Meno* 'What is virtue?' On the whole, commentators agree that what Socrates is seeking are real rather than nominal definitions, definitions that specify the essential nature of the thing concerned rather than the properties by means of which we can recognize it or the meaning of the term used to designate it (Beaney, *Analysis*,3). In other words, his method of conceptual analysis is that of "working back" from what is assumed to what is more fundamental about it.

This regressive conception of analysis is equally reflected in different ways, in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Plato may not have used the term 'analysis' himself, but his concern with definition is central to his dialogues, and definitions have often been seen as what 'conceptual analysis' should yield. The influence of Greek geometry, and of the regressive method of analysis, is evident in Plato's *Meno*, where he formulated the Meno's paradox (which anticipates the paradox of analysis): "Either we know what something is, or we do not. If we do, then there is no point searching for it. If we do not, then we will not know what to search for" (80d-e.). It is in response to this paradox that Plato introduces his theory of learning as recollection (*Meno* 86e-87b) – which implies "working back" to the first principle to demonstrate the source of knowledge. It is equally evident in his definition of 'knowledge' as 'justified true belief' (or 'true belief with an account') in his *Phaedo*. In fact, Beaney is of the view that, "the roots of conceptual analysis can be traced back to Plato's search for definitions" (2).

Aristotle was also inspired by the influence ancient Greek geometry and geometrical analysis, so that, he embraced and developed the regressive conception of analysis in his *Analytics*. He compares reasoning about the means to a given end to analysis in geometry (Beaney, 2). According to Aristotle, just as in geometrical analysis, we work back from what is sought to something we already know how to construct or prove, so too in practical deliberation, we work back from what we want to something which we know how to do, which results in what we want (qtd. in (Beaney, 2). It is this regressive conception of analysis that inspired Aristotle's development of syllogistic theory, expounded in the *Analytics*. Just as the aim of the geometer is to solve geometrical problems (construct figures or prove theorems), so too Aristotle was concerned to solve logical problems (construct arguments or prove propositions). In the *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle says that a demonstrative syllogism is "one in virtue of which, by having it, we understand something" (71b17-19), that is, one in which the premises are "true and primitive and immediate and more familiar than and prior to and explanatory of the conclusion" (71b21-2). The regressive conception dominated views of analysis until well into the early modern period.

5.2. Conceptions of Analysis in the Medieval Period

Medieval philosophy is the philosophy of Western Europe from about ad 400–1400, roughly the period between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance. Medieval philosophers were the historical successors of the philosophers of antiquity. The principles that underlie all the medieval philosophers' work are: The use of logic, dialectic, and analysis to discover the truth, known as ratio; respect for the insights of ancient philosophers, in particular Plato and Aristotle and deference to their authority. The goal of Medieval Philosophy was that of "fitting" the rational truths of philosophy into the dogmatic truths of Christianity and thus make it more intelligible and powerful. Plato and Aristotle were, thus, the two leading influences on medieval thought. Leading thinkers of this period include St. Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, and Psuedo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Thomas Aquinas.

Conceptions of analysis in the medieval and renaissance periods were largely influenced by ancient Greek conceptions. But knowledge of these conceptions was filtered through a variety of commentaries and texts. There are three conceptions of the term "analysis" (Latin: *resolution*) as used by Aquinas in his works. The first is analysis as a kind of *division*, or what is referred to as decompositional analysis, whereby a genus (common class of a particular being) is 'broken down' into its constituent species. The second is resolution as *reversion*, or what is called regressive analysis – though the movement here is modelled in the upward opposite direction towards the higher Forms. The third is analysis as *problem-solving*, understood as what is prior to the systematic act of demonstration (synthesis).

However, in the late medieval period, clearer and more original forms of analysis started to take shape. In the literature on so-called 'syncategoremata' (words that have meaning in propositions only when used with in conjunction "with" other words, e.g., prepositions, logical connectives, etc.) and 'exponibilia', for example, where Medieval logicians

developed keen interest in the interpretation of linguistic expressions within the context of the propositions they occur, we can trace the development of a conception of interpretive analysis (Beaney, 3). Sentences involving more than one quantifier such as ‘Some donkey every man sees’, for example, were recognized as ambiguous, requiring ‘exposition’ or interpretation to clarify. However, perhaps the richest and most interesting text for exploring conceptions of analysis in medieval philosophy is the *Summulae de Dialectica* (*SD*) of John Buridan (c.1300-c.1360). Buridan distinguishes between analysis as divisions, definitions and demonstrations, which can be seen as illustrating the distinction between decompositional, interpretive and regressive analysis. The bulk of the Treatise (chs. 3-12) is concerned with demonstration, explaining and elaborating on Aristotle’s account in the *Posterior Analytics*.

5.3. Conceptions of Analysis in the Renaissance Period

During the Renaissance, with the rediscovery and translation of ancient Greek texts that had simply not been known in Christian Europe in medieval times, awareness gradually grew of the variety of methodologies in antiquity. This prompted widespread discussion of methodology, inspired by the very problem of how to deal with the rediscovered ancient texts. Indeed, methodology itself became one of the hottest issues of all, as Renaissance thinkers fought to make sense of their great predecessors. Unfortunately, however, these clearer forms of analysis became overshadowed during the Renaissance, despite—or perhaps because of—the growing interest in the original Greek sources. As far as understanding analytic methodologies was concerned, the humanist repudiation of scholastic logic enhanced the controversy on methodology. Key figures in this debate were Petrus Ramus (1515-72) and Jacopo Zabarella (1533-89), who can be taken as representative of the two poles between which debates took place.

Ramus was a savage critic of Aristotle, who proposed to replace the complexities of Aristotelian logic with the single method of humanist dialectic, conceived as the means of systematizing knowledge to facilitate learning and its practical use. He saw Aristotle’s *Organon* (or logical works) as a confused body of doctrine, which needed to be reorganised for pedagogical purposes, based on the simple principle that the general comes before the specific, the whole before the part. Thus, Ramus rejected the need for analysis, as understood in the Aristotelian tradition. As Ong notes, “Analysis, for Ramus, is thus at root a way of operating didactically upon a text...” (264). He complemented this by his quest for *genesis*, rather than ‘synthesis’ in the sense of ‘demonstration’ as found in Aristotle. For Ramus, then, ‘analysis’ was not a method of solving problems, and if it can be understood as a method of discovery, then it only involved learning what was already known. (Ong, 264).

Zabarella, on the other hand, represents the Aristotelian pole. Central to Zabarella’s account of method of analysis was precisely Aristotle’s distinction between understanding ‘the fact’ and understanding ‘the reason why’, as articulated in the *Posterior Analytics*, a work on which Zabarella wrote a detailed commentary. According to Zabarella, the two methods involved here—the *methodus resolutiva* (analysis) and *methodus compositiva* (synthesis)—are to be combined in providing the joint method for natural philosophy, all other methods, such as Plato’s method of division, being inadequate to generate genuine knowledge (Copenhaver and Schmitt, 118).

5.4. Modern Conceptions of Analysis (Outside Analytic Philosophy)

The scientific revolution in the seventeenth century brought with it new forms of analysis. The newest of these emerged through the development of more sophisticated mathematical techniques, but even these still had their roots in earlier conceptions of analysis. By the end of the early modern period, decompositional analysis had become dominant. In common with the Renaissance, the early modern period was marked by a great concern with methodology. This might seem unsurprising in such a revolutionary period, when new techniques for understanding the world were being developed and that understanding itself was being transformed (Beaney, 4). The model of geometrical analysis was a particular inspiration here, albeit filtered through the Aristotelian tradition, which had assimilated the regressive process of going from theorems to axioms with that of moving from effects to causes. Analysis came to be seen as a method of discovery, “working back” from what is ordinarily known to the underlying reasons (demonstrating ‘the fact’), and synthesis as a method of proof, “working forwards” again from what is discovered to what needed explanation (demonstrating ‘the reason why’). Analysis and synthesis were thus taken as complementary, although there remained disagreement over their respective merits.

Thomas Hobbes wrote a chapter on method in the first part of *De Corpore*, published in 1655, which offers his own interpretation of the method of analysis and synthesis, where decompositional forms of analysis are articulated alongside regressive forms. Hobbes says: “Every method by which we investigate the causes of things is either compositive, or resolute, or partly compositive, partly resolute. And the resolute is usually called analytic, while the compositive is usually called synthetic” (*Logica*, 1). The decompositional conception of analysis was also shared by both the British Empiricists and Continental Rationalists. Descartes, for instance, embraces a decompositional form of analysis in the Rule Thirteen of his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (written in 1628), as articulated in *The*

Philosophical Writings of Descartes, which states: “If we perfectly understand a problem we must abstract it from every superfluous conception, reduce it to its simplest terms and, by means of an enumeration, divide it up into the smallest possible parts.” (I, 51).

The decompositional conception of analysis found its classic statement in the work of Immanuel Kant at the end of the eighteenth century with his analytic/synthetic distinction. This decompositional conception of analysis set the methodological agenda for philosophical approaches and debates in the (late) modern period (nineteenth and twentieth centuries). In the twentieth century, both analytic philosophy and phenomenology can be seen as developing far more sophisticated conceptions of analysis, which draw on but go beyond mere decompositional analysis. The following section offers an account of analysis in analytic philosophy.

5.5. Conceptions of Analysis in Analytic Philosophy and Contemporary Era

The analytic philosophy is one of the main currents of 20th century and contemporary philosophical thought. What characterizes analytic philosophy, dominant in Anglo-American philosophy, is its emphasis on the logical analysis of concepts and the study of language in which they are expressed. Michael Dummett says that ‘the fundamental axiom of analytical philosophy’ is that “the only route to the analysis of thought goes through the analysis of language” (128). The tradition begins with G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (as well as Gottlob Frege, whose initial influence was largely filtered through Russell and Wittgenstein). These philosophers set the agenda, first, for logical positivists such as Rudolf Carnap, Carl Hempel, and A. J. Ayer and then later for Wittgenstein, who in turn ushered in the ordinary language school led by Gilbert Ryle and J. L. Austin.

The conception of analysis that characterized analytic philosophy is the recognition of what was called earlier the *transformative* or *interpretive* conception of analysis. This was evident in the Cambridge School of Analysis, which was primarily active in the 1930s, and which drew its inspiration from the logical atomism of Russell and Wittgenstein and the earlier work of Moore. As well as Moore himself, its central figures included John Wisdom, Susan Stebbing, Max Black and Austin Duncan-Jones. Together with C. A. Mace and Gilbert Ryle, Stebbing and Duncan-Jones (who was its first editor) founded the journal *Analysis*, which first appeared in November 1933 and which remains a key journal of analytic philosophy today.

The paradigm of analysis at this time was Russell’s theory of descriptions, which opened up the whole project of rephrasing propositions into their ‘correct’ logical form, not only to avoid the problems generated by misleading surface grammatical form, but also to reveal their ‘deep logical structure’. This gave rise to the idea of analysis as the process of uncovering the ultimate constituents of our propositions (or the primitive elements of the ‘facts’ that our propositions represent). In the work of Frege and Russell, before the process of decomposition could take place, the statements to be analyzed had first to be translated into their ‘correct’ logical form. This suggests that analysis also involves a *transformative* or *interpretive* dimension. Hence, the Cambridge School of Analysis insists that, any analysis presupposes a particular framework of interpretation, and work is done in *interpreting* what we are seeking to analyze as part of the process of regression and decomposition. This may involve *transforming* it in some way, in order for the resources of a given theory or conceptual framework to be brought to bear.

What was also crucial in the emergence of twentieth-century analytic philosophy, however, was the development of quantificational theory, which provided a far more powerful interpretive system than anything that had hitherto been available. Frege and Russell had developed the system of predicate logic, into which statements were ‘translated’ into logical language, which opens up such possibilities that we are no longer forced to treat the surface grammatical form of a statement as a guide to its ‘real’ form, but we are now provided with a means of representing that form. Such logical analysis of language allows us to ‘analyze away’ problematic linguistic expressions and explain what it is ‘really’ going on. This strategy was employed, most famously, which was a major motivation behind the ideas of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, was significantly embraced by the Cambridge School of Analysis.

According to Wittgenstein, then, analysis—in principle—takes us to the ultimate constituents of propositions, and indeed, to the nature of the world itself. He says: “If we know on purely logical grounds that there must be elementary propositions, then everyone who understands propositions in their unanalyzed form must know it.” (5.5562). However, this whole logical and metaphysical picture was dismantled in Wittgenstein’s later work, *Philosophical investigations*, where he embraced contextual analysis. Although subsequent philosophers were to question the assumption that there could ever be a definitive logical analysis of a given statement, the idea that ordinary language may be systematically misleading has remained.

There was also the idea of Quasi-analysis and explication offered by Rudolf Carnap and logical positivism – a philosophical position of the members of the Vienna Circle. The rejection of metaphysical analysis is characteristic of logical positivism, which developed in Vienna during the 1920s and 1930s. The central figure was Rudolf Carnap, who was influenced not only by Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein but also by neo-Kantianism (Beaney, 7). Carnap's key methodological conception in his first major work, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (1928) is that of *quasi-analysis*. Carnap held that the fundamental 'units' of experience were not the qualities (the colours, shapes, etc.) involved in individual experiences, but those experiences themselves, taken as indivisible wholes. But this meant that analysis—*understood in the decompositional sense*—could not yield these qualities, precisely because they were not seen as *constituents* of the elementary experiences (68). Instead, they were to be 'constructed' by *quasi-analysis*, a method that mimics analysis in yielding 'quasi-constituents', but which proceeds 'synthetically' rather than 'analytically' (69, 74).

Also emerging at this time was the Oxford Linguistic Philosophy, with focus on analysis of ordinary language as a means of resolving philosophical problems. A major representative of this school is Gilbert Ryle, who later became more interested in the idea of logical analysis of ordinary language, to show what is wrong with misleading expressions. Ryle's most important work was *The Concept of Mind*, published in 1949, in which he argues that the Cartesian dogma of the 'Ghost in the Machine' was the result of a 'category-mistake', confusing mental descriptions with the language of physical events. According to him, his aim is to "rectify the logical geography of the knowledge which we already possess" (9), an idea that was to lead to the articulation of *connective* rather than *reductive* conceptions of analysis, the emphasis being placed on elucidating the relationships between concepts without assuming that there is a privileged set of intrinsically basic concepts. (Baeney, 6). John Austin was another influential figure in Oxford at the time. Like Ryle, he emphasized the need to pay careful attention to our ordinary use of language. He was influential in the creation of speech-act theory, with such distinctions as that between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (62). Although Austin shared Ryle's belief that reflection on language could resolve traditional philosophical problems, he employed linguistic analysis more and more as a tool in the construction of theories of language. But one good illustration of the importance of such reflection for philosophy occurs in section IV of Austin's book *Sense and Sensibilia*, where Austin (36), considers the various uses of the verbs 'appear', 'look' and 'seem', in the examples: (1) He looks guilty (2) He appears guilty (3) He seems guilty. There are clearly differences here, and thinking through such differences enables one to appreciate just how crude some of the arguments are for theories of perception that appeal to 'sense-data'.

W. V. O. Quine is also a towering figure in the contemporary period, and his famous critique of Carnap's analytic/synthetic distinction in his "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", was instrumental in inaugurating a view of philosophy as continuous with the natural sciences, with the corresponding rejection of the view that there was anything distinctive about conceptual analysis (20-46). One recent defense of conceptual analysis, with a qualified rejection of Quine's critique of analyticity, however, has been offered by Frank Jackson in his book, *From Metaphysics to Ethics* published in 1998. On Jackson's view, the role of conceptual analysis is to make explicit our 'folk theory' about a given matter, elucidating our concepts by considering how individuals classify possibilities (31-3).

As evident from the foregoing, analytic philosophy should really be seen as a set of interlocking sub-traditions held together by a shared repertoire of conceptions of analysis upon which individual philosophers draw in different ways. Analytic philosophy, then, is a broad and still ramifying movement in which various conceptions of analysis compete and pull in different directions. Reductive and connective, revisionary and descriptive, linguistic and psychological, formal and empirical elements all coexist in creative tension; and it is this creative tension that is the great strength of the analytic tradition.

5.6. A Critique of the philosophical Analytic Method

Notwithstanding its significant role in philosophy, the method of philosophical analysis has been criticized for several reasons, leading to some claim that "we are now in a 'post-analytic' age" (Beaney, 1). An outstanding criticism of the analysis method is derived from a critique of definitions, whereby the method of analysis seems to rely on some sort of definitional structure of concepts, and presumes to a give necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept. This leads to a very rigid and fixed conception of things, whereas, experience suggests otherwise. Perhaps only a few will doubt that, it is difficult to find an analysis of any concept that can qualify to be universal or general in all cases. W.V. Quine, in his essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", points to this while criticizing the analytic method in his famous rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction. After a rigorous and sustained analysis of the many ways others have sought to establish the truth of both analytic and synthetic statements, Quine drew the conclusion that, "no statement is immune to revision" (qtd. in Stumpf, 459). This means that both analytic and synthetic propositions contain only contingent truth and to that extent, they do not differ.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, equally argues in his *Philosophical Investigations* that language is not just used for stating facts (against his earlier position in his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*), but it is used for various purposes and in an indefinite number of ways. For him, names are not the simplest units of language with fixed meanings; rather the meaning of any word or concept is determined by its use in a language. For this reason, he contends that analysis should consist not in the *definition* of language or its meaning but rather in a careful *description* of its uses. His famous statement in this regard is: "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use" (qtd. in Okon and Etuk, 124).

For example, the concept "bachelor" is often analyzed as having the concepts "unmarried" and "male" as its components. Thus, the definition or analysis of "bachelor" is thought to be an unmarried male. But one might worry that these so-called necessary and sufficient conditions do not apply in every case, for the term "bachelor" may refer to an academic degree from a higher institution of learning. This means that, in each case, the meaning of 'bachelor' is determined by its use in a context. Thus, if it can be shown that the word means different things across different contexts of use, then cases where its meaning cannot be essentially defined as 'unmarried man' seem to constitute counterexamples to the method of analysis in philosophy.

6. Conclusion

The history of philosophy reveals a rich engagements and conceptions of analysis, which is any of the processes typically used by philosophers in the analytic tradition in order to break down concepts to their basics for proper understanding. While this method of philosophical engagement seems especially characteristic of the contemporary analytic philosophy, its roots and conceptual variations trace back to philosophy history as exposed in the paper. Despite several currents of criticisms, analysis remains largely a fruitful method of philosophical inquiry.

Compliance with ethical standards

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