Journal of the American Philosophical Association (2021) 59–77 © American Philosophical Association
DOI:10.1017/apa.2020.9

The Educational Value of Analytic Philosophy

ABSTRACT: *In this article, I outline three critiques of analytic philosophy; that it is (1) irrelevant to individuals and society; (2) unconstructive; and (3) excessively technical. These critiques are linked to skepticism about the educational value of analytic philosophy. In response, I suggest that if analytic philosophy provides constructive guidance about prominent and pressing questions, then it holds potential educational value. I identify a body of prominent and pressing questions that are addressed by analytic philosophy as a discipline. Because analytic philosophy is often concerned with the analysis of ordinary concepts, there is at least some potential educational value to analytic philosophy insofar as it provides guidance about the meaning of ordinary concepts that ground ordinary questions. Taking P. F. Strawson's paradigmatically analytic account of philosophy, I show that analytic philosophy can directly address ordinary questions in a constructive manner. Analytic philosophy is neither (1) irrelevant, (2) unconstructive, nor (3) excessively technical.*

KEYWORDS: analytic philosophy, philosophy of education, metaphilosophy, philosophy for children

Introduction

Analytic philosophy is rarely taught in schools. In England, the optional Religious Education A-level, taken by 17,490 16- to 18-year-olds in 2019 (National Association of Teachers of Religious Education 2019), introduces some students to some philosophical content, albeit not exclusively analytic in nature. There is also the option of studying an A-level in ostensibly Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but only 2,781 students opted for this in 2019 (AQA Education 2019). Between the ages of 11 and 16, when English secondary school children follow the broad subject-based National Curriculum, there is no philosophy education on the compulsory curriculum. Some schools introduce philosophy through Philosophy for Children (widely known as P4C; see SAPERE 2020), but this is not distinctively analytic in nature, and in 2006 only two hundred secondary schools were estimated to offer P4C (Hand & Winstanley 2006: xiii). In the United States, the American Philosophical Association reports that most schools do not offer formal pre-college philosophy courses (American Philosophical Association 2020).

On the other hand, in countries dominated by nonanalytic philosophical traditions, philosophy is frequently taught in schools. In France, 'the *baccalaureat*,

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or higher completion certificate, is awarded only at the conclusion of courses of study which have included in the final stages, a more or less extensive introduction to philosophy. A certain amount of philosophical training is thus required in France, of anyone following a career for which the *baccalaureat* is necessary' (Canguilhem 1953: 53). Francophone countries in Africa almost all teach philosophy as a core element of secondary education. In 1984, these included Burundi, the Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, and Zaire (UNESCO 1984). As might be expected, previously French colonies such as Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia also place a strong emphasis on philosophy in schools.

The influence of Catholic philosophical traditions also appears to determine where philosophy is taught in schools. Italy, Spain, Spanish colonies in Latin America, and African countries with large missionary presences have historically emphasized the importance of philosophy in education: 'The strong historical influence of the Catholic Church has long been in favour of philosophy . . . The programme of Catholic secondary education thus traditionally grants a great place to philosophy' (UNESCO 2009: 26). This might account for the presence of philosophy in schools across Latin America, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela (UNESCO 2009: 27).

In contrast, the relationship between English-speaking countries and a lack of philosophy teaching in schools is so striking that in 2007, UNESCO reported that 'one thing that stands out overall is the absence of philosophy as a mandatory subject in English-speaking countries. As one Malawian writer put it, "Malawi being an English-speaking country, philosophy is only taught here at university"' (UNESCO 2007: 76). The dominance of analytic philosophy in the English-speaking world correlates with the absence of philosophy on the school curriculum.

This broad correlation is by no means a perfect indicator of whether philosophy is taught in schools. Germany, for example, does not include philosophy on the compulsory curriculum despite sitting at the border of analytic and nonanalytic traditions. Nor is it the case that philosophy is always taught well in schools; UNESCO reports that 'too often, in fact, philosophy is taught in a pompous, even pedantic way, by summoning up the great names of the history of philosophy. This way of teaching tends to discourage students and to deaden their interest in the field' (UNESCO 2009: 31). For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the analytic philosophical tradition is rarely taught in schools, especially in countries where the analytic tradition dominates universities.

In this article, I present some existing arguments against the educational value of analytic philosophy that have been made by analytic philosophers. These may explain the absence of analytic philosophy on school curricula. In response, I argue that analytic philosophy does have potential educational value, and that it should be considered as a contender for school curriculum inclusion. First, I outline critiques of the educational value of analytic philosophy. Next, I set out a modest condition for ascribing educational value to a discipline. I then argue that even on a paradigmatically analytic account of philosophy, analytic philosophy

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

holds potential educational value as it meets this condition. This paper does not deal with the pedagogy or curriculum implications of the idea that analytic philosophy has educational value. Rather, I show that it is at least a contender for inclusion on the school curriculum.

Analytic Philosophy

Defining analytic philosophy is difficult. As Hans-Johann Glock points out, 'most participants in the debate have tended to identify analytic philosophy with the kind of philosophy they deem proper . . . this tendency has led to various distortions' (2008: 3). At the same time, the analytic-continental 'rift is still very real, both philosophically and sociologically' (2008: 2). Rather than attempting to define analytic philosophy, I will take the rift between the Anglo-American tradition and what might be called the continental tradition as it has manifested itself in philosophy departments in universities as a starting point. Since school curricula tend to defer to university departments for guidance on what to teach, this rough distinction between Anglo-American analytic philosophy and nonanalytic or continental philosophy suffices to explore why the former is often deemed of little educational value.

In 1995, UNESCO surveyed countries about the philosophy education they offered in schools. One of the requests made by UNESCO was to 'list at least ten philosophers who are considered as classics' (1995: 145). France listed 'Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Hegel and Bergson' (UNESCO 1995: 148). In contrast, Richard Rorty responded on behalf of the United States with 'Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Lock, Berkeley, Kant and Wittgenstein' (UNESCO 1995: 148). On behalf of the United Kingdom, Michael Dummett responded with 'Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Frege, Moore and Russell' (UNESCO 1995: 149). Italy responded with 'Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Bergson' (UNESCO 1995: 149). While the Anglo-American tradition reflected in the responses of the United Kingdom and United States shares much in common with the continental tradition represented by France and Italy, the two diverge after Kant.

The division echoes Michael Dummett's claim that the divergence between philosophical traditions can be traced to a particular point in the history of philosophy. Dummett states, 'Frege was the grandfather of analytical philosophy, Husserl the founder of the phenomenological school, two radically different philosophical movements . . . They may be compared to the Rhine and the Danube, which rise quite close to one another and for some time pursue roughly parallel courses, only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas' (1993: 26). Whether or not Frege and Husserl represent a true point of divergence, it seems fair to say that there is some point in the post-Kantian history of philosophy where Anglo-American analytic philosophy becomes a distinct tradition from its counterparts in other areas of the world.

It is in the United Kingdom and United States, where the Anglo-American analytic tradition holds fast, that little to no emphasis is placed on teaching philosophy in

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

schools. At least one reason for this absence of philosophy in schools is that prominent members of the Anglo-American analytic tradition have made explicitly hostile claims about the educational value of analytic philosophy.

The Educational Value of Analytic Philosophy

When instigating the first World Philosophy Day, UNESCO made the following statement about the educational value of philosophy: 'Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality . . . It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups . . . for the maintenance of peace . . . Recognising the eminent role of philosophy in the development of humanity . . . underli[es] UNESCO's aim of imbuing public opinion with moral and philosophical ideas that would strengthen respect for the human person, the love of peace, solidarity and the attachment to a cultural idea.' (UNESCO 2005: 2)

This statement raises two issues. The first issue is the contrast between the aims and scope of the analytic philosophical tradition and the aims and scope that UNESCO attributes to philosophy. The second issue arises from the account of educational value implicit in UNESCO's statement. In this section, I examine the first issue. It may be in response to the sort of lofty goals for philosophy put forward by UNESCO that analytic philosophers have explicitly distanced themselves from attributing educational value to philosophy. However, in doing so they have failed to acknowledge more modest accounts of the ways that analytic philosophy might be valuable in education. This requires an examination of the notion of educational value, which I address in the next section.

Perhaps in response to conceptions of the educational value of philosophy akin to those presented by UNESCO, a number of prominent analytic philosophers have explicitly distanced themselves from attributing too much educational value to analytic philosophy. In *What is Philosophy For?* Mary Midgley recounts the responses of Dummett and P. F. Strawson to her calls to prevent philosophy departments from being shut down in British universities between 1975 and 1990. These stalwarts of the analytic tradition held that philosophy ought not be taught at 'provincial' universities (including the University of Newcastle, where Midgley was teaching), let alone in schools. Midgley claims that

> Dummett . . . told me flatly that it was wrong in principle to try to preserve all these provincial academic departments. Philosophy, he said, was a serious and highly technical subject which should only be studied at its own proper level. Any less professional approaches to it were useless and might even do harm. And what Dummett meant by the proper level is clear from a well-known passage in his writings where he said that 'the proper object of philosophy' had been finally established with the rise of 'the modern logical and analytical style of philosophising'. This object, he said, was 'the analysis of the structure of thought, [for which] the only proper method [is] the analysis of language'. And, not surprisingly, he thought the business of linguistic

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> analysis had now become a highly technical pursuit- something increasingly like nuclear physics—which could only be carried on by people specially trained in it'. (Midgley 2018: 10)

It is worth noting that by 'provincial' universities, Dummett was likely referring to any university other than Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London.

Strawson gave a similar reply to Midgley. He said that 'he must refuse to support this project because I [Midgley] was suggesting that philosophy was to be valued because of its effect on society. This, he said, was degrading to it: philosophy should only be practised and valued for its own sake' (Midgley 2018: 11). Strawson can be interpreted as resisting the tendency to use the discipline of philosophy as an instrumental means of pursuing particular societal aims. UNESCO's claim that philosophy can contribute to peace and tolerance amongst nations is one such attempt. Another interpretation of Strawson is that focusing on the value of the skills provided by studying philosophy, such as critical thinking skills, might create a conception of the discipline where philosophy is reduced solely to a means of teaching critical thinking skills. Since most other disciplines also develop students' thinking skills, this would undermine the idea that there is distinct educational value attributable to philosophy. However, at face value, Strawson denies the value of philosophy to society; this leaves little room to attribute educational value.

This skepticism about the educational value of philosophy is not confined to claims about teaching philosophy in universities. In the 1953 UNESCO report, *The Teaching of Philosophy*, Donald MacKinnon provided a response on behalf of the United Kingdom that echoes Dummett and Strawson's misgivings but applies them to the place of philosophy in schools:

> It was not a matter of surprise to the British consultants that one of the recipients of the questionnaire (Professor Emmet of Manchester) included in her reply the following statement: 'I ought to say, I think, that most of my colleagues felt rather indignant that an alleged fact-finding questionnaire should be framing questions in a way which suggested continually that philosophy ought to be ideologically directed. We cannot share this view, not because we disagree with the democratic ideology, but because this to us is a false view of philosophy'.
>
> Professor Emmet certainly spoke for many others than herself in the United Kingdom when she wrote thus. It is not, however, an implication of her argument that philosophical work in Britain today is irrelevant to the confusions and questions of the market-place: merely that as philosophical work its service to the everyday world must be indirect. We are admittedly in Britain, living in a period when the dominant temper of philosophy is analytic and critical rather than speculative and constructive.
>
> . . .
>
> The impact of philosophy upon the community at large must be largely indirect; the philosopher or philosophers cannot usurp the function of

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> the priest or the preacher, the doctor or the psycho-analyst. He can neither give men a faith to live by, nor in the optimistic style of the thirties, believe that by the dissemination of textbooks of applied logic he can alter materially the springs of political or social decision.
> (MacKinnon 1953: 119–20)

MacKinnon concludes with a claim that holds today: 'in the United Kingdom the teaching of philosophy is very uncommon in schools' (1953: 123).

More recently, Agnes Callard's critique of the value of public philosophy follows in the same vein. She casts doubt on whether philosophers can 'contribute to the hygiene of public discourse . . . us[ing] our critical-thinking skills to shine the light of reason into the darkness of partisan political bickering' (2019). She points out that philosophers do not have a body of settled answers to provide people with, and are as good at disagreeing with each other, or forming an echo chamber as the general population. She also questions the value of philosophy for the individual: 'philosophy doesn't jazz up the life you were living, it snatches that life out of your grip. It doesn't make you feel smarter, it makes you feel stupider: doing philosophy, you discover you don't even know the most basic things' (2019). Callard thinks that philosophy is valuable insofar as philosophers are attempting to answer important questions; but like the nuclear physicist, those attempts have little direct value to the wider public who need not be included in philosophical conversations. Pandering too much to public interest risks directing attention away from the task of solving important problems, which may or may not be of direct relevance to the public.

Taken together, these critiques of the Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy cast it as a technical activity that is either beyond the grasp of school students or of little interest to them. As analytic philosophy has nothing to contribute to society, it ought to be pursued for its own sake rather than serve some economic or social end. Furthermore, the fruits of analytic philosophy are not useful to wider society. If this is the case, then it is not a far stretch to say that analytic philosophy has nothing to contribute to an individual's education either. In summary, analytic philosophy is cast as (1) irrelevant to individuals and society, (2) unconstructive, and (3) excessively technical.

These claims, while having serious implications for those considering whether to include philosophy on the school curriculum, can also be interpreted as a reaction against nonanalytic philosophical traditions. Babette Babich describes continental philosophy as attempting 'to keep the meaning of philosophy as the love of wisdom . . . Thus the object of philosophy is often said to be the meaning of life' (2003: 88). Similarly, Andrea Staiti claims that providing a *Weltanschauung*, or 'comprehensive view of the world, of its meaning and purpose, that precedes and grounds all further particular stances and opinions about single occurrences in the world itself' is the primary goal of continental philosophy (2013: 796). In claiming that philosophy cannot, and ought not 'usurp the function of the priest or the preacher, the doctor or the psycho-analyst' (MacKinnon 1953: 120), MacKinnon rejects the idea that analytic philosophy addresses large-scale questions about the meaning of life. Instead, Neil Levy holds that 'analytic

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophy tends to channel its students away from these [fundamental] questions, and in the direction of detailed work on its puzzles' (2003: 300), thus earning it a reputation as 'a new scholasticism' (2003: 286).

Levy claims that that continental philosophy 'can claim greater social relevance' (2003: 300), and Strawson, Dummett, MacKinnon, and Callard's skepticism about this role for analytic philosophy seems well founded. Certainly, analytic philosophers rarely make claims about the wholesale meaning of life. It is also the case that, in contrast to the sort of philosophy described by Babich and Staiti, analytic philosophers are engaged in a technical pursuit that has less straightforward social relevance. Strawson, Dummett, MacKinnon, and Callard can be read as dispelling misconceptions about analytic philosophy that arise from the loftier ambitions of nonanalytic philosophical traditions. Unfortunately, in making bold claims about the place of philosophy in schools, the public realm, and universities, analytic philosophers may have influenced policy to the extent that analytic philosophy is now rarely taught in schools.

Educational Value

UNESCO's statement about the educational value of philosophy references 'the full development of the human personality' and the promotion of 'understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups . . . for the maintenance of peace' (2005: 2). This implies ambitious goals for education—goals that analytic philosophy, and many other commonly taught disciplines, fall short of promoting. A similarly stringent account of education is provided by Gert Biesta, who claims that 'education is more than the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills, that it is more than simply getting things "right," but that it also has to do with nurturing the human person, that it has to do with individuality, subjectivity, in short, with "becoming and being somebody"' (2002: 243).

This account of the aims of education, which Biesta equates with the concept of *Bildung*, fits neatly with philosophical traditions that aim to answer meaning-of-life questions. Continental philosophy has been described as meeting this aim; as has the development of philosophical thought in religious traditions such as Catholicism. Conversely, the analytic philosophical tradition has little to offer in terms of 'nurturing the human person' and helping students to become and be somebody. However, even if we accept that education ought to nurture the human person and help them to become and be somebody, there are more basic educational aims that must be achieved first. Identifying these allows for a more modest account of educational value that does chime with the scope of analytic philosophy.

Rather than holding that philosophy has educational value only if it answers meaning-of-life type questions about the world, educational value can be construed more modestly. At a basic level, something has educational value if it prepares someone for later life. This is true of an activity that helps someone to become and be somebody, but it is also true of an activity such as mathematics or learning how to read. Without the ability to interact in an informed way with the

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

world around us, it is difficult to develop fully as human beings. It follows that an activity which addresses and provides guidance about how to answer a prominent and pressing question that students are likely to encounter in their lives has educational value. This is because providing guidance about answering prominent and pressing questions is part of preparing people for life.

Michael Hand claims that 'children should be equipped by their education to deal effectively with at least those problems that feature prominently and pressingly in ordinary human lives' (Hand 2018: 7). This starting point for a modest account of educational value holds that someone who has not been well equipped to deal with prominent and pressing questions has not been well educated. Activities and ideas that help people to address prominent and pressing questions thus qualify as having educational value. If an activity or idea helps someone to address a prominent and pressing question, then this is a condition for attributing at least some educational value to that activity or idea. If an activity or idea helps someone to address a prominent and pressing question, then it ought to be considered for curriculum inclusion—or at least it ought not to be ruled out.

Considering whether to include a discipline on the curriculum involves the further step of considering whether the discipline provides the only—or best—way to answer the prominent and pressing question at hand. This involves assessing it against other disciplines competing for curriculum space. Furthermore, there are more prominent and pressing questions than there is curriculum time to address, so addressing a prominent and pressing question is not a sufficient criterion for curriculum inclusion. This means that the proposed modest account of educational value falls short of providing complete curriculum guidance. However, addressing a prominent and pressing question does serve as an indicator for educational value: providing guidance about some prominent and pressing question suggests that a discipline has at least potential educational value. As a result, rather than argue that analytic philosophy ought to be placed on the compulsory curriculum, I focus on the smaller task of establishing whether analytic philosophy has potential educational value.

The critiques presented by Dummett, Strawson, Emmet, and Callard all deny that analytic philosophy has this sort of educational value. Since analytic philosophy is (1) irrelevant to individuals and society, (2) unconstructive, and (3) excessively technical, it also (a) does not address prominent or pressing questions, (b) does not provide anything helpful in response to prominent and pressing questions, and (c) is in any case inaccessible to school aged students. In other words, analytic philosophy does not have educational value because it does not provide school aged students with helpful guidance in response to prominent and pressing questions.

In what follows, I counter these claims and argue that analytic philosophy can provide a basis for constructively addressing prominent and pressing questions and should not be discounted from having educational value. Analytic philosophy might not be able to meet the goals set for it by UNESCO, but it could have educational value in virtue of addressing prominent and pressing questions and helping to prepare students for their future lives.

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ordinary Prominent and Pressing Questions

In order for analytic philosophy to be educationally valuable, it needs at least to address prominent and pressing questions that people might be expected to deal with over the course of their lives. In order to attribute educational value to analytic philosophy, there will need to be prominent and pressing questions that are addressed by it. One body of questions addressed by analytic philosophy is commonsense or ordinary questions. Because analytic philosophy is often concerned with the analysis of ordinary concepts, I propose that at least part of the educational value of analytic philosophy lies in the importance of having a clear understanding of the ordinary concepts that shape ordinary questions. This begins to counter the claim that analytic philosophy is irrelevant to individuals and society.

Richard Pring differentiates between theoretical ways of understanding the world and ordinary ways of understanding the world. He claims that 'the theoretician suggests that the world which is *ordinarily* described in terms of table and chairs should be re-described in terms which are not *ordinarily* understood, viz. of molecules and particles, or atoms and electrons' (1977: 59). For example, when speaking about teacher education, Pring claims that trainees are 'asked to adopt a new conceptual framework' as part of their training. This contrasts with their commonsense understanding of the issues at hand. The significance of this distinction between commonsense and theoretical understanding is that commonsense accounts 'are adequate for most practical purposes' and so should, in Pring's opinion, play a more central role in teacher education unless theoretical accounts are substantially better (1977: 62).

Next, Pring sets out the significance of ordinary and theoretical ways of understanding the world to school-aged students. The issues that children face before they come to school are framed in ordinary or commonsense ways; 'pupils bring to school . . . a wide range of common sense understandings. These understandings—common sense to them and those they mix with—form the student's view of the world and determine the many practical decisions he makes. These, then, are what above all need to be educated' (Pring 1977: 73). Pring's view is that immediately teaching theoretical ways of understanding the world without considering students' existing commonsense understandings of the world is problematic. Further, the focus of the curriculum on theoretical ways of understanding the world leaves important ordinary questions unaddressed. Pring does not go so far as to suggest that analytic philosophy might address these ordinary questions, his point is limited to the claim that there are commonsense or ordinary questions that are not systematically addressed by curricula which are primarily theoretical. I argue that within the class of ordinary questions arising from commonsense ways of understanding the world, there are prominent and pressing questions that it would be worthwhile to address.

To illustrate what I mean by ordinary questions, the newspaper the *Guardian* runs a feature answering questions that people commonly ask the search engine Google. These include such questions as 'What does grief feel like?', 'What is love?', 'Do people change?', 'Is the term 'mansplaining' sexist?', 'Can you be a socialist and

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rich?', 'Have I ruined my life?', 'Why do good people suffer?', 'Am I old?', 'Why don't unicorns exist?', 'Am I a racist?', 'Is mental illness real?', 'Did I make the right decision?', 'Can technology replace teachers?', and 'Am I just paranoid?' (*Guardian* 2018). Although these questions have been selected by the *Guardian* for journalistic purposes rather than as a representative sample, the list illustrates that there is a body of ordinary questions that people think about but schools do not address. Many of the questions share concerns about the meaning of ordinary concepts—for example, the concepts of sexism, racism, mental illness, teachers, or existence. Others ask about morality, values, and truth. These ordinary concepts play a role in many areas of thinking and are not systematically studied in schools. Not all of these questions are prominent and pressing; rather, the list illustrates the sorts of ordinary questions left off the curriculum because of their ordinary status.

In considering ordinary questions, I suggest that they encompass at least questions about truth and knowledge, questions about beauty or aesthetics, questions about relationships, questions about morality, questions about the good life, questions about value, questions about the nature of reality, and questions about meaning. Within these classifications there are trivial questions, excessively specialized questions, and prominent and pressing questions. For example, a prominent and pressing question about truth and knowledge is 'how ought we to judge different sources of information?'; this is particularly pressing given concerns about so-called fake news and its effect on democratic processes. An example of a prominent and pressing question in beauty and aesthetics is a question about body image and standards of human beauty. Standards of beauty and resulting concerns about body image can lead to mental and physical harm, particularly in young people. Examples of prominent and pressing questions about relationships include those about sexuality, monogamy, family, and friendship. There are many prominent and pressing questions within the body of ordinary questions set out. Many of these do not have a defined place on the curriculum and are not addressed systematically during students' time at school.

Gareth Matthews illustrates the prominence of commonsense questions in children's lives by using a series of anecdotes taken from young children: 'Tim (about six years), while busily engaged in licking a pot, asked, "Papa, how can we be sure that everything is not a dream?"' (Matthews 1980: 1); 'Jordan (five years), going to bed at eight one evening, asked "If I go to bed at eight and get up at seven in the morning, how do I really know that the little hand of the clock has gone around only once?"' (1980: 2); 'Ian (six years) found to his chagrin that the three children of his parents' friends monopolized the television . . . "Mother," he asked in frustration, "why is it better for three people to be selfish than for one?"' (1980: 28); and, 'David worries about whether an apple is alive. He decides that it is when it's on the ground but not when it has been brought into the house' (1980: 6). These questions ask about the nature of reality, and the possibility of knowledge (Tim and Jordan), the nature of morality (Ian) and the nature of life and death (David).

Matthews's examples are more abstract that those covered by the *Guardian*, but they are similar in that the questions employ ordinary concepts. The questions are active concerns for children because they play a role in their lives. We talk about

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

knowledge, belief, truth, death, goodness, morality, value, life, time and space, dreaming, perception, and so forth constantly and throughout our lives. Although Matthews's examples are not necessarily pressing, they do illustrate the importance of becoming competent users of ordinary concepts so that more pressing questions can be addressed in later life. Tim was asking questions about knowledge, Ian was asking questions about justice, and David was asking questions about life and death. These concepts ground prominent and pressing questions that they are likely to encounter in their adult lives.

In Pring's opinion, 'to ignore such common-sense views would be to leave the student, in those matters which chiefly preoccupy his mind, very much where he is' (Pring 1977: 73). Since ordinary concepts are part of people's experiences of the world, and since they play a role in how a set of prominent and pressing questions are framed, it is worth addressing them as part of someone's education. To fail to address them would be to fail to educate students about issues that they are very likely to need to address either immediately, or in later life. Addressing ordinary prominent and pressing questions holds educational value.

Analytic Philosophy and Ordinary Concepts

If analytic philosophy can be shown to address prominent and pressing questions in a constructive way, then analytic philosophy can be ascribed potential educational value. This goes some way to dispel the skepticism expressed by analytic philosophers about the educational value of their discipline. Taking Strawson's paradigmatically analytic approach to philosophy, I will show that through systematically studying ordinary concepts, analytic philosophy directly addresses ordinary questions. On Strawson's account, philosophy addresses ordinary questions through the analysis of ordinary concepts. While the Anglo-American analytic tradition involves a broader range of activities than just conceptual analysis, critiques of the educational value of analytic philosophy often focus on the technical nature of conceptual analysis. Furthermore, if it can be shown that at least one paradigmatically analytic philosophical activity, which is simultaneously concerned with self-contained puzzles and is highly technical, holds educational value, then the doubts cast by Dummett, Strawson, Emmet, and Callard can begin to be countered.

Strawson provides an account of conceptual analysis that gives a basis for explaining how analytic philosophy might address prominent and pressing questions. When describing conceptual analysis, he uses an analogy of systematically studying the grammar of one's mother tongue. He likens it to the work of analytic philosophers who systematically study ordinary concepts:

> Just as we may have a working mastery of the grammar of our native language, so we have a working mastery of this conceptual equipment . . . But just as the practical mastery of the grammar in no way entails the ability to state systematically what the rules are which we effortlessly observe, so the practical mastery of our conceptual equipment in no way entails the possession of a clear, explicit

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> understanding of the principles which govern our handling of it, of the theory of our practice. So—to conclude the analogy—just as the grammarian, and especially the model modern grammarian, labours to produce a systematic account of the structure of rules which we effortlessly observe in speaking grammatically, so the philosopher labours to produce a systematic account of the general conceptual structure of which our daily practice shows us to have a tacit and unconscious mastery. (Strawson 1992: 7)

Strawson holds that our use of theoretical concepts is carefully taught within their respective disciplines. We learn the precise definition of the concept of 'atom' when we learn atomic theory in chemistry lessons. However, our understanding of pre-theoretical, or ordinary concepts is never set out as part of any systematic study. We are able to use ordinary concepts extensively when working with ordinary ways of understanding of the world, but if we are asked for the rules governing how ordinary concepts are used, or what exactly ordinary concepts mean, we struggle to articulate our implicit grasp of them.

Strawson stresses that his account of conceptual analysis is compatible with Gilbert Ryle's and Ludwig Wittgenstein's accounts. Ryle uses the metaphor of cartography; he contrasts our tacit understanding of how to get from one place to another with the explicit understanding gained by having a map. Conceptual analysis provides the map so that 'once these key ideas are charted, the geography of a whole region is, at least in outline, fixed' (Ryle 1971: 211). Wittgenstein likens conceptual analysis to therapy that aims at commanding 'a clear view of the use of our words' (1953: 122). In all three cases, conceptual analysis is seen as a method of clarifying and illuminating how we tacitly use and understand ordinary concepts. Although I rest my argument on Strawson's single account of conceptual analysis, it is a paradigmatically analytic account. It sees philosophy as a technical activity that aims to analyze concepts. Strawson's account of conceptual analysis is prone to the problems set out by those casting doubt on the educational value of analytic philosophy, including those leveled by Strawson himself.

Clarity about our tacit understanding of concepts is important for several reasons. The first is that tacit understanding is adequate so long as we do not run into puzzles. Midgley's analogy of philosophy as plumbing highlights this. When plumbing works well, we need not worry, but as soon as something goes wrong, if we do not understand how the plumbing works, we are incapable of making progress. As she explains, 'systems of ideas which are working smoothly are more or less invisible' (Midgley 1992: 143); however, 'when things go wrong . . . we must then somehow readjust our underlying concepts; we must shift the set of assumptions that we have inherited and have been brought up with. We must restate those existing assumptions—which are normally muddled and inarticulate—so as to get our fingers on the source of trouble' (1992: 140). Without a clear understanding of the concepts that we ordinarily use, we cannot make progress on pressing questions that make use of ordinary concepts. For example, a student who has never considered the concept of knowledge might have a diminished ability to make judgments about whether they ought to endorse an interesting view that

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they have encountered on social media. They might not have the same conceptual dexterity and sophistication to make and justify their decision as someone who has studied analyses of the concept of knowledge in terms of, for example, justification, truth, belief, evidence, and reality.

Even if pressing and prominent questions do not arise from conceptual confusion, explicit and clear understanding of ordinary concepts is central to being able to justify and reason about commonsense beliefs. In order to give my reasons for believing that mansplaining is or is not sexist (one of the questions listed by the *Guardian*), I need to appeal to some clear understanding of what it is to be sexist and what *mansplaining* is. I need to link appropriately a clear and explicit understanding of sexism to the actions, attitudes, and beliefs associated with mansplaining. This is not just about being clear and accurate in my own thinking: it is about appealing to other people who disagree with me, engaging in dialogue about the matter, and making progress toward resolving issues. In the shared endeavor of creating and maintaining a healthy society, we need clarity about the meaning and use of ordinary concepts to avoid miscommunication, confusion, fallacy, and empty vitriol. A preliminary step to making progress on questions is to fix, at least provisionally, the meanings of the key concepts involved in any given conversation.

Strawson sets out what he considers ordinary, or in his words, pre-theoretical concepts, and the list is both extensive and central to much of human thought: 'Ethical notions: good, bad, right, wrong, punishment; temporal and spatial concepts; the ideas of causality and explanation; ideas of emotions: sadness, anger, fear, joy; of mental operations of various kinds: thinking, believing, wondering, remembering, expecting, imagining; of perception and sense experience: seeing, hearing, touching, having sensations; whole ranges of classificatory concepts for types of people, animals, plants, natural objects, processes, or events, human artefacts, institutions, and roles; and the properties, qualities, doings and undergoings of these' (Strawson 1992: 6).

These concepts form the basis of people's ordinary ways of understanding the world; they are central to swathes of human inquiry. Strawson's list of ordinary concepts is simultaneously representative of the concepts with which analytic philosophers often concern themselves. There is, then, a body of pressing questions that are addressed by the analytic tradition of philosophy through conceptual analysis. Many of these questions require clarity about the meaning and use of ordinary concepts in order to make progress. An education into aspects of philosophy that focus on the analysis of these ordinary concepts would contribute to giving students clarity about the meaning and use of ordinary concepts, which in turn would help them to begin to answer prominent and pressing questions resting on these concepts.

Constructive Answers to Ordinary Questions

If analytic philosophy is to qualify as educationally valuable, it is not enough to show that it addresses prominent and pressing questions. It also needs to provide help or guidance to students wishing to answer those questions. The contribution made

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by analytic philosophy to answering prominent and pressing questions is one of the critiques leveled against the educational value of philosophy. Recall that MacKinnon explicitly claims that analytic philosophy is unconstructive: 'the dominant temper of philosophy is analytic and critical rather than speculative and constructive' (MacKinnon 1953: 119).

Can analytic philosophy offer constructive means to address prominent and pressing ordinary questions? If so, then analytic philosophy is indeed relevant to individuals and society and constructive. The first thing to note is that, unless the question is directly about the meaning of a concept, like David's question about whether apples are alive, which asks about the concept *alive*, then conceptual analysis is not going to offer complete answers to ordinary questions. However, this does not undermine the claim that conceptual analysis can play a role in answering ordinary questions. Below, I argue that conceptual analysis is a prerequisite to answering some ordinary questions because coming up with an answer often requires, or is aided by, a clear understanding of the concepts central to the question being asked.

To take one of the *Guardian*'s examples, if I want to know whether I am a racist, a starting point is exploring what the concepts *racism* and *race* mean. Once I have a clear understanding of the concepts of racism and race, I can reflect on whether my actions, attitudes, and beliefs are in fact racist. If I want to know whether I am paranoid, I would benefit from clarity about the concepts of knowledge, justification, truth, belief, and paranoia that underpin the question before I can begin to judge whether my beliefs are paranoid. If I want to know whether mental illness is real, I need clarity about the meaning of concepts such as *mental illness*, *illness*, and *real* before I can start to construct a meaningful and appropriate answer to the question. Studying analytic philosophy, which provides systematic analysis of the concepts at hand, can provide this prerequisite clarity about the meaning of the concepts central to ordinary questions.

A possible critique of this role for conceptual analysis is that philosophers do not agree on the meaning of concepts. However, even if philosophers do not agree, they cumulatively offer a range of options for defining the meaning of ordinary concepts. To know that the concept of knowledge can be defined in terms of justified belief, justified true belief, pragmatically, using various accounts of the concept of justification constitutes a form of progress towards answering questions about knowledge. Without any clarity about what the concept means, there is little prospect of coming to clear conclusions in response to prominent and pressing questions resting on the concept *knowledge*. Furthermore, if inquiry involves dialogue with others, then fixing the meanings of concepts is vital if the dialogue is to be collaborative. Often disagreements hinge on different people fixing the meanings of ordinary concepts differently. Analytic philosophy provides a basis for addressing prominent and pressing questions because it presents findings arising from a systematic study of ordinary concepts that can offer guidance about how to understand ordinary questions.

The fruits of conceptual analysis can go further than providing a clearer understanding of concepts. They can also provide a basis for developing substantive answers to prominent and pressing questions. This is because fixing

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concepts is a prerequisite to theorizing about the questions that employ them. Conceptual analysis is one way of fixing the meanings of concepts, and can provide a foundation for theorizing. Resulting theories about ordinary prominent and pressing questions are relevant to individuals and society, and they are more clearly constructive than the more limited analyses of ordinary concepts discussed above. They can provide concrete guidance about how to understand the world around us.

Sally Haslanger (2012) gives an account of conceptual analysis that helps to explain how it can be constructive. She provides three separate analytical tasks: (1) conceptual inquiry that examines our use or ordinary concepts; (2) descriptive projects that rely on 'empirical or quasi-empirical methods'; and (3) analytical approaches to questions that ask 'What is the point of having these concepts? What cognitive or practical task do they (or should they) enable us to accomplish? Are they effective tools to accomplish our (legitimate purposes); if not, what concepts would serve these purposes better?' (2012: 224). Haslanger thinks that these tasks often go together and that a question about, for example, gender, will need to take all three forms of inquiry into account. Between them, they are able to clarify, deepen, and ultimately alter our understanding of the world around us. Like scientific inquiry, this is a constructive methodology.

To illustrate how analysis of ordinary concepts can lead to substantive answers to ordinary questions, I offer Kate Manne's *Down Girl* as a case in point. Manne starts by saying '[t]he term "misogyny" is . . . both a word we need as feminists, and one we are in danger of losing' (2018: 12); her aim is to 'offer a useful toolkit for asking, answering, and debating such issues, as well as to provide room for detailed, substantive accounts of misogyny as they affect particular groups of girls and women' (2018: 13). The toolkit that she develops is a conceptual framework for understanding what misogyny is and what is wrong with it. Manne develops this conceptual framework by starting with an examination of what she calls the 'naïve conception' of misogyny (2018: 19), pointing out its inadequacies as a conception, and then developing a new conception which is better able to shed clarity on important questions. Her focus is firmly on analysis of the concept of misogyny.

Manne claims that the concept she develops through this analysis has 'several important theoretical and practical advantages' (2018: 20–21). It 'enables us to understand misogyny as a relatively unmysterious, and epistemologically accessible, phenomenon'; 'It enables us to understand misogyny as a natural and central manifestation of patriarchal ideology'; 'It leaves room for the diverse range of ways misogyny works on girls and women given their intersectional identities'; 'It enables us to understand misogyny as a systematic social phenomenon, by focusing on the hostile reactions women face in navigating the social world'; it fits uses of misogyny in grassroots activist movements; 'It delivers plausible answers to many of the questions about misogyny that have been controversial recently'; and 'It enables us to draw a clean contrast between misogyny and sexism' (2018: 21). All of these benefits constitute an opening up of understanding, insight, and clarity about what we mean by misogyny. This allows for new dialogue about the

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concept, which in turn provides the potential for fruitful progress towards answering prominent and pressing questions.

Without a clear concept of misogyny, answering prominent and pressing questions about the place and experiences of women can become muddled, fractious, and harmful. Manne points to the issue of misogyny in the 2016 US election; Donald Trump's words and actions become transparently misogynistic on her analysis of the concept. This provides previously unavailable apparatus for talking about his words and actions in a constructive way. Without systematic analysis of ordinary concepts, we lack the clarity needed to properly address otherwise slippery prominent and pressing questions. If, as a teacher, I wanted to address prominent and pressing questions about misogyny in a classroom, starting with Manne's analysis would present students with a systematic toolkit for making progress on the questions at hand. This toolkit supports substantive theorizing in response to questions by providing clarity about what is at stake.

Studying the elements of philosophical work that engage in and draw on the analysis of ordinary concepts can provide the sort of basis for the systematic study of ordinary questions which other areas of the curriculum provide for their respective disciplinary questions. While studying philosophy might not always provide direct answers to questions, it can provide the resources needed to construct answers.

Too Technical?

Finally, analytic philosophy has been charged with being overly technical. Hand explains that 'opponents of the claim that children can be taught philosophy maintain that the subject is simply too difficult for them' (2006: 3). Dummett, Emmet, Strawson, and Callard seem to hold the broader view that analytic philosophy may be too technical for the general public, let alone school children.

While this claim raises empirical questions, two points demonstrate that we should not be too pessimistic about the possibility of teaching analytic philosophy well. First, if analytic philosophy is taught in such a way that its relevance to prominent and pressing questions is used to guide teaching, then the philosophy courses will be designed to be relevant to children's questions. This would make it is less likely that schools will select entirely abstract or irrelevant content to teach, and so students will be studying clearly applicable philosophical ideas which relate to their existing understanding of the world. The success of P4C and similar programs at relating both the task of conceptual analysis and some of the findings of analytic philosophy to children's own questions provides some support for this view. Analytic philosophy makes use of some straightforward methods that can easily be taught to students to help them to engage in analytic philosophical inquiry themselves. One such method of inquiry is thinking up counterexamples; another is engaging in dialogue with others. These methods are also already taught to many students through P4C and similar programs (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan 1980).

Second, Hand claims that 'philosophy does not make any significantly greater cognitive demands on learners than other forms of inquiry routinely found on

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

primary school curricula', such as mathematics (2006: 3). Schools teach children a wide array of material taken from technical, abstract fields of study that are no more straightforward than analytic philosophy is at university level. All that is required is the simplification of academic analytic philosophy so that, like mathematics, physics, history, and other core subjects, it can be made accessible and appropriate to its audience. This point highlights the parity between analytic philosophy and other disciplines taught in schools. Unlike the view that philosophy ought to provide meaning-of-life type answers or help to promote peace and tolerance, most disciplines taught in schools simply provide students with methods and answers in response to questions about the world. These are often taken from highly technical and abstract fields of study that are no more or less rigorous than analytic philosophy. If the educational value of analytic philosophy is understood as mirroring the educational value of mathematics, physics, history, and other core subjects, then there seem no clear reasons for rejecting the possibility that it could be a valuable addition to the school curriculum.

Conclusion

The Anglo-American analytic tradition of philosophy has been accused of being (1) irrelevant, (2) unconstructive, and (3) overly technical. One determinant of whether analytic philosophy has educational value is its contribution to providing guidance in response to prominent and pressing questions. However, these three accusations imply that analytic philosophy (a) does not address prominent or pressing questions, (b) does not provide anything helpful in response to prominent and pressing questions, and (c) is inaccessible to school aged students. If analytic philosophy is unable to provide constructive ways of addressing prominent and pressing questions, then its educational value is questionable. In fact, analytic philosophy is rarely taught in schools, perhaps in response to the skepticism about the educational value of analytic philosophy expressed by analytic philosophers themselves. However, as I have argued, the Anglo-American analytic tradition does have relevant and constructive material to offer in response to ordinary prominent and pressing questions. By *ordinary questions*, I mean those that rest on the meanings of ordinary concepts such as goodness, knowledge, race, and so on. Within this set of questions, there are a large number of prominent and pressing ones that ought to be addressed in schools.

Through providing a starting point for fixing the meaning of ordinary concepts, analytic philosophy can offer constructive guidance for answering these prominent and pressing ordinary questions. This means that analytic philosophy is neither irrelevant, nor unconstructive. There are many relevant ordinary questions which are within the remit of analytic philosophy, and the results of the systematic study of ordinary concepts are useful for answering them. The claim that analytic philosophy is overly technical may be true of some academic philosophy, and of some ways of teaching analytic philosophy, but it could be made accessible in the same way that technical aspects of other disciplines have been made accessible for teaching in schools. For, since analytic philosophy provides guidance about how we might answer prominent and pressing ordinary questions, it has at least some

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

educational value. Even on Strawson's paradigmatically analytic account of philosophy, where technicality is celebrated, the resulting philosophical canon has potential educational value, and so analytic philosophy ought to be considered as a contender for inclusion on the school curriculum.

JANE GATLEY
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
jane.gatley@gmail.com

References

American Philosophical Association. (2020) 'So You Want to Teach Precollege Philosophy'. https://www.apaonline.org/page/precollege (accessed February 25, 2020).
AQA Education. (2019) 'Exam Results Statistics—June 2019 A-Level'. https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/over/stat_pdf/AQA-A-LEVEL-STATS-JUN-2019.PDF (accessed February 10, 2020).
Babich, Babette. (2003) 'On the Analytic-Continental Divide in Philosophy: Nietzsche's Lying Truth, Heidegger's Speaking Language, and Philosophy'. In C. G. Prado (ed.), *A House Divided: Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy* (Amherst: Humanity Books), 63–103.
Biesta, Gert. (2002) '*Bildung* and Modernity: The Future of *Bildung* in a World of Difference'. *Studies in Philosophy and Education,* 21, 343–51.
Callard, Agnes. (2019) 'Is Public Philosophy Good?' *Point*. February 13, 2019. https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/agnes-callard-is-public-philosophy-good/.
Canguilhem, Georges. (1953) 'The Teaching of Philosophy in France'. In UNESCO (ed.), *The Teaching of Philosophy: An International Inquiry of UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO), 17–27.
Dummett, Michael. (1993) *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Glock, Hans-Johann. (2008) *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Guardian. (2018) 'The Autocomplete Questions'. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/series/the-autocomplete-questions (accessed September 19, 2020).
Hand, Michael. (2018) 'On the Distinctive Educational Value of Philosophy'. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools,* 5, 4–19.
Hand, Michael, and Carrie Winstanley. (2006) *Philosophy in Schools*. London: Continuum.
Haslanger, Sally. (2012) *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Levy, Neil. (2003) 'Analytic and Continental Philosophy: Explaining the Differences'. *Metaphilosophy,* 34, 284–304.
Lipman, Matthew, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan. (1980) *Philosophy in the Classroom*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
MacKinnon, Donald. (1953) 'The Teaching of Philosophy in the United Kingdom'. In UNESCO (ed.), *The Teaching of Philosophy: An International Inquiry of UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO), 119–48.
Manne, Kate. (2018) *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Matthews, Gareth. (1980) *Philosophy and the Young Child*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Midgley, Mary. (2018) *What Is Philosophy For?* London: Bloomsbury.
Midgley, Mary. (1992) 'Philosophical Plumbing'. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements,* 33, 139–51.
National Association of Teachers of Religious Education. (2019) 'Schools' Failure to Meet Legal Requirement on RE Continues to Impact A-level Entries'. https://www.natre.org.uk/news/latest-news/schools-failure-to-meet-legal-requirements-on-re-continues-to-impact-a-level-entries/ (accessed 10 February 2020).
Pring, Richard. (1977) 'Common Sense and Education'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 11, 57–77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ryle, Gilbert. (1971) 'Philosophical Arguments'. In *Collected Essays 1929–1968,* vol. 3 of Collected Papers (London: Hutchinson), 203–22.
Staiti, Andrea. (2013) 'Philosophy: *Wissenschaft* or *Weltanschauung*? Towards a Prehistory of the Analytic/Continental Rift'. *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* 39, 793–807.
SAPERE. (2020) 'What is P4C?' https://www.sapere.org.uk/about-us.aspx (accessed September 19, 2020).
Strawson, P. F. (1992) *Analysis and Metaphysics: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
UNESCO. (1984) *Teaching and Research in Philosophy: Africa*. Paris: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2005) Item 15 of the Provisional Agenda of the Hundred and Seventy-First Session of the Executive Board: Creation of a World Philosophy Day. April 13, 2005. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000138818_eng.
UNESCO. (2007) *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*. Paris: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2009) *Teaching Philosophy in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Paris: UNESCO.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press