

# Philosophical Analysis

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## **Who Are the Analytic Philosophers?**

- Philosophers who identify themselves as analytic philosophers.
- Philosophers who have been trained by analytic philosophers or in “analytic” philosophy departments.
- Philosophers who use symbolic logic as a means to illuminate philosophical problems.
- Philosophers who use a technique (or cluster of techniques) known as “philosophical analysis.”
- Perhaps philosophers working after the nineteenth century (except for Frege).

## **Who Are Not Analytic Philosophers?**

- Historical philosophers (Nietzsche)
- Phenomenologists (Husserl)
- Existentialists (Sartre)
- Deconstructionists (Derrida)
- Pragmatists (James)
- Naturalists (the Churchlands)
- Logical revisionists (Hegel)
- Social philosophers (Foucault)
- British idealists (Bradley)

### What Might Be Analyzed in Philosophical Analysis?

- In the history of philosophy, analysis has been applied to a number of different kinds of things.
  - Individual things in the world (an apple).
  - Properties and relations (being square, being a father).
  - Concepts (the idea or notion of a human being, of gold, of substance).
  - Sentences or Propositions (“The present king of France is bald”).

### Classical Philosophical Analysis

- Philosophers before the twentieth century engaged in various forms of analysis.
  - Aristotle gave definitions by genus and difference (human being is rational animal).
  - Leibniz claimed that the individual concept of each existing thing is infinitely analyzable.
  - Locke analyzed our ideas of kinds of substances.
  - Berkeley analyzed our ideas of individual things.
  - Many philosophers analyzed propositions into subject-copula-predicate.
- To get a glimpse of classical philosophical analysis, we will look at some views of Locke and Berkeley.

### Locke’s Analysis of Sorts of Substance

- Locke undertook to analyze the “ideas” we have of sorts of substances, such as “a man, horse, gold, water &c.” (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Section 3)
- The idea of a sort of substance is complex.
- The complex idea is made up of simple ideas.
- “Our *specific* ideas of substances are nothing else but *a collection of a certain number of simple ideas, considered as united in one thing*” (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Section 14).

### An Example: The Idea of a Swan



“Thus the idea which an Englishman signifies by the name swan is white colour, long neck, red beak, black legs, and whole feet, and all these of a certain size, with a power of swimming in the water, and making a certain kind of noise, and perhaps to a man who has long observed this kind of birds, some other properties: which all terminate in sensible simple ideas, all united in one common subject” (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Section 14).

### Support

- We **suppose** a common subject “in which” the simple ideas exist and which “supports” them as being:
  - Required for the very existence of the simple ideas, since “*we cannot conceive how they should subsist alone, nor in one another*” (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Section 4).
  - The “cause of their union” (*Essay*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Section 6).
- Locke recognized that “supporting” is a metaphorical notion and that the idea of a “thing” to which ideas “belong” is confused.

### Berkeley’s Critique of “Support”

- Berkeley claimed that “the idea of being in general together with the relative notion of its supporting accidents” is meaningless. (*Principles*, Section 17)
  - The idea of being in general “appears to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all others.”
  - The idea of support cannot be taken literally, and how it is to be taken is left unexplained.
- According to Berkeley, a thing is nothing more than a collection of sensible ideas.
- “The objects of sense are nothing but those sensations combined, blended, or (if one may so speak) concreted together” (*Principles*, Section 99).

### An Example: An Apple



- “A certain color, taste, smell, figure, and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing signified by the name “*apple*” (*Principles*, Section 1).

### Replacing the “Support”

- Berkeley felt compelled to account for the unity of objects and for the existence of sensible ideas.
- The existence of sensible ideas depends on their being perceived by the mind (*esse est percipi*), so the existence of sensible things is mind-dependent.
- The unity of sensible objects is attributed to their intelligible archetypes in the mind of God, who impresses on us the ideas making up the object.
- Berkeley’s critique of Locke’s analysis thus led to his embrace of idealism.

### A Lesson for Analysis

- For both Locke and Berkeley, analysis does not end with a listing of constituents.
- The constituents must be **related** to something else to explain their existence and unity in one thing.
- The general thrust of idealism is that **mind** is the unifying factor uncovered by any analysis
- A more radical view, due to Bradley, is that unification of constituents is impossible: reality is a monolithic unity which cannot be analyzed.
- Russell’s and Moore’s reaction to this view were key to the birth of contemporary analytic philosophy.

### Contemporary Analytic Philosophy

- The most important feature of contemporary analysis is its focus on linguistic entities.
- Since the end of the nineteenth century, analysis has had at its disposal the resources of modern symbolic logic.
- Much analysis, however, is informal and directed toward the ordinary use of language.
- It is difficult to give a single characterization of the methods of analytic philosophy in the present day.