



Grace de Laguna as a Grandmother of Analytic Philosophy

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GRACE DE LAGUNA AS A GRANDMOTHER OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY: HER PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND A.N. WHITEHEAD'S

FREDERIQUE JANSSEN-LAURET

ABSTRACT. In this paper I build a case for considering the pioneering behaviourist philosopher Grace de Laguna as one of the grandmothers of analytic philosophy. I argue against the 'Great Men' narrative of analytic philosophy as composed of Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein and their followers, and in favour of a more inclusive 'movement' narrative of analytic philosophy as a broad and varied movement with an anti-idealist and naturalistic orientation aimed at fitting around novel development in the sciences, including Einsteinian physics and psychology. I compare de Laguna's prescient early views to Whitehead's; both share an anti-idealist but also anti-atomist solution to the problem of perception, and both oppose the bifurcation of nature, with de Laguna expressing these views before Whitehead did. I conclude that while both opposed the narrower project of logical atomism, both count as ancestors of the wider analytic movement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Analytic philosophy is a notoriously male-dominated endeavour, and one with a strong orientation towards logic and philosophy of science. Historians conventionally locate its origins in 1899 Cambridge, beginning with Moore's 'Nature of Judgement' (Moore 1899). They also conventionally describe it as having all-male origins, with three 'founding fathers', the realists and logical atomists Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein, inspired by its 'grandfather', Frege. Katzav's article and this special issue represent a step towards overcoming this narrow perspective. In this paper I argue that Grace de Laguna, though not a self-identified analytic philosopher, can nevertheless be seen as one of its 'grandmother' figures: someone who foreshadowed several important arguments which were crucial more to the middle period of analytic philosophy than its early, atomist phase. I build my case by recognizing de Laguna alongside other grandmother figures such as Constance Jones and Christine Ladd-Franklin and by drawing connections between her prescient philosophy of science and the slightly later thought of Whitehead, a lesser-known but acknowledged 'grandfather' of analytic philosophy (MacBride 2018: 115-128). De Laguna articulated versions of some Whiteheadian doctrines before him, and expressed a great affinity with his thought in her later works (De Laguna 1951). Although neither de Laguna nor Whitehead were logical atomists, they belong to the broader movement of analytic philosophy according to the way I recommend thinking about it: they were anti-idealist and pursued a philosophy to fit around the new developments in science, such as the new Einsteinian physics and the new psychology.

2. ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND ITS FORGOTTEN GRANDMOTHERS: OVERCOMING THE GREAT MEN NARRATIVE

Historians have made headway over the past 30 years with efforts to integrate female thinkers into the canon of philosophy (e.g. Waithe 1987-1991). Yet narratives about the canon and origins of analytic philosophy remain stubbornly male. Several well-respected histories of analytic philosophy mention no female philosophers at all (Coffa 1991, Skorupski 1993). Many more assume that no women contributed until the late 1940s or early 1950s. They mention only one female theoretical philosopher, either Elizabeth Anscombe or Ruth Barcan Marcus, and generally spend only a few sentences discussing her (e.g. Baldwin 2001, Cocchiarella 1987, Glock 2008, Soames 2003, Soames 2014).

Worse, some historians suggest that the male domination of analytic philosophy and its focus on logic and science are related because, they say, women gravitate towards normative philosophy. According to this hypothesis, women did not take up analytic philosophy until its middle phase, when its focus broadened to include ‘women philosophers – such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Iris Murdoch, Mary Midgley, and Philippa Foot – [who] have continued to demonstrate a strong interest in moral theory’ (J. Broad 2006: 1069; on these four figures, also see Mac Cumhaill and Wiseman 2021). By recognizing de Laguna’s contributions to the analytic tradition, Katzav resists this tendency. Here I particularly want to stress that the hypothesis that women prefer moral theory to philosophy of science and logic is not supported by the historical record, which shows women philosophers, such as Christine Ladd-Franklin, E.E. Constance Jones, Victoria Welby, Sophie Bryant, Mary Whiton Calkins, Beatrice Edgell, Augusta Klein, and Helen Dendy publishing on logic and philosophy of science in the major philosophy journals from the 1880s onwards. Several female logicians and philosophers of science writing in the 1890s-1910s bear a relationship to analytic philosophy similar to Frege’s, and thus deserve the epithet ‘grandmothers of analytic philosophy’ (Janssen-Lauret 2021). Their work focused on the central concerns of analytic philosophy, such as innovations in logic, anti-idealism, analysis of language and reality, and finding a philosophy which might accommodate novel developments in science, like the mathematical revolution in rigour, Einsteinian physics, evolutionary biology, and the emerging science of psychology.

As I will argue, de Laguna, though a little younger than figures like Jones and Ladd-Franklin, also fits the ‘grandmother’ profile in many respects. By contrast with those women who clearly belonged to the analytic movement, and can be considered ‘founding mothers’, such as Susan Stebbing (Stebbing 1932-33; Janssen-Lauret forthcoming-a; Janssen-Lauret 2017) and Dorothy Wrinch (Wrinch 1919; Lebens 2018: 192-199), the ‘grandmothers’ embraced key principles of what we now call ‘analytic philosophy’, but opposed the earlier, narrower project of logical atomism. They typically advocated views more reminiscent of the middle period of analytic philosophy, such as Jones’s stress on the distinction between sense and reference or, as she called it, denotation and intension (Jones 1890) and Ladd-Franklin’s close scrutiny of the relationship between logic and the interpretation of ordinary-language reasoning and the crucial role of context and pragmatic considerations in interpreting language (Janssen-Lauret 2021).

Like the other ‘grandmothers’, de Laguna did not describe herself as an aficionada of Moore and Russell’s ‘New Philosophy’ or of logical atomism, and had a foot in several philosophical traditions. She self-described as belonging to a tradition of ‘speculative philosophy’ (de Laguna 1951). She cited figures belonging to both continental and analytic philosophy. But this does not mean that she was not an ancestor of the current tradition of analytic philosophy. In fact, as Katzav’s lead paper reveals, she played a significant role in the development of analytic philosophy.

‘Analytic philosophy’ is difficult to define. The analytic tradition never had a clearly delineated body of doctrine shared by all its adherents. A geographical or linguistic characterisation as ‘Anglo-American’ or ‘Anglophone’ philosophy dominant in the twentieth century unfairly marginalises the contributions of analytic philosophers from the European continent, including even the German-speaking canonical founder Wittgenstein and the ‘grandfather’, Frege. Identifying analytic philosophy with a style which prizes clear thought, justification, and argument is too wide-ranging; most philosophical traditions value those features. To say that analytic philosophy restricts itself to the analysis of language is, by contrast, too narrow. Aware of the drawbacks of these various intensional definitions, several historians of analytic philosophy seek refuge instead in a definition which they consider to be at least clear insofar as it is extensional. Analytic philosophy, they declare, is the work of three or four particular men and their followers.

‘If analytic philosophy is not a unified set of doctrines adhered to by the broad range of philosophers, what is it? The short answer is that it is a certain historical tradition in which the early work of G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein set the agenda for later philosophers’ (Soames 2003: xiii).

Even Beaney, who stresses the role of Susan Stebbing, sometimes promulgates this kind of narrative,

‘analytic philosophy can be characterized as the tradition that originated in the work of Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), G. E. Moore (1873-1958), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and developed and ramified in to the complex movement (or set of interconnected subtraditions) that we know today’ (Beaney 2015: 9).

This extensional definition, according to which early analytic philosophy is simply identified with the works of the male ‘founding fathers’, has the theoretical benefits of being neither Anglo-centric, nor vague, overly expansive, or unreasonably narrow. But defining early analytic philosophy as the works of three or four Great Men, and analytic philosophy in general as the tradition propounded by their followers, I maintain, is not a neutral extensional characterisation, but a gendered and tendentious one.

First of all, a field simply defined as the ideas of three or four Great Men and those who followed their agenda excludes female founders by fiat. The Great Men narrative also has the further disadvantage that it leaves no room for according the status of ‘early analytic philosopher’ to figures who were not followers of Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein, but

critics or independent thinkers ploughing their own furrow. Even if someone made important contributions in the early analytic period, engaged in a spirit generally sympathetic to the analytic project, or foreshadowed key ideas of the middle or later analytic periods, Soames' and Beaney's definitions imply that s/he cannot be an early analytic philosopher if s/he was not a disciple of the great men but critical of them or independent of them.

The above point is especially important to bear in mind in connection to the 'grandmothers' of analytic philosophy. Several women working in theoretical philosophy developed themes central to analytic philosophy before the canonical 'founding fathers' did, engaged critically with the canonical male founders—both Jones and Ladd-Franklin published incisive criticisms of Russell (Janssen-Lauret 2021)—or worked in relative isolation from them. Jones and Ladd-Franklin were originators of ideas—such as the sense-reference distinction and inferentialism in logic and language—which became influential only many years after the very early analytic period in which they lived. These themes, to which Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein did not pay much attention, grew into huge drivers of debate in the middle and late analytic periods respectively. De Laguna's focus on the emerging science of psychology, and her behaviourist approach, is similarly prescient.

Approaching analytic philosophy as a Great Men narrative is not necessary. My alternative proposal is to view analytic philosophy not as a tradition issuing from the works of three or four men, but rather as a broad and varied movement. Analytic philosophy resists neat and tidy definition, intensional or extensional. It has no fixed collection of central doctrines or small cabal of authority figures who set the agenda. It is a movement with a variety of strands, each with a range of central and more peripheral figures, each with doctrines in some respects allied, in some respects in tension with some of the others. Among the strands making up the early analytic philosophy movement are empiricism, advances in formal and mathematical logic since the nineteenth-century revolution in rigour—not just Frege's, but the algebraic calculi, too—the analysis of language and new developments in physics and psychology. On that alternative conception of analytic philosophy, there is room for multiple grandfathers and grandmothers besides Frege. Others who might deserve the title of 'grandparent' are pioneering symbolic logicians such as Ladd-Franklin, Augustus De Morgan, George Boole and Mary Everest Boole, John Venn, Giuseppe Peano, and A.N. Whitehead, early philosophers of mind and psychology such as Margaret Floy Washburn, Beatrice Edgell, and G.F. Stout, American pragmatists like Ladd-Franklin, Peirce, Dewey, and William James, and philosophers of logic and language like Jones and Victoria Welby. Grace de Laguna's thought includes pioneering work on behaviourism in the philosophy of mind and psychology, pragmatist elements, and philosophy of science akin to Whitehead's, and therefore fits the 'grandmother' profile, too.

Among the founders of analytic philosophy the 'movement' narrative would include British figures like Stebbing, Wrinch, Margaret Macdonald, and Margaret Masterman, American logicians like Susanne Langer and Alice Ambrose, European logicians like Rozsa Péter, the members of the Vienna Circle, and the logicians and philosophers of Lvov and Warsaw, many of whom were female (Janssen-Lauret forthcoming-b). One way to restore female early analytic philosophers to their rightful place is to give up the Great Men narrative and embrace the 'movement' narrative of early analytic philosophy.

My narrative of analytic philosophy as a movement also accounts for why a figure like de Laguna may fruitfully be counted as an analytic philosopher by us now, even if she did not call herself an analytic philosopher, or an adherent of the ‘New Philosophy’ or logical atomism. Analytic philosophy acquired its name rather late in the day. The earliest use of the term of which I’m aware is Russell’s ‘Analytic and Synthetic Philosophers’ (Russell 1922), where Russell describes Moore as representing analytic philosophy, and Karin Costelloe-Stephen as representative of synthetic philosophy (Vrahimis 2020). But the term ‘analytic philosophy’ did not become common until decades later, and was not then a term denoting just the logical atomists, or only straightforward followers of Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein; it was a term for a movement which included those strands of thought as well as several which the ‘New Philosophers’ and logical atomists would have opposed, such as holism (Janssen-Lauret 2017), inferentialism, and nominalism (Janssen-Lauret 2015, 2018).

What I take to be most distinctive about the analytic philosophy movement is its tendency to model its philosophical approach on those of the sciences. Among the canonical male analytic philosophers, this began with reflection on the mathematical revolution in rigour and general relativity. These results upset traditional philosophical certainties about the infinity, parts and wholes—e.g. the intuition that no whole is the same size as any of its proper parts—and the nature of space and time.¹ Analytic philosophers held that philosophy should accept these results as true, set out to clarify and interpret them, and fit philosophical enquiry around them. For some lesser-known analytic philosophers, such as Welby, Stout, Washburn, Ladd-Franklin, and de Laguna, reflection on new findings in the emerging science of psychology was also a major driving force (e.g. de Laguna 1919). Critical analysis of linguistic meaning, reference, and truth became crucial items in the analytic philosopher’s toolbox as she set out to investigate the logical form of scientific truths and their collective ontological commitments.

Analytic philosophers differ on how they engage with the content and method of the sciences. The early Russell believed that analytic philosophers must try to discover the underlying *a priori* logical forms of mathematics and physics, rather than borrow its latest empirical content; Quine, by contrast, thought that no such clean separation could be made, since he opposed the distinction between the *a priori* and the empirical (Janssen-Lauret and MacBride 2018: 53-59). My guiding principle in counting something as analytic philosophy is that it approaches philosophy as something constrained by the findings of the sciences, and seeks not to contradict those, but to integrate philosophy with them. Another hallmark is engagement in the analysis of language, definitions, or logical possibility. Continental philosophy, by contrast, traditionally models its approach and methodology on those of the humanities. It borrows not just the content, but the methods, of literature, theology, and history. Modern continental philosophy might also be characterised as a movement with intersecting strands, such as Hegelian idealism, neo-Thomism, Heideggerianism, phenomenology, Marxism, and existentialism, some of which intersect with some

¹For a modern development of this line of thought, see MacBride and Janssen-Lauret 2015.

strands of analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophy tends to be opposed to idealist, mystic, literature-driven tendencies in philosophy. But its purview is far wider than that which results if we think only of Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein and those who followed their agenda as analytic philosophers.

As I view the history of analytic philosophy, then, analytic philosophy embodied forms of naturalism from the beginning. I use ‘naturalism’ here not in the narrow sense of Quinean naturalised epistemology, but in the broader sense of searching for a philosophy to accommodate the deliverances of the sciences, not merely the natural sciences but also the new mathematics, evolutionary biology, and the new science of psychology. The naturalism I have in mind aims to build a philosophy around these scientific results. It resists the kind of system-building which disregards or seeks to be independent of the sciences. While this puts some constraints on the kind of philosophical speculation analytic philosophers can engage in, it does not imply that analytic philosophy is primarily ‘critical’ rather than speculative philosophy. These terms are used in a way crucial to the overall argument in (Katzav 2016; Katzav and Vaesen 2017) but date back at least to C.D. Broad (Broad 1924; Broad 1947). Analytic philosophy does value and place stress on critical methods and philosophical analysis, but most of its advocates also engage in the ‘synoptic’ (in the more literal sense of ‘viewing together’ rather than the more usual sense of ‘summarising’) and ‘synthetic’ project Broad (1947: 16-17) takes to be distinctive of speculative philosophy. Broad describes the problem of perception and the mind-body problem as key problems of speculative philosophy. De Laguna’s answers to these problems, while they differ sharply from those of the logical atomists, certainly turn on an empiricist approach compatible with analytic philosophy. While some analytic philosophers, such as the later Moore—not the Moore of (Moore 1899), which is rather speculative—ordinary-language philosophers, and deflationary Wittgensteinians lean heavily critical, to assign Moore too great a role in deciding who counts as an analytic philosopher (as in e.g. Katzav and Vaesen 2017: 790-791) risks falling prey to the Great Men narrative of analytic philosophy.

Since in my view some types of naturalism were baked into analytic philosophy from the beginning, I disagree with Katzav’s claim in his lead article that analytic philosophy became naturalistic only under the influence of Quine in the 1960s, and that speculative naturalism was unwelcome in analytic philosophy. This statement relies on an implausibly narrow use of the term ‘naturalism’, and is not, in my view, a good characterisation of Quine, whom I read as a deeply systematic philosopher with a wide-ranging positive project in addition to his critical projects. I argue (Janssen-Lauret 2018 xviii-xix) that the early Quine was already committed to a kind of modest but naturalistic metaphysics, rather than Carnapian anti-metaphysics, in the 1930s, having seen that metaphysics tempered by empiricism was possible in such models as James’s empiricist anomalous monism and Whitehead’s event ontology, as well as Russell’s analysis of matter; while the early Quine did not embrace any of these speculative systems, neither did he think them composed of pseudo-statements. He considered them legitimate philosophy.

3. DE LAGUNA'S PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AS EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Two common themes between the early works of De Laguna (de Laguna 1917) and Whitehead (Whitehead 1920) are anti-atomism and opposition to the bifurcation of nature into two distinct realms. Both held that the natural world, which we investigate by means of natural science, is presented to us via the senses. In science we seek, as de Laguna put it, to identify patterns exhibited by the reality which we confront in sense perception, and to sort those patterns into the scientific phenomena, which 'bear systematic relations to other [phenomena] individuated and classified by similar principles' (de Laguna 1917: 632) and those phenomena which are grouped together arbitrarily, which do not represent real uniformities in nature. Both opposed an atomistic reductionism according to which the analysis of reality bottoms out in a set of discrete atoms whose qualities and movements explain all other phenomena. Although there are some differences between de Laguna and Whitehead, both shared a holistic way of looking at the world, and its investigation by means of natural science, which provides novel, and usefully speculative, solutions to both the problems Broad identified as belonging to speculative philosophy: perception and the mind-body problem.

Perception in particular had bedevilled the logical atomists and proved especially difficult to tackle with a highly 'critical' approach to philosophy. It is only rarely remembered that Moore's 'A Defence of Common Sense', which sets out to rebut idealism, does not end with a triumph over idealism in general, but in a kind of aporia following attempts to provide an atomist analysis of purportedly physical objects like hands while starting from a base of perceptual observations. Moore's emphasis on the truth of common-sense claims like 'this is a hand' served to rule out the peculiar idealism of Bradley, who took common-sense judgements not to be fully true (Janssen-Lauret forthcoming-a). Yet logical atomism, even combined with the certain truth of such common-sense claims, left room for forms of idealism which provided analyses of common-sense truths in ontologically idealist or phenomenalist terms, analyses which appeared unsatisfactory. Moore could not see how to dispel, for example, the potential analysis that hands are 'permanent possibilities of sensation', which was the view of J.S. Mill (Moore 1925: 57). Such analyses were embarrassing to the early analytic philosophers, because they appear 'paradoxical' or analytically false (Moore 1925: 59).

All of Moore attempted analyses of 'this is a hand' began with 'this [sense datum] is part of the surface of a human hand', and attempted to portray hands as logical constructions out of sense data. But all of them ran into difficulties Moore could not see how to overcome: assuming that sense data are identical with the surfaces of objects cannot account for the possibility of double vision, taking hands to be physical objects constructed out of mental sense data posits a mysterious relation of 'being an appearance of', and describing hands as 'permanent possibilities of sensation' is paradoxical (Moore 1925: 59). De Laguna's solution to the problem of perception, published some years before Moore's admission of aporia, consisted in sweeping away both the logical atomist approach to analysis and Mill's. De Laguna denied that atomistic analyses, whether physicalistic or mentalistic, could suffice to account for human perception; a new theory must be sought which was

neither atomistic nor divided the world into the mental and the physical. She rebutted the view that physical atoms and their patterns of movement could fully account for the variety of sensible qualities discerned by human perception,

‘The familiar objects about me in the room with their sensible qualities of color, of warmth or cold, of hardness or softness, of brightness or dullness, would reveal themselves to a finer perception as myriads of particles of different shapes and sizes, here densely packed, there far apart, and ever whirling and dancing in varying patterns. But were we beings endowed with faculties capable of perceiving this world in all its minute detail, we should no longer find in it the objects of our human world. We could not see the wood for the trees. Even though for every discriminated difference in our human world we should be able to point out a variation of some sort in atomic structure and arrangement, the resolution of the atomic world into the world of human perception would appear a mere tour de force. For the selection, from among all the multifarious actual variations in the atomic world, of those variations which correspond to sensible differences in the human world, would be wholly arbitrary.’ (de Laguna 1917: 629)

De Laguna found the contrary view, that physical phenomena should instead be accounted for in terms of perceptions, equally unsatisfactory. ‘As Mill urged, the laws of nature represent uniformities, not between groups of sensations, but between objects and events. Not a single causal relationship is analyzable into a sequence of sensation groups. That Mill was further led by his associationism to define an object as a group of possibilities of sensation does not prejudice the truth of this insight’ (de Laguna 1917: 632). De Laguna urged her readers to give up on attempting to make all of reality conform to a reductionist project where one science accounted for the results of all the others, remarking that this was the kind of ‘error [which] has given rise to the problem of the dualism of the physical and psychical’ (de Laguna 1917: 632).

Whitehead’s opposition to the bifurcation of nature had been extremely thoroughgoing. He held that the world could not be divided up into the mental vs. the physical, into primary qualities vs. secondary qualities, or into particulars vs. universals. All, he maintained, were abstractions out of a panoply of events which we experience (Whitehead 1920: 75). Whitehead embraced a one-category ontology. His single category was just that of an event, without bifurcation into universal and particular, a dualism which ‘does violence’ to our experience (Whitehead 1929: 68). De Laguna can occasionally be seen doubting the particular-universal dualism as well. Even in her first published paper, for example, she wrote that if the pragmatist immediatist denies that universals can be perceived directly, then ‘immediatism, it is evident, is brought face to face with a dualism of particular and universal as radical as that faced by the older empiricism’ (1909: 403).

When Whitehead denied that nature can be divided into the realm of physical reality, with its primary qualities, and another realm consisting of our ‘psychic additions’, he expressed the point as follows: ‘the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain

the phenomenon' (1920: 29). According to Whitehead, secondary qualities, such as the red glow are presented to us in perceptual events just as much as the secondary qualities, consisting of what De Laguna described above as the 'whirling and dancing' of the atoms. De Laguna strikingly expressed a similar kind of rejection of the primary/secondary quality distinction when she argued against the view, popular among psychologists harking back to the British empiricist, that atomic 'sensations' of minimal duration had primacy over enduring perceptual events. She offered instead the bold thesis that, 'The child does not see colors, and can not see them, until, and in so far as, he has already learned to see objects. He does not hear tones until he has learned to hear voices and footsteps, nor feel pressures and muscular sensations until he has learned to feel hands and bottles and rattles.' (de Laguna 1916a: 353).

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