

## I

# Nihilistic Consequences of Analytic Philosophy

Only a few days had elapsed since the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association immediately following Christmas. It was the 2000 meeting, only a year short of the centenary of the Association. The APA is the official professional society for academic philosophers in the United States. It is the official society because, among other things, it is the employment agency for the profession. A colleague in another university sent me this e-mail message:

I thought you might enjoy this snippet of talk that I overheard in an elevator at the APA. It was a conversation between two young men who are at Princeton (according to nametags) and finishing the graduate program/going on the job market (according to context): [I came in a couple floors into the conversation]

#1: . . . So did the last interview go just as well?

#2: No. It really didn't go well at all. It was very odd. [*puzzled look*]

#1: How so?

#2: Well, for example, they asked me what I would like to teach and I talked about my philosophy of mind course, you know, and one of them cut in and asked me if I would have the students read William James and . . .

#1: William James? The Pragmatist? [*said in disbelief*]

#2: Yes, yes, and so I told them of course not. Can you imagine?

#1: Good. What did they say?

#2: They said, "Why not?"

#1: What did you say?

#2: I said I never read anyone who takes philosophy personally [*look of great distaste*] or confuses philosophy with things that matter in their little lives.

#1: Right. If they want to talk about philosophy as if it matters personally, they need to get out of the profession or at least go back to school. Yeah—maybe we [Princeton] could get together with Pittsburgh and Rutgers and offer some regional postdoctoral remedial programs for those kinds of people. [*great snickering and laughter*]

And what is analytic philosophy? Rather than the old standby of attempting to define by adducing necessary and sufficient conditions for applying terms, I will try a kind of ostensive procedure. I will point, and say, “There, that’s what I mean.” Actual instances of the “analytic” habit of mind will appear in concrete situations.

Modest contextual or *in situ* clarifications will be gained. We will see central or paradigmatic instances, but see also where cases might appear on the margins. In fact, an indefinite number of borderline cases might appear; and with this the complexity, variety, and frequent fuzziness of actual life-situations is acknowledged.

I point first to the elevator conversation. The second example is the Leiter Report, or the Gourmet Guide to Analytic Philosophy Departments in the United States. It has been disseminated for about ten years to university administrators and philosophy departments, the ones that count, across the nation. It ranks, it says, analytic departments of philosophy nationwide. It chronicles year by year the horse race for the top spot. Princeton, Rutgers (my school), Pittsburgh, and at times Harvard and others, have jockeyed for the lead. Very recently, NYU’s newly reminted doctoral program—reminted with a vengeance—has flashed to the front, a stunning dark horse.

The criteria for ranking? Its reputation among those who know. Those in the know simply know, and Brian Leiter knows who these people are. About one hundred philosophers are asked to rank departments nationwide. Reports circulate of contending departments offering Leiter the latest news of faculty appointments. Stars being lured; or stars threatening to leave their old departments because of undisclosed offers; or with spouses discontented so the two might be movable as a pair; or a star negotiating for a professorship if he or she is guaranteed a one-course-a-year teaching load on the graduate level only.

Until very recently, midway through the report Leiter threw in a completely unfounded claim: The best teaching in Continental philosophy is found in analytic departments. He simply knows. Last year Leiter

really did limit his ranking only to analytic departments.<sup>1</sup> In the semblance of an attempt to supply criteria for his judgments, he distinguishes between departments that offer an historic emphasis, among other emphases, and those that are “problem solving.”

A telltale point: Only in the last year have well-known Anglo-American philosophers begun to criticize The Report (coincidentally with a coldly furious letter to the APA Board from the 2000-strong Continental Group, The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy). Thus Bernard Williams, guest speaking at NYU, scoffed gently at the distinction Leiter draws between studying history of philosophy and “problem solving.” For the very idea of what problems are, or what problems there are, stems typically from historical studies, or neglect of same. But the main point is, for about a decade The Report went unchallenged by analytic philosophers, and indeed was relished by quite a few. And not unchallenged harmlessly, for deans have been known to allocate funds and faculty positions on the “objective basis” of The Report. Leiter informs us that the website for the *Philosophical Gourmet Report, 2000–2001*, has received 130,356 “visits” since November 1998.

Now for the third and last exhibit of analytic philosophy to which I point (“I mean *that*”): the new NYU graduate program, which exhibits perhaps the final analysis of analysis. This is a great boon. Seeing where this habit of thought has finally gotten, we can see clearly where it has always tended. In the new program, no dissertation is required for the doctorate, no comprehensive exams (so of course no history of philosophy exam), no foreign languages.<sup>2</sup> Just a few analytic gems, polished, tight exhibits of analytic skill in argumentation, papers publishable in the best journals. And what are they? The ones who publish the best philosophers. An airtight argument, one must admit.

We have all we need to sketch initially the meaning of “analytic philosophy.” The consequences for our lives of this habit of thought are intimated.

Return, please, to the Princetonians in the elevator. How explain the hauteur of these young men? The answer to this will supply much of what we need to know about nihilism, and how analytic philosophy encourages it. What enables apparently intelligent and successful graduate students in philosophy (intelligent and successful judged by the standards of a highly commercialized, technologized, and analytic society), what enables them

to claim that older philosophers such as myself and my colleagues should be sent back to school at Pittsburgh, Princeton, Rutgers (!), and, I suppose, NYU to be reeducated?

It must be that they observe from a radically ahistorical and modern-progressivist point of view, and that they take it completely for granted. It must be that the tide set in motion by the scientist-philosophers of the seventeenth century—Descartes is the best example—has come full term. But let the subsequent physician-philosopher John Locke epitomize the tide, in fact the tidal wave. The enlightened philosopher is to accept a subordinate position: He must be, says Locke, an “underlaborer” to the empirical scientist.

Undeterred by the Romantic rebellion of the early nineteenth century—and later idealists, pragmatists, and phenomenologists—this tidal wave crashes through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Augmented by scientific and technological marvels of these centuries, the wave carries all before it, the whole culture and now much of the world besides.

We best call this tidal wave *scientism*. This is the view that *only* science can know. Scientism cannot be supported by science itself. For to substantiate the claim that other ways of knowing are fraudulent, or at least unreliable, would require that science pursue these putative ways of knowing and determine that they get us nowhere. But to pursue these other ways reliably would require science to abandon its own proven methods and scope of validity. Or, science would be required to rule a priori and arbitrarily that the other ways couldn't possibly be effective in their subject matter areas. Either way, science oversteps itself. Scientism is ideology, not science. The simple fact is, not all questions or issues can be resolved by any single method, scientific or otherwise.

The young men's hauteur is an instance of scientism. Their reasoning (insofar as that term applies at all) must go something like this: Since science progresses, and philosophy is supposed to attach itself somehow to science, philosophy must also progress. Hence, knowledge of the history of philosophy is inessential: where we start from now funds and holds within itself all previous progress. At most, studying the history of philosophy satisfies an antiquarian's curiosity. Hence, as well, an analytic philosopher's knowledge of the history of analytic philosophy itself is inessential.

Hegel put it succinctly: *Wesen ist was ist gewesen*. Being is what has become. Not to know how one has become what one is, means one has a grossly inadequate idea of what one is. The Princeton graduate students pride themselves in never reading “anyone who takes philosophy person-

ally or confuses philosophy with things that matter in their little lives.” But being ignorant, apparently, of how they (and their professors, presumably) have come to hold such a view, they have no idea of how it might be criticized, or who they are who hold it. What would Socrates, Kant, Hegel, or James have said about it? Socrates believed that philosophy is tendance of the soul. (Can you imagine him countenancing a “gourmet report”?) Kant knew that one of the essential philosophical questions is, What may I hope? Hegel saw that nothing—but nothing—happens of note in the world without passion. James observed that if one who desires self-knowledge takes exclusively a [supposedly] detached and dispassionate view of oneself, one has already prejudiced what one can be, and, of course, what one can know of oneself.

In fact, one is always personally involved some way in every investigation one undertakes. One is particularly entangled in one’s person when denying that one is personally involved. To presume to transcend personal involvement through a quasi-scientific “philosophy of mind” is to be massively self-deceived. Presuming to transcend personal self, these selves group themselves and assert themselves blindly. The damage spreads through everything they touch. In the Maoist manner, those still stuck in the old ways are to be purged or “reeducated.”

Who will teach the undergraduates who still take philosophy courses (an ever shrinking number)? In great part it will be these newly minted, or about to be minted, young Ph.D.’s. Those who have no idea of the travail through which humankind has passed, over many, many millennia, in order to become semihumane and semicivilized—at least some of the time. Those graduate students who may say, for example, to their still younger undergraduate charges that existentialism was a mere fad, or a product of the extreme anxiety of the World War II years, or the work of those who never outgrew adolescent identity crises. As if Sartre or Heidegger or William James invented the ideas of death or of identity crisis. As if the main labor of philosophy had not always been to guide us into the fullest possible self-development and self-knowledge, despite anxiety and death—or because of them!

Recall how Socrates in *Phaedo* concludes his arguments for the immortality of the soul. He and his friends conclude that they had at least done their best in engaging a greatly difficult question. But the dialogue doesn’t end there. Socrates launches into an extended recounting of ancient myths of the journey of the soul after death, its passage through underground rivers, and so on. Try this yourself with the typical graduate student

analytically trained: Ask him or her why Socrates (and Plato) end the dialogue this way. See if you get any intelligent discourse on the immemorial role of myth in the development and constitution of human beings. Typically you will get, at best, a logician's response to the validity of Socrates' earlier arguments, and that's about all. In hearing nothing but the latest in "scientific" philosophy, they have been cheated by their professors.

Nihilism means: to mangle the roots of our thinking-feeling-evaluating selves, to lose the full potential of our immediate ecstatic involvement in the world around us. It means to lose full contact with our willing-feeling-valuing life-projects: to have a shallow sense of what is valuable in human life. It means to be arch, smug, dried out—to be a talking head among other such heads. Speak and reason as we will, we are no longer moved in our depths.

Nietzsche believed we moderns were losing our depth. When we speak, depth is a matter of being present as a person in what we say; it is not just a matter of asserting informational or logical "content." Or, as the apt phrase has it, depth means standing behind what we say. At decisive junctures of life, the authentic person's each word and act is an implicit vow: "I bet my life on this." The nihilist says, in effect, there is nothing worth dying for. There is nothing that I believe from the bottom of my being.

Nietzsche vents a disturbing thought: We would rather have the void for our purpose than be void of purpose. If there is never anything worth dying for, we tend to will the void, to will destruction. Nihilism. For this gives us, surreptitiously, something to believe in: "There is no belief. There is no reliable knowledge of reality. There is no reliable fullness of being."

James joins Nietzsche in thinking that belief is the *feeling* of reality, and the feeling of our own fullness. They both agree that in losing conventional religious belief, we are left flailing in limbo. For "new tablets,"—new compelling and commanding ultimate beliefs—have not yet been discovered. Christianity was not all childishness, fear, and resentment, for it gave us something constructive to believe in. Sacrificial love need not always be correlated with self-loathing: it can be what Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* called the "gift giving virtue":

When the sun, over-full, pours itself into the sea. So that even the poorest fisherman rows with golden oars.

Nietzsche thinks that we are afraid to reflect because we suspect what we might find: That we don't really know what we're doing; that we don't have

good reasons for what we're doing; that we're not building solid, deep selves; that we don't find that which commands total belief and total commitment and direction. Or that, when some claim to find it, it's fanaticism.

When Nietzsche encourages us "to shoot out a shining star," he is as much cheerleader as sober guide. Not yet himself a member of the new community that must come about if nihilism is to be avoided, he cannot decisively distinguish the shooting out of a star that achieves depth and vitality of self from shooting out a star disintegratively and wildly. Nietzsche foresees many of us today: our countless addictions, distractions, dissipations of passion that might have served as the core of self. Seeking that which we can avow, we find Disney World, or much worse. We do not find objects and ends worthy of our depth and passion. We are led to evasions, and to the silent desperation of which Thoreau spoke, and from which Emerson tried to steer us clear.

Nietzsche had read too much of Schopenhauer to think we moderns could easily locate ourselves and map our course (he had also read Emerson). Opening the door for Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and others, Schopenhauer disclosed how we overestimate the powers of self-consciousness. We think we direct our will toward this or that objective, and that we rationally calculate the consequences of achieving it. All the while, vast tides of will are moving us in ways we don't imagine. We are moved inexorably toward many things that give no lasting satisfaction, but which we cannot stop craving.

Most wish to believe that we emerge from our animal pasts. However, our heads chock full of ideas and ideals, we remain in our animal pasts. But not living simply, as do the other animals, we are entangled and confused. We can't come to terms with the will of the species embodied in each of us: the brute will to survive. For Schopenhauer, the willing self is inexplicable, at least in the clear cut sense of mechanistic physicists' "explanation." Following and developing Kant, Schopenhauer believes that this sense of explanation can only be in terms of causal connections discerned between objects.

But our own willing-feeling self cannot be an object for us! We are far too close, too engulfed in it. I the willer *am* my willing. With respect to our own willing-feeling self, all the facile distinctions analytic thinkers draw are out the window: self/other, knower/known, subject/object, emotive/cognitive, willer/willing. And the realization lands with a thud: this willing exceeds the scope of my consciousness, and hence the scope of my cognition, narrowly pinned down and defined.<sup>3</sup>

I *am* this willing-feeling! To gain any grasp on it at all, I—I-myself—must feel the force and pinch of it. One either has the grit and the equanimity to stand open to one's "empirical character" as a particular human animal, or one does not. The self can be sensed only emotively—and morally—and expanded upon only metaphysically, as Schopenhauer does.

Analytic thinkers tend to constrict what intelligence and cognition can mean. But this is insufficient for self-knowledge. To allow one's feeling-willing self to be accessible to some extent, is a moral virtue akin to courage, patience, and, in a sense, love—self-love *and* love of others. (Because for good or ill we do affect others. Are we blessings or afflictions?) The analytic tendency to divide the emotive from the cognitive, and the moral from the factual, is disastrous. In addition to one's own self, some other things can only be known lovingly and resolutely—Jane Goodall's chimpanzees, for but one example.

The endemic weakness of analytic philosophy is just what one should expect: a proneness to making overly simple and rigid distinctions. This, rather than realizing with Nietzsche, Peirce, and James, for instance, that every distinction we draw is good for so much and not a bit more. And that we must be prepared to erase distinctions, and, looking around afresh, make new ones. (What, for example, are the conditions of identity of a supposed "mental state"—"a belief," say—in contrast to a "physical state"?)

At least one more overly facile analytic cut must be pointed out: the "scientific," "cognitive," and "factual," on the one hand, and the "aesthetic" on the other. In many analytic departments of philosophy, aesthetics is not meat and potatoes, but only dessert. But achieving any perspective at all on our feeling-willing lives and selves, is not only a moral and characterological matter; it is an aesthetic one. The moral/aesthetic distinction must be greatly softened.

To disingulf ourselves even partially from the immediate involvements of our subjectivity, James the thinker and artist advises us "to pump free air around things." That is, to gain a certain deliciously delicate and difficult-to-define distance on the true givens of life. We may be able to *say* about something only *that* it is, not *what* it is. Art-making and art-loving can supply this free air, this measure of accessibility of oneself to oneself, this partial deliverance from the otherwise overwhelming grip of impulse and will. Schopenhauer sees this, as does John Dewey. Like Socrates did when, at the end of his life and in a vision, a Presence told him to learn to play a musical instrument.



Do you think the young men in the elevator will ever come to grips with these issues?

Socrates thought the most important learning is remembering matters that we already know, in a sense, but cannot thematize and use effectively in living and thinking. Myth and ritual keep alive this vibrant stratum of our evolved being. They are the funded sensitivity, engagement, perceptiveness, knowledge of the human race, and they must be perpetually revived and revisited.

David Abram writes,

Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and honking of geese.

But Abram goes on,

I found myself now observing the heron from outside its world, noting with interest its careful, high stepping walk and the sudden dart of its beak into the water, but no longer feeling its tensed yet poised alertness with my own muscles.<sup>4</sup>

When this detachment from the kindred world in which we have evolved and taken shape is crude, automatic, and endemic in a culture, there is vast trouble. In losing resonance, our very being begins to dissipate. We are basically involved, evaluating, passionate beings. As I said, nihilism mangles our roots. What Ingmar Bergman writes of modern art can equally be said of contemporary analytic and “scientific” philosophy at its worst: it is

free, shameless, irresponsible: the movement is intense, almost feverish, it resembles . . . a snakeskin full of ants. The snake is long since dead, eaten out from within, deprived of its poison, but the skin moves, filled with meddlesome life.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned, the vast majority of analytic philosophers turn a blind eye to the history of their thought. They cannot understand how the passion with which they have pursued their project of knowing the truth

has constricted that project and limited what they can find. Analytic philosophy wants to valorize itself by charting what it takes to be its ever closer convergence with the latest scientific findings (and to develop a metaphysics in the closest possible association with formal logics). Nevertheless, we must at least note some high points in the development of this habit of thought if we would begin to grasp its great limitations.

I mentioned in passing the philosopher-scientists of the seventeenth century. It is particularly Descartes who is germinal in the growth of analytic philosophy through the centuries. In addition to being a mechanistic physicist of a certain bent, he was a mathematician and geometrician of note, and an ambitious physiologist and anatomist. He was not well versed in the history of philosophy. He did pick up the idea of “substance”: roughly, that which exists more or less on its own, or in and through itself. He was unaware apparently of the immense subtleties poured into this idea by Aristotle, for example, two thousand years earlier. (And apparently unaware of the Latin mistranslation of *ousia* [the first of the categories for grasping the reality of something] as *substantia*.)

Aristotle would never have thought that a single characteristic of anything, such as some feature that falls in the categories of quantity or location, could adequately demarcate or characterize the being or reality of that thing. But impatient to unroll his scientifically informed world-view, Descartes does think so. There are basically two sorts of substances: Matter, characterized by the key characteristic of being extended (and localized), and mind, characterized by the key characteristic, nonextended (and nonlocalized).

Now, where does Descartes stand when he stakes out his initial philosophical position? What all is he assuming? It is not clear. The question is not really raised and considered, despite his protestations that he wants a self-illuminating and self-authorizing beginning for his thinking. He simply assumes that each thinker is a nonextended, thinking substance. Mind is a nonextended substance that stands by itself. And it reflects itself within itself. Its “contents”—ideas, sensations, mental images—are illuminated within it. In other words, mind is something like a self-illuminating, mirror-lined container (except it is somehow spaceless and without any definite location).

Which leads him, he thinks, to an absolutely certain, self-certifying beginning for his world-view, the famous *cogito ergo sum*. Briefly: Even if a doubt occurs, and then doubt about the doubting, still it must be doubting that is going on “in the mind.” And since, he believes, there could not be a

doubt or a doubting without a doubter, a thinker, we can be sure of at least one, certain, “originative” truth: I must exist as a thinking thing.

And do I also have a body? That can be doubted!

Now, all this is blatantly counterintuitive. The whole Cartesian approach is eminently doubtable. So far is it from being true that “mind” is essentially self-reflexive, its “contents” self-illuminating! Anyone with any self-awareness knows that thoughts and impulses flit through the margins of consciousness that we are lucky to register at all. Moreover, they never are found alone, as discrete mental contents or elements, but always in a whole flowing experiencing-experienced context, which is the presence in some way of the world around us. Our moment-by-moment life is pre-reflective: we are immediately involved in what presents itself as a whole world, even though most of it is blurred at any particular moment. If we are sane, we feel this world’s sustaining, resisting, or affording presence every instant. Sequestering ourselves, prompting ourselves into a crude reflective attitude, we may imagine that we can doubt the “external world’s” reality, but we can’t really. Not for more than a few moments at least, not without going insane.

The great nineteenth-century American philosopher, Charles Peirce, believed that philosophy’s first business is to repudiate Descartes. Here is a key way to locate or site analytic philosophy and to clarify it: A graduate student in some of the “best” universities today can be minted Ph.D. (*doctor philosophicus*) without ever hearing Peirce’s name. Though the student may at least hear the names of two thinkers this genius influenced: William James and John Dewey (but recall the Princetonian would never *read* James). All these “pragmatists” agree that Descartes gave a fatefully wrong direction to modern analytic philosophy; he substituted an abstraction and an analysis for a description of what immediately presents itself concretely in living. Thinking that there are discrete mental contents or elements results from an initial reflection and analysis that forgets itself. It smuggles itself in and falls asleep. Mental contents—or so-called “sense data”—are not the building blocks of our minding life, the pragmatists maintained. Rather, they are the by-products, the artifacts, of the analysis that forgets itself.

The pragmatists maintain the primacy of *description*: the description of what actually presents itself in our immediate experiencing (see Essay 4, “Phenomenology in the United States”). The description is of something holistic and encompassing—with a vengeance. In refusing to substitute abstractions and unwitting reflective analysis for descriptions of what is

presented concretely and immediately as a surrounding and sustaining presence, in refusing this, pragmatists are also phenomenologists. Thus Peirce can say both that the repudiation of Descartes is the first business of philosophy and that phenomenology is. The two come to the same thing.

And here is another key way of siting, locating, clarifying analytic philosophy: newly minted Ph.D.'s from most of the "best" graduate programs will know nothing about phenomenology. For some reason unknown to them, it will be a thirteen-letter dirty word. They will have no idea of why Hegel's first big book, his voyage of discovery, was a phenomenology, nor of why Peirce (and James and Dewey in their ways) thought that the first business of philosophy is phenomenology. Nor, of course, why Peirce found his categories—his basic ways of sorting out and constituting the experienced world—only within his phenomenology. This stands in sharp contrast to Descartes and his incredibly thin and unfounded categories for "substances"—ones characterized by a single feature, nonextended or extended.

Here is another earmark of analytic philosophy, intimately related to the above: Newly minted Ph.D.'s from many of "the best" graduate programs can be found who know very little of the pivotal figure in modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant.<sup>6</sup> (As Aristotle is the pivotal figure in what professors of philosophy commonly call ancient philosophy.) Kant's philosophy is a protracted and titanic attempt to sew the immediately lived world back together after Descartes chopped it up.

Kant presents his own phenomenology (inadequate though it may be). Before any talk of mental "contents" or "sense data" can be allowed, we must lay out the framework, the context or matrix, without which no discrimination of any particular anythings—"mental" or "physical"—can occur. Ineluctably, as "forms of all possible perception or intuition," we must experience space and time as all-encompassing and continuous wholes. And this before any concepts, even, can be applied to our sense experience. Concepts have instances, Kant says, space has parts.

Analytic philosophy carries the living, unreflected residuum of Descartes's "substantialism," "atomism," "mentalism," his whole glittering trove of reified abstractions and hypostatized nouns for mental "contents"—sensations, images, and such. We get one version or another of what has come to be called phenomenalism. We don't get phenomenology.

Bear with me a bit longer in this all too brief but necessary review of the history of analytic philosophy. We must mention how John Locke fell

into line with key features of Descartes's mind/matter dualism. Despite major differences between the two thinkers (prompting writers of histories of philosophy to classify Descartes as a rationalist and Locke as an empiricist), despite this, the latter accepts uncritically Descartes's premature and unfounded analysis of immediate experiencing into mental "entities," "states," "data." At this key point, Locke falls into the cleaving course, the wake, of the "father of modern philosophy."

But it is not until David Hume, emerging well over a century after Descartes, that the pulverizing, detaching, and corrosive—that is, nihilistic—effects of Descartes's thought become fully apparent. Descartes could, it seems, make himself believe that the Christian God exists. So, this creating and sustaining Deity would not have produced beings whose best thought—mechanistic physics, logic, mathematics, and philosophy—would leave them in doubt about the existence of the "external world" and their own bodies! So, Descartes concludes, those doubts can be dismissed.

But with David Hume, all the reassurances of Christianity pretty well dissolve in an acid bath of acute, if constricted, criticism. Accepting Descartes's assumption that the basic resources of thought are discrete mental bits or "contents" in private minds, but rejecting his theological arguments, Hume advances an eerie skepticism. All we can be sure of are sequences of sensations or mental images, vivid or faded, that we take to be appearances of what is happening in the world. But it might not be really happening out there at all. What we take to be one thing causing another may be no more than habits of thinking and expectation we've developed, habits of assembling discrete mental data, habits that might explode the next moment in the face of the unexpected.

And why should Descartes be sure that there must be a continuous self or thinker that has or thinks all these mental contents? Who am I, really? No one can tell. All we can be nearly sure of are the sequences of mental data so far experienced that we just blindly assume to be occurring in a continuous thinking self.

But for all of Hume's critical acuteness, he doesn't question Descartes's basic substantialist and dualist assumptions, his divisions of mind from matter and subjects from objects. Only on these assumptions does Hume's eerie skepticism follow. Analytic philosophy to this day tries to deal with the spectre of Hume. Most analytic philosophers that I've encountered are ignorant of Descartes's great successor and arch-critic, Benedict Spinoza. He judged Descartes to be a confused thinker. The diremption or bifurcation of substances into extended and nonextended is

groundless, Spinoza believes. There is only one truly self-standing substance, and everything leans on, is related to, everything else within the one substance. Indeed, there is only one true individual, and it is Nature. Nature or God. And here despite all his geometrical reasoning, Spinoza returns to the mythic roots of Nature religion found in the earliest reaches of human evolution, East or West, North or South.

Carrying heavy remnants of Cartesian thinking, analytic philosophers are practically obsessed with the problem of “reference.” How can we be sure that there is anything “out there,” and that we can know what it is? Propagated in their thinking is a miasmatic feeling of unreality, detachment, uncertainty that can’t help but shroud their everyday living in some nebulous way. All the resources of modern modal and nonmodal logics are wedded to a kind of metaphysics in which a referent is rigidly designated “in all possible worlds.” (Saul Kripke’s notion of naming is a special case in analytic philosophy, and much more in touch with our actual existence. But I cannot deal with it and with him here.)

A corollary: most analytic philosophers will not study our own American critics of Descartes already mentioned. For they must dimly perceive in them a threat to their own basic assumptions. Peirce speaks of “paper doubts”: we can pretend to doubt what we can’t really, for doubt is not some mental “content in one’s mind,” but a way of responding and acting in a world we cannot wholly doubt. James responds to “the referent problem” in his typical phenomenological and disarming way. If I grab you by the wrist, we simply cannot doubt—not really—that that place on your body where I feel you is exactly where you feel yourself felt. We “refer” to the very same place.

Except, of course, it is not “reference” at all, but the practical certainty of immediate involvement in an essentially interrelated world. It is an existential certainty without which sanity would be impossible.

Analytic philosophy tends powerfully to put us at a remove from everything, even from our own selves, selves turned ghostly. As if the self were a kind of theatre in which we sit and try to identify ourselves on a stage—try to identify ourselves out there as objects (recall Schopenhauer’s critique of construals of self-knowledge in subject/object terms). Not finding ourselves out there, we may conclude that we can’t really find ourselves at all. Or, it’s as if, in a delusional sweat, we ran outside our house, looked back in through a window, and were surprised that we couldn’t see ourselves in there.

Yet again, perhaps the whole Cartesian world-view can be compared

to those large plastic cubicles, found in some diners and amusement parks. The bottom of the cubicle is loaded with goodies: toy cars, glittering zircon bracelets, strings of beads, packs of cigarettes, puppets, chocolates sheathed in foil to look like outsized silver dollars. Above them all is poised a magnificent claw. After putting coins in slots, you can manipulate the claw downwards and clamp its jaws shut on just the thing you want in the jumble and tangle of treasures. And perhaps you will fail and get the wrong thing, or get nothing.

Whatever its drawbacks and virtues as academic philosophy (I of course am emphasizing its drawbacks), judged on a psychoanalytic as well as an existential level analytic philosophy may well be the ultimate defense mechanism. The mechanism employed by those who feel dimly but profoundly their vulnerability as body-selves—what I mentioned in the preface. Descartes thought that humans are composite beings, half mental, half physical. Animals are only physical beings, and mechanical ones at that. So when an animal is vivisected and shrieks, it may sound like it is feeling pain, but it is really no more than a machine that shrieks because it is blocked in its functioning, or because it is unlubricated. It is hard to imagine any presumptively sane view more out of touch with reality.

Though some analytic thinkers may repudiate Descartes's precise formulations, most keep the endemic detachment and schizy unreality that goes with the Cartesian territory. Thus there is little analytic work on the primal stages of human evolution, studies of the mythic and ritualistic grounds of human existence. Work on "the environment" and on "environmental ethics" does occur, but tends as expected to be thin and detached, with many reified abstractions, "rights," "duties," and so on.

But we are not only *in* environments, as marbles are in a box. We are of them, constituted fully or scantily of their being. Detachment kills immediacy of involvement, and its sustenance and sap. Kills our kinship with plants and animals, and our ecstatic oneness with sky, mountain, sun, wind, bird, and native peoples. Insofar as this is the case, analytic philosophy is nihilistic.

Here's a trichotomy that may orient us. First, there's the domain of what we know and know that we know; second, the domain of what we know we don't know; third, the domain of what we don't know we don't know. The latter is, of course, unplumbable, undemarcatable. We simply sense, dumbly discern, that we are engulfed in an encompassing reality that cannot itself be encompassed or circumscribed.

I understand philosophy in a traditional way. It is an activity the ultimate aim of which is to keep us open to the unencompassable, the domain of what we don't know we don't know. An obvious corollary is to strive to make our assumptions as clear and as grounded in experience as it is possible for us to make them. For our assumptions are just that: assumptions, which we formulate within a universe we cannot encompass in thought. Analytic philosophy tends to so sharply focus that it seals us from the vague but all-important background presence of the universe. It feeds a starvation diet to us strange thinking animals. It is crudely or subtly nihilistic.

Assumptions made automatically very often pinch off in advance the full sustaining and regenerating flow of the universe through us, through our resonating bodies and nervous and glandular systems. This is certainly true of Descartes, all his strained arguments for the existence of God to the contrary notwithstanding. It remains true of the analytic tradition, at least the main channel of it. Truth, for example, in this channel is typically construed as a correspondence between propositions "in the mind" and the world "out there." But these are all reified abstractions, not the flowing life of involvement in whole surrounds that we bodily beings actually live.

And think of it! Why should truth be restricted to *words*? All the unencompassable ways the world is revealed to us constitute truth. Silences, music, gestures, presences and presencings here and there. Animals, birds, trees, indigenous peoples, all these beings can be true when they are true to themselves, true to their nature, and their nature is shown us.

Our own American pragmatist-phenomenologists converge not only with the earliest thought in European or Western philosophy, but also (as I have recently argued in a book) with indigenous thought worldwide.<sup>7</sup> They tune in to the primal level of experience. They set us free in the presence of the universe. It's not as if this current of American thought had simply been replaced by analytic concerns. John Dewey died in 1952. Henry Bugbee—author of *The Inward Morning*—died at Christmas, 1999. They, and others, kept writing and teaching. Bugbee recalls us to fullness of presence and of truth:

As true stillness comes upon us, we hear, we hear, and we learn that our whole lives may have the character of finding that anthem which would be native to our own tongue, and which alone can be the true answer for each of us to the questioning, the calling, the demand for ultimate reckoning which devolves upon us.<sup>8</sup>



It's not as if such voices were not raised, voices of hearkening and reckoning. The analytic tide simply drowned them out in many university philosophy departments.

I seem to hear William James asking for clarification of "tide" in "analytic tide." He demands we spell out its consequences for our experience, "cash it." Immediately we are turned again to face the unencompassable encompassing. No more than with "the universe" can we pin down and isolate the meaning of "analytic tide." We sense viscerally the unplumbable domain of what we don't know we don't know. Why has the tide arisen, what are its limits, just where will it flow, and will it subside? Our ability to know what moves us individually and corporately is greatly limited—unimaginably limited.

Not to acknowledge this is to be sucked further into nihilism, vain thrashing around and zombie-like unreality. No doubt, my own attempt to link analytic habits of thought and nihilism is more limited and flawed than I can imagine. But, of course, I do believe I should try. I easily concede that there are more subtleties and borderline cases of analytic thought than I have acknowledged. Yet, there is an analytic habit of mind that tends to pinch down the fullness of experiencing, to weaken the force of its flow. Inevitably, the analytic habit diminishes the fullness, weight, and sustaining presence of the world experienced by us, and the fullness, weight, and sustaining presence of our own experiencing selves.

Pause a moment with works that I believe can be called analytic and that exhibit this deracinating tendency, Douglas Husak's *Drugs and Rights* (New York and Cambridge, England, 1992), and several of Thomas Nagel's works. (Nobody will charge me with picking on weaklings.)

Husak defends with great apparent clarity and logical rigor the view that the recreational use of psychoactive drugs should be legalized. One can learn much from the book. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that Husak's horizon has shrunk, and probably before he knew it. Any vision unencumbered by analytic methodological focusing and strictures would see that the probability of addiction for some of those who use drugs recreationally is not insignificant. But nowhere in the book does the phenomenon of addiction show itself in its fullness and violence. Any unencumbered survey of the subject matter, any disciplined looking around, any phenomenology, would have shown how disastrous addiction can be for some people. It destroys their own and often their family's lives. Husak contents himself with exploding the common view that "drug addicts cannot stop." Because some do, and some of these stop "cold turkey."

But the palpable fact is that many try to stop and cannot, and their own lives and their relatives' are gravely impaired or destroyed. And note a limitation of view that I find remarkable in Husak, a philosopher of law: even though it may be that only a minority of those who use drugs recreationally get addicted, doesn't our whole system of laws aim, among other things, to protect the minority? Don't we try to protect people from their reckless urges? Don't we, for example, try to protect people from bashing their brains out riding motorcycles by requiring them to wear a helmet?

Now turn to the well-known contemporary philosopher Thomas Nagel. Some may think that he's too freewheeling a thinker to be labelled "analytic." I do agree that he is freewheeling, comparatively at least, and certainly very interesting to read. But an analytic tendency limits his vision unnecessarily. Thirty years ago and more I would have predicted a greater growth in his thought than has in fact occurred. For example, that long ago he published a truly creative and liberating article, "Sexual Perversion." (Reprinted in *Mortal Questions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). It was influenced, to be sure, by Jean-Paul Sartre's mordant phenomenology of interpersonal relations. But Nagel opened out on horizons that Sartre seldom or ever intimates. Nagel exhibits sexual perversion as a short-circuiting of fully regenerative cycles of human interactive sexual activity. It's not just the alluring and arousing "look" of the other, but what the look leads to in time—or doesn't lead to. Does it lead to growth in the world for each party? Though always suitably reserved, cool, professional, Nagel was, I think, opening the way to the deepest reaches of human experience, possibly to grounding myths and rituals of regenerativity that have sustained us immemorially.

I was puzzled and ultimately disappointed by Nagel's more recent *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). I had expected the phenomenology evident in the earlier article to be more matured, more active on a broader scale, but no.

First of all, the reader can't help but be impressed by Nagel's persistent and noble attempt to avoid reductionism. His writing reminds me some of Gabriel Marcel's *Homo Viator*. We can at best be said to be on our way to understanding ourselves—or at least to be trying very hard. For there are two apparently irreducible ways to understand things. And since they are ours, we must try to live with them both, but they are largely incompatible. First, "the view from nowhere," That is, the "external standpoint," or what science discovers by systematically ruling out what appears

to only one, or a very few, particular points of view; and counting only what can be discovered by any competent inquirers, adequately equipped, at any place or time (and centrally employing the universal language of mathematics).

Second, the view from somewhere, what each of us turns up and lives through in our immediate, first person, “internal” viewpoint. Neither view gives us any ultimate understanding of how reality might be disclosed irrespective of human observation, experience, interpretation.

There is a note of humility here, perhaps of mystery. What a relief to hear such a voice in “the better” departments of philosophy today! However, at the risk of appearing ungrateful, I will make a few critical remarks. I don’t mind at all the tragic note in Nagel, but I don’t think it’s quite on pitch. Moreover, it should be sounded in a larger composition. God knows, reconciliation of viewpoints is difficult enough in this world without Nagel’s reading of subjectivity that eccentrically emphasizes the privacy of individual consciousness and viewpoint, and also the gulf that divides the internal viewpoint from the external. Our contemporary feeling of alienation, isolation, abandonment are baneful enough without exacerbating them.

What prevented Nagel’s “Sexual Perversion” from moving out decisively into the mytho-cultural historical and prehistorical background that it opened up (for me at least) is still at work in his writing. He inadequately unpacks subjectivity. There is a detectable residue of Cartesian psycho/physical dualism and premature objectification—despite what I imagine will be his protests to the contrary.

This can be seen in his justly famous, “What is it Like to be a Bat?” (*Philosophical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 4, Oct. 1974). In some fundamental ways, Nagel seems to agree with phenomenologists. For a prime example, he implicitly agrees with Husserl’s basic critique of Descartes: that he leaves the individual ego as “a tag-end of the world.” That is, that Descartes has, unwittingly and automatically, abstracted himself from immediacy of involvement in the encompassing and permeating world. Everything for him is an object of some sort—even a mind is! Inevitably, his thought must go out of touch with his own self. The question is whether Nagel adequately develops this implicit agreement with Husserl.

In his article, “What is it Like to be a Bat?”, Nagle rejects both behaviorism and functionalism, for they both prematurely objectify mind and body. He *tries* to rediscover our subjectivity (not subjectivism!): how we are actually living our lives and experiencing the world every moment.

We understand others—insofar as we do so at all—only empathically. As he poses the fundamental question, What’s it like for that subject of experience to have that experience? he has us look for analogies that link various subjects’ experiencing of some agreed upon thing. “Yes, it hurts like fire when you touch it,” or “Right, you feel good after you do it,” etc.

Now, what’s it like to be a *bat*? Here is a distant species, and empathy is stretched perilously close to the breaking point. Nagel rightly emphasizes that we shouldn’t try to imagine our consciousness in the bat’s body; this would be more Cartesianism, he says. He probably holds to something like what I call body-self: consciousness is something our bodies do. And note well: he doesn’t assert that we have *no* idea of what it’s like to be a bat. But he does assert that bats are “a fundamentally *alien* form of life.”

At this point, Nagel, again, disappoints me. We find, ironically, a deficiency of empathic feeling: a deficiency in his account of the potentialities and actualities of immediate involvement in the world, his account of our subjectivity. In a much more subtle form than is usual for many philosophers today, we encounter yet again pervasive and endemic modern loneliness, desiccation, alienation. Calvin Martin writes brilliantly,

One of the great insights of hunter societies is that words and artifice of specific place and place-beings (animal and plant) constitute humanity’s primary instruments of self-location . . . for mankind is fundamentally an echo-locator, like our distant relatives the porpoise and the bat . . . Only by learning . . . *true* words and *true* artifice about these things can one hope to become . . . a genuine person . . . To be mendacious about other-than-human persons springs back upon us to make us mendacious about ourselves. (*In the Spirit of the Earth: Rethinking History and Time*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 103)

Even with Nagel, we lose in the end our profound kinship with all beings, particularly living ones. So we lose an essential ingredient of ourselves. This would have greatly disturbed Native Americans, and it should disturb us. To really empathize with other beings we must empathize and resonate with ourselves. We must really unpack our subjectivity. If we do, we will discover that there are specific analogies between our experiencing and a bat’s. Though presumably we do not send out sonar pulses, measurable only by sensitive instruments, exactly as do bats, we do send out sounds (to take but this sensory modality). And we do “read” the response