

# Academic Success in America: Analytic Philosophy and the Decline of Wittgenstein

There is a rather widespread consensus, among historians of philosophy, concerning the decline of Wittgenstein amid recent analytic philosophy. However, the exact import of such a decline, its chronological development, as well as its causes and several other features, are difficult to ascertain with the traditional methods of the history of philosophy. In this article we applied a distant reading approach, and a variety of other quantitative methods, trying to provide a more reliable and accurate account of Wittgenstein's decline. We focused on a corpus consisting of the metadata of US PhD dissertations in philosophy from 1981 to 2010 (although other kinds of data are also taken into consideration), and we tried to relate the topic of the dissertation with the success of the candidate in his/her subsequent academic career. The results of this analysis, corroborated by other evidence, allowed us to put forth the more reliable and accurate account just hinted at, and at the same time to suggest – as a contribution to external history of philosophy – a plausible mechanism at the basis of the decline itself, notably a process driven by those who controlled the recruitment policies in the philosophy departments.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; history of analytic philosophy; academic success; distant reading

## 1. Wittgenstein's Place in the History of Analytic Philosophy

There is a widespread sentiment among scholars that the influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy has been declining over the last decades, and that such a decline has been especially serious among analytic philosophers (for this reconstruction, see Malcolm, *Wittgenstein*; Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place*; Kenny, *Wittgenstein*; Glock, *The Influence of Wittgenstein*; Frascolla, Marconi, and Voltolini, *Wittgenstein*; Tripodi, *Dimenticare Wittgenstein*). Once upon a time – in the 1950s and the 1960s – things were rather different: Oxford, and to a lesser extent Cambridge, were seen as the Mecca of linguistic philosophy; linguistic philosophy was considered the avant-garde and, in fact,

the core of analytic philosophy; and Wittgenstein was widely regarded as the champion of this philosophical tendency. The Wittgensteinian revolution in philosophy awoke great expectations. Here is how Bernard Williams once described them, in a 1978 conversation with Bryan Magee on ‘The Spell of Linguistic Philosophy’:

Many questions of philosophy turned out, each of them, not to be any one question at all. They were often a collection of different worries, different puzzles, which had been put together under some simplifying formula, and when you saw through that and had analytically taken the problems apart, you’d find that many traditional questions of philosophy had not been solved but had disappeared. You no longer needed to ask them. And the promise this offered was very great – and extremely exciting. There really were people who were saying that the whole of philosophy would be over in fifty years. It would all be finished. (Williams, ‘The Spell of Linguistic Philosophy’, 114)

This and several other testimonies – such as Ryle, ‘Ludwig Wittgenstein’; Strawson, ‘Critical Notice’; and Urmson, ‘Discussion’ – confirm the ‘eschatological’ character of the philosophical atmosphere during the Golden Age of Oxford linguistic philosophy.

This was a time in Oxford in which, as Ernest Gellner once put it, ‘criticising Wittgenstein was unthinkable’ (Gellner, *Words and Things*, 30). In this period, the Wittgensteinian paradigm in philosophy was so dominant in Britain that, to say the least, many people were convinced that the tradition was to have a similar impact on the United States and the rest of the English-speaking philosophical world.

However, the conjecture was false, and things transpired differently. The Wittgensteinian tradition has been largely forgotten or rejected by present-day analytic philosophers: it has lost its centrality in Britain, and it has never reached a comparable reputation in the United States. Let us consider, for example, the following Wittgensteinian claims, characteristic of that tradition (they are mostly associated to the later Wittgenstein, but some of them were accepted by the early Wittgenstein as well).

Science and philosophy are deeply distinct, they lie on different planes: science is a theory, philosophy is not a substantive theory but an activity of conceptual clarification. What is necessary is not determined by certain features of the world, but rather is a by-product of our language, or of our conceptual scheme. Mentalism is false: any mental 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria, and a private language is impossible. Rationalization of intentional behaviour is not a type of causal explanation: the reasons for our actions are not their causes. Now, all such Wittgensteinian cornerstones were once part of a body of commonly shared views in the analytic community in Cambridge and Oxford, at the time in which many people expected the influence of British analytic philosophy to spread all over the English-speaking world. Nowadays, none of these views are accepted (let alone taken for granted) by the average analytic philosopher, not only in the United States, but in Britain as well.

A rather convincing historical reconstruction is available in the philosophical community (see, in particular, Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place*, but also Tripodi, *Dimenticare Wittgenstein*, which seem to agree on the main outlines of the account). The decline, or the lack of success, of Wittgenstein in the analytic tradition depended presumably on a number of philosophical, cultural and even geopolitical factors. After the Second World War, not only did the United States increase their cultural hegemony and their economic, political and military predominance with respect to Europe (and to Britain, in particular), but, as a by-product, the core of analytic philosophy moved to America, while Britain gradually became a periphery. All this had severe consequences for the legacy of Wittgenstein in analytic philosophy, since post-war American analytic philosophy was, to a certain extent, either a-Wittgensteinian or anti-Wittgensteinian. It was in a certain sense a-Wittgensteinian. The linguistic and cultural distance made it difficult for American philosophers to understand Wittgenstein: his language, his spirit,

his philosophy. Moreover, in the United States Wittgenstein was often assimilated to Rudolf Carnap: a respected and ‘scientific’ philosopher, who had taught Quine in Europe and then emigrated to America in 1936, thus becoming an eminent professor in Chicago and Los Angeles; though at the same time someone who, ultimately, had made epochal and ultimately incorrigible mistakes, which were famously exposed by Quine himself and, among others, by Nelson Goodman and Carl Gustav Hempel (see, for example, Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*; Quine ‘Two Dogmas’; Hempel, ‘The Theoretician’s Dilemma’). As a consequence, Wittgenstein was often regarded by American analytic philosophers as an obscure and less scientific *Doppelgänger* of Carnap. To mention only one remarkable and well known episode, Quine criticised Carnap’s analytic-synthetic distinction. That criticism, however, was regarded by many analytic philosophers as the ultimate word on any attempt in philosophy to draw and use a divide between the conceptual and the factual, including the grammatical-empirical distinction introduced and defended by Wittgenstein. The adoption of a Quinean semantic and epistemological perspective had severe metaphilosophical consequences – which the Wittgensteinians on both sides of the Atlantic were often scarcely aware of –, having to do with the issue of the continuity (Quine) or discontinuity (Wittgenstein) between science and philosophy (cf. Tripodi, *Dimenticare Wittgenstein*; Marconi, ‘Quine and Wittgenstein’).

Nevertheless, an important part of American philosophy was also straightforwardly anti-Wittgensteinian. In the 1960s and 1970s, several influential analytic philosophers in the United States took Wittgenstein’s philosophy into serious consideration, yet their attitude towards it was in many cases unsympathetic. For example, Hilary Putnam attacked Wittgenstein’s notion of criterion and the related idea of a ‘depth grammar’, Donald Davidson criticised the distinction between the causes of

and reasons for our actions, and Jerry Fodor charged Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and mind with behaviorism and verificationism (Putnam, 'Dreaming and "Depth Grammar"'); Davidson, 'Action, Reason and Causes'; Chihara and Fodor, 'Operationalism'; Fodor, *The Language of Thought*). All such 'analytic' criticisms of Wittgenstein had further metaphilosophical implications related to the continuity-discontinuity issue. They had a direct implication: the conceptual distinctions criticised by Putnam and Davidson, respectively – namely, the distinction between criteria and symptoms and that between reasons and causes – are quite directly related to the main metaphilosophical divide between science and philosophy (roughly, science concerns the space of causes, philosophy the space of reasons; philosophy describes the logical criteria for the application of concepts, science explains phenomena and discovers facts by considering their symptoms). But such criticisms also had a less direct implication: the philosophical perspective defended by Fodor in the philosophy of language and mind became part and parcel of the epochal paradigm change represented by the rise of the cognitive sciences, which are based on the *prima facie* anti-Wittgensteinian idea that mental processes are to be conceived of as calculi, in which mental representations are syntactically governed by inner, unconscious rules. The peak of the anti-Wittgensteinian turn in the history of American analytic philosophy was achieved in the 1970s with the revival of metaphysics, led by Saul Kripke and David Lewis, among others: the new perspective introduced by Kripke in his *Naming and Necessity* favoured a rejection of Wittgenstein's linguistic and normative conception of the modalities; the metaphysical work done by Lewis became the prototype and the model of a view of philosophy as a kind of substantive, general and explanatory theory, based on the evaluation and weighing of costs and benefits or, more precisely, as Timothy Williamson would call it,

on an abductive methodology (Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*; Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*).

The brief historical explanation just outlined is quite persuasive, but requires qualification. First, the picture is not complete. After all, in the 1960s (and then in the 1970s) analytic philosophy in America was not *entirely* indifferent or hostile to Wittgenstein. On the contrary, at that time in the United States there were several analytic philosophers who knew Wittgenstein well and appreciated his philosophy: not only the group of full-blooded Wittgensteinians gathered around Norman Malcolm and Max Black at Cornell University, which was rather isolated and marginal with respect to the mainstream, but also several other philosophers – such as Stanley Cavell and Richard Rorty, Burton Dreben and Rogers Albritton, Barry Stroud and Robert Arrington –, some of whom were undoubtedly influential and occupied key positions in American philosophical academia (see Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place*, 265). One of the most interesting cases was that of Wilfrid Sellars, who was well acquainted with Wittgenstein's philosophy, provided an original interpretation of it, and used both the early and the later Wittgenstein for his own philosophical purposes (see Bonino and Tripodi, 'Sellars and Wittgenstein').

This last remark on Sellars's philosophical use of both Wittgensteins reminds us that the historical reconstruction of the decline of Wittgenstein described above mainly focuses on the place of the *later* Wittgenstein in 20<sup>th</sup>-century analytic philosophy, especially in the United States, and one might well suppose that things are different insofar as the *early* Wittgenstein is concerned. However, focusing on the metaphilosophical issue of the (alleged) continuity between science and philosophy, Wittgenstein – both early and late – and present-day mainstream analytic philosophers represent opposite poles in the philosophical spectrum: therefore, from this point of

view, it would seem reasonable to speak of a decline of Wittgenstein *tout court*, without any qualification as to the early or late Wittgenstein.<sup>1</sup>

A further related qualification is that the very notion of an analytic mainstream is vague and elusive. Though one can legitimately say that *in general* Wittgenstein is alien to the present analytic mainstream, there seem to be several examples of important philosophical theories in the recent analytic tradition which are directly related to or inspired by both the early and the later Wittgenstein's thought. Concerning the early Wittgenstein, consider for instance David Armstrong's combinatorialism, which attributes a central metaphysical role to the Wittgensteinian notion of a state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*) or, perhaps in a rather loose sense, Davidson's program for a truth-conditional semantic theory, which primarily depends on Tarski's theory of truth but which is also based, as Hans-Johann Glock once put it, on '*Tractatus*-like reflections on the essential preconditions of language' (Glock, *The Influence of Wittgenstein*; see also Armstrong, *A Combinatorial Theory*; Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*; Davidson, *Inquiries*). There are equally clear examples of uses of the later Wittgenstein by eminent analytic philosophers: not only thinkers such as John McDowell and the New Wittgensteinians, who are often perceived as 'foreign bodies' by the analytic mainstream, but also full-blooded analytic philosophers such as Crispin Wright and Paul Horwich, as well as two contemporary 'classics' of analytic philosophy such as the later Putnam and, above all, Kripke as the author of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (see, for example, McDowell, *Mind and World*; Crary and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*; Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*; Horwich,

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote 16 below.

*Wittgenstein's Metaphilosophy*; Putnam, *The Many Faces*; and Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules*).

A last qualification to the above historical outline concerns the fact that there was and still is a philosophical world in the United States, which is not strictly speaking analytic: a world which is partly related to endogenous philosophical phenomena such as pragmatism, transcendentalism, and critical realism, and partly associated to exogenous philosophical traditions such as phenomenology, Marxism, hermeneutics, critical theory, etc. In this non-analytic world, Wittgenstein's philosophy might have played a somewhat different role (or different roles) and its legacy might have had a different historical development. Furthermore, as is well known, plenty of commentaries, interpretations and exegeses of Wittgenstein's work are still being written, in addition to numerous philosophical works of the form, 'Wittgenstein and X': this strand of Wittgenstein studies do not necessarily belong to the analytic tradition.

Taking into account the titles of all journal articles, books, and academic dissertations recorded by the Philosopher's Index from the period 1950-2009, it can be concluded that 'Wittgenstein' is still regarded as the name of a great philosopher. There are 8,679 occurrences of 'Wittgenstein' in such titles: a relatively significant datum, which indicates that, though less popular than philosophers such as Kant (occurring in 18,407 titles), Hegel (16,358), Marx (13,981), and Heidegger (11,582), Wittgenstein is more popular than philosophers such as Sartre (5,455), Husserl (5,377), Locke (5,082), Spinoza (4,997) and Dewey (4,851), and much more popular than analytic philosophers such as Quine (1,744) and Kripke (629); the number of occurrences of 'Wittgenstein'



regularly increases, from the first decade to the last.<sup>2</sup> This result reveals something interesting about Wittgenstein's place in contemporary philosophy, with a special focus on the English-speaking philosophical world (the Philosopher's Index may have a certain anglophone bias) but without any constraint concerning a specific philosophical current or tradition. However, it is at least *prima facie* at odds with another outcome recently achieved by scientometrics, which concerns the more restricted area of analytic philosophy and seems to confirm the decline view described above: taking into account a corpus of 4,966 articles taken from five important philosophical journals belonging to the analytic tradition (*The Philosophical Review*, *Noûs*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, *Mind*, and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*) from the period 1985-2014, Buonomo and Petrovich recently provided a list of the most cited philosophers. With 199 citations, Wittgenstein occupies the 63rd position in the ranking, far from the top rankings (David Lewis: 2119; Willard Van Orman Quine: 921; Donald Davidson: 899; Hilary Putnam: 685) (Buonomo and Petrovich, 'Reconstructing Late Analytic Philosophy'). Notwithstanding his lasting centrality as a subject of exegesis and research for philosophy *in general*, the presence and influence of Wittgenstein is nowadays much less evident in *current philosophical theories*, as far as the *analytic* tradition is concerned; in this context his main theses are simply ignored or neglected, his name mentioned rarely.

## **2. Quantitative Analysis: Methods and Corpora**

As we have already stated, the above historical reconstruction of the decline of

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<sup>2</sup> Here are the percentages of titles containing 'Wittgenstein' over a corpus of more than 19,500,000 titles: 0.0076% in the 1950s; 0.0226% in the 1960s; 0.0401% in the 1970s; 0.0534% in the 1980s; 0.0573% in the 1990s; 0.0680% in the 2000s.

Wittgenstein in contemporary analytic philosophy is quite plausible. However, what evidence supports such a reconstruction? One might rely upon traditional forms of evidence, taken into account by historians of philosophy. One might read and analyze a fair number of articles and books, which are supposed to have played an important role in this story. Perhaps the number of articles and books taken into consideration is rather large, if one is an avid reader. Yet, one might read with due attention only a small part of the entirety of the philosophical literature that is relevant, especially if one is interested in what has taken place in recent years, when academic production has increased significantly.

One might also rely on one's personal impressions of what happened, derived from one's familiarity with the subject matter or the relevant philosophical *milieu*. Alternatively, one might take into account the impressions of other actors of the history one is attempting to reconstruct: typically, semi-autobiographical reflections of important philosophers who played some role in the events. This evidence is most likely reliable enough to write a history that is approximately correct. Yet many details still elude the historical reconstruction. For instance, we speak of a decline of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but what was the *pace* of such a decline? Are there ways in which one can estimate this pace? Is a comparative evaluation of the different causes of the decline possible? In what areas of philosophical production did the decline begin? In general, is it possible to measure the decline in any significant way?

These, of course, are only examples of questions that might be asked. The application of quantitative methods could be helpful to devise a more detailed account, and also to raise questions that cannot be tackled through the traditional methods of the history of philosophy. Methodologically, we take inspiration from two main sources. One is the so-called 'distant reading' approach, introduced by Franco Moretti in literary

history, whose basic insight is that you can achieve a novel understanding of literature and its historical development not by studying in detail a few particular texts, but rather by aggregating and analyzing large amounts of information (cf. Moretti, *Distant Reading*). The main motivation of this methodological attitude – which resembles the shift of attention, characteristic of the kind of social history associated to the *Annales* school, ‘from exceptional events to the large mass of facts’ (Braudel, ‘L’histoire’) – is the realization of the presence and the significance of a ‘great unread’ (that is, the 99% of the literary production in a given period, as opposed to the literary canon, which is the remaining 1%), together with the awareness that close reading is not feasible in this context (Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*, 3). The central role of data in this approach, however, is not determined only by their quantity. It is also important to look for different *kinds* of data, not investigated before, drawn from a variety of sources; no longer (or not only) single texts (e.g., a poem, a short story, a novel), but various kinds of data: paratexts and other similar material, metadata, statistical data, and so forth. This data can be used to investigate new kinds of objects such as structures, cycles, regularities, and patterns.

The other source of methodological inspiration is the sociology of philosophy, not only in the strict sense (Kusch, *The Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge*; Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*; for a general outline, see Heidegren and Lundberg, ‘Towards a Sociology of Philosophy’) but also in a broader sense, as a label for a variety of heterogeneous contributions from the sociology of culture (e.g., Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*), and the sociology of scientific knowledge (e.g. Merton, *The Sociology of Science*, as well as Bloor, *Knowledge*). These approaches share the conviction that philosophy is part of the socio-political context and has socio-political purposes, and also that a balanced combination of qualitative and quantitative methods

can create a better understanding of the tangled relationship between philosophy and its social, institutional and political conditions.

Taking distant reading and the sociology of philosophy as our models, we apply quantitative methods with the aim of understanding whether some aspects of the traditional interpretation of the decline of Wittgenstein in the history of analytic philosophy can be somewhat corrected, enriched or improved. This may seem a scarcely revolutionary result, as no well-entrenched historiographical view is subverted by the present article. On the other hand, one of our aims is that of testing the reliability of this kind of quantitative approach to the history of philosophy, so that a certain degree of convergence between our conclusions and those obtained by means of more traditional methods can be regarded, in this respect, as an encouraging result. We chose to investigate a specific corpus, made up of 21,014 PhD dissertations in philosophy defended in the United States from 1981 to 2010. Specifically, the corpus consists of the metadata of such dissertations, which is made available by ProQuest ([www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)), where one can find the author's name, the title of the dissertation, the year, the university, a sort of classification according to discipline provided by ProQuest, along with other bibliographical data. In particular, the metadata includes the abstracts of the dissertations, which have been the primary objects of our distant reading.

The choice of the corpus stands in need of some justification. First, we focused on a specific literary genre, i.e., PhD dissertations, which are a particularly interesting source for our investigation, since they well represent the academic cultural climate of a certain period, as the choice for the subject matter of a dissertation is usually sensitive to fashions and trends. Of course, academic philosophy is not the whole of philosophy, yet it is undoubtedly a significant part of it. In particular, we find it reasonable to assert

that analytic philosophy, one of our main topics, is an essentially academic philosophical tradition.

Second, we selected a specific geographic area. We chose to focus mainly on the United States, which we regard as the core of contemporary analytic philosophy, where the most significant part of the story we are trying to investigate took place. A comparison with the British case would be interesting, but unfortunately the data that are presently available and that we have already collected are neither stable nor reliable enough to construct a narrative of the legacy of Wittgenstein in British analytic philosophy, mainly because the corpus provided by Electronic Theses Online Service (EThOS: <https://ethos.bl.uk>) is spoiled by gaps that are possibly biased. We hope that we will be able in the future to devote a separate analysis to the British side of this story.

Third, we limited our research to a certain time span. The corpus is part of a bigger dataset, which contains the metadata of the 30,344 PhD dissertations in philosophy defended in the United States from 1861 to 2015. We chose to focus on the period 1981-2010 because it is the period in which the effects of the decline of Wittgenstein should be most evident. Moreover, there are grounds to consider analytic philosophy over the last forty years – ‘late analytic philosophy’ according to a label that has been recently introduced (Weatherson, ‘Centrality’, 517) – as a quite distinct historical-philosophical phenomenon, a phenomenon which, though not homogeneous, nonetheless deserves a separate investigation, since it presents several recurrent or widely accepted views, on a methodological, stylistic and perhaps even substantive level. It is particularly relevant that the process of distancing itself from the Wittgensteinian paradigm and, more generally, from the so-called Linguistic Turn seems to be one of the distinctive features of late analytic philosophy (Bonino and Tripodi, *History of Late Analytic Philosophy*; see also Williamson, *The Philosophy of*

*Philosophy*). Fortunately enough, in this period the abstracts are available for *all* the dissertations of the corpus provided by ProQuest, allowing us to take advantage of this source of information while at the same time treating the data in a uniform way. For the sake of comparison, we have also taken into account the period 1951-1980: since many abstracts of the dissertations are not available in the earlier period, we have mainly paid attention to the titles (for further considerations on the period 1951-1980, see section 6).

### **3. Measuring the Decline of Wittgenstein: Academic Success in America**

As an introduction to this main section of the paper, some preliminary data can be useful to support a claim that has only been hinted at before. Notwithstanding the supposed decline, Wittgenstein has remained a very important philosopher in the United States: he has been a ‘classic’, so to speak, throughout the whole period we have considered. In Table 1 the names of philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, very broadly conceived, are taken into account, together with the number of their occurrences in the titles of the PhD dissertations defended in the United States from 1861 to 2015. As it is easy to see, Wittgenstein is in second place, just after Heidegger. Similar results can be obtained if one considers the occurrence of the names of philosophers in the abstracts of the dissertations, rather than in the titles, in the later period (Table 2): here the time span considered is 1981-2010. There is a clear sense in which Wittgenstein was and still is very popular as a subject matter of PhD dissertations in philosophy in the United States: Tables 1 and 2 provide a rough idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon. And this, at least *prima facie*, could seem to challenge our historical-philosophical starting point, that is, the very idea of a decline of Wittgenstein. As we shall see in what follows, however, the decline can be confirmed and even measured; this can be done in such a way that the decline itself turns out to be compatible with Wittgenstein’s persisting high popularity.

[Table 1]

[Table 2]

The main assumption of this paper is that we can investigate a relevant aspect of the supposed decline of Wittgensteinian philosophy by studying the academic careers (if any) of those who wrote their dissertation on Wittgenstein, and by comparing them with the careers of those who wrote their dissertation on different topics and, in particular, on a different kind of philosopher. We assume that academic success, or lack of academic success, of a PhD candidate  $x$  writing a dissertation on the philosopher  $A$  may be a significant symptom and a reasonable measure of the philosophical success, or lack of philosophical success, of  $A$ . For our purposes, the most important comparisons are those between the academic career of PhD candidates who wrote their dissertation on Wittgenstein, and those who wrote their dissertation on a ‘typical’ analytic philosopher. In particular, we chose four analytic philosophers, who hold very different views on virtually every subject, but who have been almost unanimously regarded as important figures within the analytic community in the last decades. They are David Lewis, Saul Kripke, Jerry Fodor, and Michael Dummett. Lewis had a primary role in shaping the physiognomy of analytic philosophy in the last forty years, especially from a methodological point of view (roughly, by regarding philosophical theories as large inferences to the best explanation), and he is among the figures who are mainly responsible for the revival of metaphysics, one of the historical-philosophical processes that has characterized the anti-Wittgensteinian tide of late analytic philosophy. Kripke’s role in fostering a metaphysical turn is second to none; he is a unique figure in this story, for he is at the same time the author of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, which caused a renewal of interest in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy in America; a renewal, however, characterized by an uncompromisingly analytic (and to a

large extent non-Wittgensteinian) philosophical style. Fodor prompted the return of mentalism and a cognitive approach that can be regarded, under many respects, as alien to the Wittgensteinian perspective in the philosophy of mind and language. Dummett has a unique position in the group: a British, rather than an American, philosopher, whose views are for several reasons close to those held by the later Wittgenstein in the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mathematics; but at the same time a typical analytic philosopher, with a deep expertise in formal logic, and the tendency – a far cry from the main Wittgensteinian metaphilosophical watchword – to construct general, systematic and explanatory philosophical theories.

Among the dissertations defended from 1981 to 2010, we selected those in which the name ‘Wittgenstein’ occurs in the abstract (442 dissertations). Then we singled out the *philosophy* dissertations, i.e., those dissertations that were written in the context of a PhD program *in philosophy*. There are 329 of them.<sup>3</sup> The same was done with the ‘analytic’ dissertations (we counted 404 of them). Then, with the aid of search engines, we traced the academic careers (if any) of all the authors of the dissertations that have been selected. We attributed a numerical value to the highest position held by each of them (if any). We took into account both the academic rank (adjunct, assistant, associate, full professor) and the ranking of the philosophy department (we used a rather rough ranking, based on three levels, and drawn from existing rankings). Then we calculated the average value for each group: this is what we called the Academic

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that in order to do this we had to trace each author and find out the department in which he studied, since this piece of information is not univocally provided by ProQuest.



Success Index.<sup>4</sup> Table 3 below shows the comparison between Wittgensteinian and analytic dissertations.

[Table 3]

As can be noticed, there is a significant difference between the two groups. The ‘decline’ of Wittgenstein seems to be in some way confirmed. The relatively low Academic Success Index is a manifestation of this decline.

It must be remarked that the Academic Success Index, given the somewhat arbitrary way in which the different factors are weighed, should not be taken too seriously as an absolute value. However, we believe it represents a significant indicator, if considered in a comparative way. This is our main result. What makes us confident that the result is a solid one is that we considered other groups of dissertations and made other comparisons, and the fact that they all converge provides an important confirmation.

In Table 4 one can see the Academic Success Indexes of other groups of dissertations. The work done for Wittgenstein and analytic philosophers has also been done for Spinoza dissertations (115 theses in philosophy), for Gadamer dissertations (102 theses), and for a random sample of 200 dissertations, drawn from the entire corpus. Gadamer has been chosen because he is a typically continental philosopher, and Spinoza as an example of a philosopher ‘dead a long time ago’. One can see that Wittgenstein’s performance is rather poor, even with respect to these additional groups, whereas the analytic performance is very good.

[Table 4]

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<sup>4</sup> See the Appendix at the end of the paper for details about the procedure we followed in assigning numerical values to each kind of academic career.

In calculating the Academic Success Index we normalized the numerical values for academic age (see Appendix). However, in Table 5 one can see that there is no significant change when considering the non-normalized indexes.

[Table 5]

The same general result is confirmed by the data that has been disaggregated by five-year periods (Table 6). There is not even one exception.

[Table 6]

It is important to note that until now when speaking of Wittgensteinian dissertations, we have referred to the dissertations in which the name ‘Wittgenstein’ occurs in the abstract. Therefore, this group also includes the dissertations in which Wittgenstein might just be a minor topic. We could call this group the ‘broad’ Wittgenstein. Within this group, we selected a ‘narrow’ Wittgenstein, that is, all the dissertations in which Wittgenstein is in fact the main topic. As can be seen in Table 7, the Academic Success Index of the narrow Wittgenstein is even lower (but just a bit) than that of the broad Wittgenstein.

[Table 7]

Further confirmation can be obtained by considering the subclass of Wittgensteinian dissertations in which the name of a typical analytic philosopher also occurs (names such as those of David Lewis, Saul Kripke, Jerry Fodor, and Michael Dummett). As is possible to see in Table 8, it seems that the analytic content has had some sort of positive influence.

[Table 8]

Perhaps one might figure that the development of one’s whole career is not the relevant aspect to consider, in order to measure the role of one’s choice of topic in

determining one's academic success, because over time the author of a dissertation can easily change the subject of his or her research. This is partly true. However, it seems to us that the topic of one's dissertation is a significant aspect of the author's education and training, and these in turn have, at least in many cases, a lasting impact on the development of the author's interests over his or her entire career. Moreover, a similar comparative result – a result that, actually, is even stronger – can be obtained by considering the simpler dichotomy between academic professions and non-academic professions (including non-philosophical academic professions), which presumably depends on choices and events taking place within a limited number of years after the writing of the dissertation. 115 of the 329 Wittgensteinian candidates (34.95%) did not obtain an academic position as professors of philosophy, while for the analytic candidates that ratio was 68 of 404 (16.83%).

#### **4. The Causes of the Decline**

In the preceding section we have attempted to demonstrate that there is a significant correlation between the topic of the PhD dissertations and the academic success of the PhD candidates. The result seems to be rather solid: in particular, the correlation between the choice of Wittgenstein as a topic for a dissertation and a low Academic Success Index is revealed by many different kinds of data; and this correlation, we have maintained, can be regarded as a way to express the decline of Wittgenstein in the history of American (analytic) philosophy. More explicitly, we hold that the choice of the topic is not only correlated with academic success, but that it is a real cause of the latter.

Obviously enough, this does not rule out the existence of other causes. In particular, it is hard to dispute that attending a PhD programme in a high-ranked university usually makes for a better academic career (Clauset, Arbesman, and

Larremore, ‘Systematic Inequality’; Brancati et al., ‘Early Predictors’). This claim is confirmed by our data. By looking at Figure 9, one can easily discern this phenomenon taking place: more clearly in the analytic case (rank A: ASI 50.73; B: 44.55; C: 42.74), to a somewhat more limited extent in the Wittgensteinian case (A: 39.19; B: 32.49; C: 34.31). The two causal factors intersect (and probably interact) with one another, making it more difficult to interpret the data when the groups that are compared present significantly different topic-rank distributions.

The distribution of the Wittgensteinian dissertations among the ranks is very close to the distribution of the philosophy dissertations in general. On the contrary, the analytic dissertations move away from the average distribution.

[Table 9]

It is reasonable to suppose that the very high score (in terms of Academic Success Index) of the analytic dissertations is (also) due to such a distribution. It is certainly difficult to quantify the exact contribution of this causal factor in isolation, and in any case it would be well beyond the objectives of this paper.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems to us that the influence of the university ranking cannot obliterate the influence of the dissertation topic. This is clearly shown, once again, by Table 9: the Academic Success Index associated with Wittgenstein is consistently lower than that associated with analytic philosophers, *whatever the rank of the university*. The consistency of this result through different ranks points to a common element: the dissertation topic.

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<sup>5</sup> An explorative investigation with our data, for what it is worth, seems to show that the impact is not as momentous as one might think: considering the random sample of 200 theses, the ASI of dissertations in philosophy defended in A-ranked universities (call them A dissertations) from 1981 to 2010 is 45.11; the ASI of B dissertations is 41.11; the ASI of C dissertations is 40.26.

There may be other factors, which are directly or indirectly correlated with the topic of the dissertation. These factors may have a causal role in determining the academic success, and if this causal role were overriding, it could be regarded as an objection to our main claim: the topic matters.

For instance, it is fair to assume that academic success is influenced by socio-economic conditions: the wealthier you are (and the wealthier your family is), the more likely it is that you will have a successful academic career. This causal factor is probably stronger than the dissertation topic in determining one's future career. Though there are no a priori reasons to suppose that one's socio-economic condition influences in some systematic and significant way the choice of Wittgenstein rather than, say, David Lewis as the topic of one's dissertation, nonetheless the socio-economic conditions are strongly correlated with the rank of the university in which one studies, and thus there may be an indirect connection with the dissertation topic. Since whatever possible interference of one's socio-economic condition on one's dissertation topic choice is mediated by the university ranking, the reasons showing that the ranking does not obliterate the causal role of the topic are valid for socio-economic conditions, as well.

But subtler objections can be put forth. One could conjecture that smarter students choose certain topics for their dissertations more often than other topics, and that Wittgenstein is a relatively rare choice among smart students. This objection does not seem convincing. First of all, one can see in Table 9 above that even students of A-ranked universities (say, PhD students at Harvard or Princeton), who are presumably 'smart' enough, are penalized by Wittgenstein. Moreover, there are no a priori reasons to suppose that Wittgenstein is a relatively rare choice among smart students, and that, say, David Lewis is a relatively common one. The conjecture seems to be arbitrary, so

that the burden of proof is on those who make it: they should provide sufficient evidence; they should, e.g., take on the tough task of submitting all the available candidates to an IQ test, or something to this effect. Lacking any independent evidence, the only remaining plausible justification for the ‘smart candidates’ conjecture seems to be a circular one: the claim that people working on analytic philosophers are relatively smarter than those studying Wittgenstein can only be inferred from their relatively higher academic success. And other possible ways of testing the conjecture – e.g., counting the number of postdoctoral publications, or the number of citations – would run up against further forms of circularity, since they ultimately are nothing but other expressions of academic success.

Another kind of objection, focusing on an alternative historical-philosophical hypothesis rather than on a different sociological explanation, could be that the decline of Wittgenstein is simply part of a decaying relevance of central figures of the history of analytic philosophy, since – as one might argue – the analytic tradition used not to care about its own history very much.<sup>6</sup> In order to check whether the decay is actually a general fact about the lack of interest in the history of analytic philosophy, one would need to know how people who wrote their dissertation on, say, Frege or Russell behaved in terms of their academic success in the United States. Among the PhD dissertations in philosophy from 1981 to 2010 there are 181 theses in which the name ‘Russell’ occurs in the abstract and 188 in which ‘Frege’ occurs. Taking into account a random sample in which either ‘Frege’ or ‘Russell’ occurs, we found out that Russell and Frege have a higher Academic Success Index than Wittgenstein, as Tables 10 and 11 illustrate. It seems therefore that the objection can reasonably be rejected.

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<sup>6</sup> We thank an anonymous referee for this observation.

[Table 10]

[Table 11]

Finally, a last objection can be raised. We have noticed above that Wittgensteinian candidates have a lower Academic Success Index than the analytic ones *even though* Wittgenstein is a very popular topic for a PhD dissertation in philosophy in the United States: given the 329 dissertations on Wittgenstein in the period 1981-2010, in order to have a comparable number of analytic dissertations we had to take into account the occurrence in the abstracts of the names of *four* analytic philosophers. From this consideration, however, one could argue that Wittgenstein has a poor Academic Success Index *precisely because* it is a very popular subject.<sup>7</sup> The real cause of the lack of success, one could say, is the very popularity of the topic, rather than its philosophical content: after all, a department cannot recruit too many Wittgenstein scholars, for instance, or it would not be able to ensure pluralism in the philosophy curriculum; therefore, the department must look to different teaching competencies, thus recruiting people who can teach, for example, analytic (e.g., Kripke, Lewis, Fodor, Dummett), early modern (e.g., Spinoza), or continental philosophy (e.g., Gadamer). This objection seems *prima facie* plausible. However, it is not entirely convincing. Wittgenstein is a popular topic, true: yet, this means that there are 329 Wittgensteinian dissertations over approximately 20,000; 1.56% is not a very compelling percentage, after all; would it be enough to saturate the market? Moreover, the relatively widespread topic is what we called the ‘broad’ Wittgenstein (the subset of dissertations in which ‘Wittgenstein’ is mentioned in the abstract), rather than the ‘narrow’ Wittgenstein (the smaller subset of dissertations truly devoted to Wittgenstein), and it seems reasonable to

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<sup>7</sup> We owe this objection to XXX.

suppose that several broadly Wittgensteinian scholars could also teach different subjects (it is likely that some of them would only be able to teach other subjects, since they lack the required expertise to teach Wittgenstein).<sup>8</sup> Finally, and more importantly, we found a counterexample to this objection. Only one 20<sup>th</sup>-century author is more mentioned than Wittgenstein in the abstracts of the dissertations in the period 1981-2010: Martin Heidegger. Heidegger occurs in approximately 900 dissertations, 519 of which were written and discussed in the context of a PhD programme in philosophy. We calculated the Academic Success Index of Heidegger dissertations in philosophy (the ‘broad’ Heidegger) by considering, for the sake of brevity, a random sample of them (20%). Tables 12 and 13 illustrate the comparative result, which reveals that the popularity of the topic, even if it were causally relevant, would not drown out the causal role of the philosophical content of that same topic in determining the Academic Success Index: Heidegger is more popular than Wittgenstein, yet it has a higher Academic Success Index.

[Table 12]

[Table 13]

## **5. Meta-Philosophical Patterns**

We have claimed that the topic of the dissertation is a genuine cause, among others, of the difference in academic success between Wittgensteinian and analytic candidates.

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<sup>8</sup> When we speak of “the choice of Wittgenstein as the topic for the dissertation” we are speaking somewhat imprecisely, for most broadly Wittgensteinian dissertations do not focus on Wittgenstein. In this paper we make the conjecture – which seems to be somewhat confirmed by the data – that making reference to Wittgenstein in the abstract of the dissertation tells us something interesting about the philosophical culture and inclinations of the author of the dissertation.



But why, and how?

Some additional data can shed light on these questions. The more often a topic is found in dissertations defended within the context of doctoral programmes in philosophy (rather than, say, in non-philosophical programmes, such as political science, theology and religion, or English literature), the higher the Academic Success Index (in philosophy departments)<sup>9</sup> associated with that topic (Table 14).

[Table 14]

There is a possible correlation here: between academic success in philosophy and topics that better characterize philosophy as a professional, specialized discipline. We use the cautious wording ‘a possible correlation’ for we believe that more data should be taken into account to corroborate this hypothesis. This is, therefore, simply a suggestion for future research.<sup>10</sup> The issue of the specialization and professionalization of philosophy brings us to the next step of our inquiry. Let us now return to the question: Why, and how, does the choice of Wittgenstein as a dissertation topic make a difference in academic success? Using a visualization software,<sup>11</sup> we found what follows (Figures 1 and 2).

[Figure 1]

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<sup>9</sup> We have not calculated the Academic Success Index in non-philosophical departments.

<sup>10</sup> Notice, however, that Wittgensteinian theses seem to go in the opposite direction with respect to the others, since their Academic Success Index is the lowest, even though its presence as a topic in dissertations written in the context of PhD programmes in philosophy, compared to its presence in extra-philosophical dissertations, is higher than the average. This seems to suggest that Wittgenstein is quite a disadvantageous topic!

<sup>11</sup> VOS-viewer is an open source software tool for analyzing networks created by Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman at the University of Leiden. VOSviewer also offers text mining functionalities that can be used to construct and visualize co-occurrence networks of terms extracted from a textual corpus.

[Figure 2]

These maps have been obtained by retrieving and counting the occurrences of terms in the abstracts of the theses. These maps represent the terms with more than 70 occurrences in each corpus: the corpus of the Wittgensteinian abstracts, in Figure 1, and the corpus of the analytic abstracts, in Figure 2. The size of an item's label and circle depend on the weight (i.e., number of occurrences) of the item. The distance between two items on the map approximately indicates the relatedness of the items in terms of co-occurrence in the same unit of analysis (here, the abstracts of the dissertations). In general, the closer two terms are located to each other, the stronger their relatedness (see van Eck and Waltman, 'VOSviewer Manual').

Two different patterns, to use Moretti's phrase ('Patterns and Interpretations', 5), can be recognized in the two maps. Looking at the keywords at the centre of the analytic map (that is, the biggest circles in the central part of the map), we find the idea that philosophy is a kind of *theory* – 'theory' is the main keyword – which provides *arguments*, gives *accounts*, defends *claims*, in order to solve *problems*. Theory, argument, problem, account, claim: these are all important related keywords on the analytic map. On the Wittgensteinian map, we do not find the same pattern; we find something different, which will be examined later on in the paper. The pattern in the analytic map alludes to a certain metaphilosophical conception. It points to a certain conception of what philosophy is, or should be; with an idea, or an ideal, of how philosophy works: an idea of a philosophical style. In short: a science-oriented style, and a science-oriented metaphilosophical view.

An example, taken from the analytic abstracts, can be representative of this view (the significant passages and formulas are highlighted).

[Figure 3]

By contrast, Figure 4 is an example of a Wittgensteinian abstract.

[Figure 4]

These two abstracts exemplify the different patterns previously recognized in the two maps. Based on the recognition of this difference, we performed an experiment. We took into account the terms occurring more than 10 times in the Wittgensteinian corpus of abstracts as well as in the analytic corpus. They were about 500 and 470, respectively. In such subcorpora, we selected the terms associated with an analytic philosophical style and with analytic metaphilosophical preferences. This move – it must be stressed – was suggested by the visualization map of Figures 1 and 2 above. In both corpora we counted terms such as ‘theory’, ‘account’, ‘problem’, ‘argument’, ‘claim’, ‘thesis’, ‘explanation’, ‘solution’, ‘objection’, ‘system’, ‘puzzle’, ‘result’, ‘conclusion’, ‘assumption’, ‘constraint’, ‘hypothesis’, ‘consequence’, ‘defense’, ‘requirement’, ‘attack’, and so forth: the complete list can be found in the central column in Table 15.

[Table 15]

The main result here is that the science-oriented metaphilosophical terms occur in the analytic abstracts more than twice the amount of times than they do in the Wittgensteinian ones (they are, respectively, the 15.3% and the 7.3% of all the terms occurring in the abstracts).

Let us now take a look at some interesting peculiarities of the Wittgensteinian map (Figure 1). In this map some terms are much more common than in the analytic map: for example, ‘language’ and ‘philosophy’. Is this fact significant? We believe it is. Consider ‘philosophy’ first. The word ‘philosophy’ occurs in the Wittgensteinian corpus three, almost four, times more often than in the analytic corpus. It is the second most used term. This can be very significant, if we consider that these are all PhD theses *in*

*philosophy!* We surmise that this result points to the difference between a more traditional kind of philosophy, that is a philosophy reflecting on its own nature, status, and legitimacy, and a philosophy that behaves as normal science: in a PhD thesis in physics or biology, for instance, one does not find a frequent occurrence of the words ‘physics’ and ‘biology’, respectively. Instead, one finds words expressing the content of the scientific inquiry: strings, photons, forces; enzymes, protein synthesis, DNA, respectively.

Let us now briefly consider three additional keywords. (i) ‘Language’. The Wittgensteinian theses belong to the so-called Linguistic Turn in philosophy; the analytic ones do not; at least not anymore. The turn has finished, and a new analytic philosophy has taken a non-linguistic (that is, substantive) turn (Williamson, ‘How Did We Get?’). (ii) ‘Work’. It is a term strictly related to the history of philosophy: the work of an author, the comparison between two works, the major work belonging to a certain philosophical current, and so forth. Among the Wittgensteinian theses the place of the history of philosophy and of exegesis seems to be more central than in the analytic theses. (iii) ‘Interpretation’. Theses belonging to the hermeneutical tradition are more akin to Wittgenstein than to analytic philosophy. Both hermeneutics and the later Wittgenstein regard philosophy as a humanistic discipline, reject any reduction of the reasons for action in terms of causes, and, more generally, belong to the tradition that von Wright labelled ‘Aristotelian’, as opposed to ‘Galilean’ (von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*).

To summarize the results presented in this section: we are suggesting that presence (and the absence) of certain semantic patterns can partly explain the difference of academic success (in order to achieve a full causal explanation, however, a causal agent has to be identified: this task is pursued in the next section). Such patterns point to

the presence (and the absence) of a science-oriented philosophical style and metaphilosophy. Therefore, the index of academic success for PhD candidates in US philosophy departments over the last forty years is quite strictly connected to the choice of a more or less science-oriented philosophical style and metaphilosophy. It is reasonable to suppose that a science-oriented philosophical style is part and parcel of a process of academic and scientific self-legitimization of philosophy.

## **6. A Process Driven from the Top**

The point of departure of our research was the traditional reconstruction and explanation, by means of the traditional methods of the history of philosophy, of the decline of Wittgenstein in contemporary analytic philosophy. At first, the data seems to be at odds with the historical reconstruction, since it showed that even in the United States Wittgenstein never ceased to be a 'classic', or in any case a very popular subject. A closer look, however, reveals that there is no real contrast between our data and the traditional account. The point is simply that one should distinguish between the place of Wittgenstein in analytic philosophy (where it is correct to speak of a decline) and the place of Wittgenstein in different philosophical contexts and traditions (where the situation is likely different). With regard to the former issue, we have, to a large extent, found confirmation of the received view: the most important aspect of this account that we have corroborated by applying quantitative methods is the important role of science-oriented philosophical style and metaphilosophy in explaining the decline of Wittgenstein.

However, we can also add something new to the picture. We can now locate the metaphoric place where the decline of Wittgenstein began. It is up there, so to speak, in the very same place in which the process of academic recruitment takes place. Our results seems to suggest that the decline of Wittgenstein is not due, so to speak, to a

widespread *Zeitgeist*. If a philosopher is simply alien to the *Zeitgeist*, or against the tide of history, it is likely that people cease to speak of his work: for example, PhD students would probably write few dissertations on him/her. Here we are dealing with a different phenomenon: the decline of Wittgenstein seems to be a consequence of a top-down process, or better yet: of a process driven from the top, a process guided by a relatively small number of people, i.e., those academics who hold the power of influencing the recruitment policies in philosophy departments. Of course, this remark is nothing but a suggestion. More work should be done, and more data should be analysed, in order to make the suggestion a solidly confirmed hypothesis. However, it is not an airy-fairy suggestion, either. Consider Table 16, for example.

[Table 16]

The figure shows the percentage of Wittgensteinian dissertations of the total number of dissertations in philosophy over the three decades 1981-1990, 1991-2000, and 2001-2010. The interpretation of this datum is twofold. On the one hand, Wittgenstein has never ceased to be important, central, widely discussed: the values, 2.79%, 1.93% and even 1.2% are all very high.<sup>12</sup> It must be remembered that in these decades Wittgenstein remained the second most mentioned 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher in the abstracts of the dissertations, after Heidegger. This fact seems to make the *Zeitgeist* hypothesis very unlikely. On the other hand, the percentage of Wittgensteinian dissertations have

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<sup>12</sup> One might suppose that these values are high because of the so-called ‘Kripkenstein’, that is Kripke’s famous interpretation of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations (Kripke 1982). The data shows that this does not seem to be the case, since the theses in which Kripkensteinian issues are mentioned in the abstract are just 22 out of 329. However, it is worth noticing that 15 of these Kripkensteinian dissertations were defended in high-ranked universities, and this may partly explain the above supposition concerning the ‘Kripkenstein effect’.

consistently decreased from 1981 to 2010. There are several possible explanations of this decrease. Perhaps the PhD students in philosophy gradually caught on: experience taught them that writing a Wittgensteinian dissertation would be a handicap in their academic career; it would be better to avoid doing so, and, instead, to stand on the analytic side.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, and this can be at least in part an alternative explanation of the same phenomenon, new actors – in particular, continental philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, Ricoeur, Arendt, and so forth – entered the philosophical field in the United States.

This is our final result, which provides an original interpretation of the historical-philosophical phenomenon we have labelled ‘the decline of Wittgenstein’. Yet this result could be questioned on the basis of data concerning the decades preceding the 1980s, since they could put in doubt the causal reconstruction we put forward. We chose not to deal with these data since the beginning, because they are less reliable than those concerning the later period. Indeed our corpus does not allow us to undertake the exact same sort of reconstruction of academic careers, for the abstracts are available only occasionally in the period prior to 1981. This is why for the period 1951-1980 we chose to consider the titles rather than the abstracts. However, (i) titles may introduce systematic distortions in the investigation (for example, it is likely that only the titles of certain kinds of theses – perhaps the more historical and less analytic ones – contain the name of a philosopher); (ii) the absolute numbers of the dissertations in the earlier period are also much smaller, and that in general makes the results less solid; (iii) the further back in time one goes, the higher the margin of error in reconstructing the careers by using a search engine; (iv) it is sometimes difficult to

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<sup>13</sup> It is possible that this has a positive feedback effect, further weakening Wittgenstein’s appeal as a dissertation topic, and thus ultimately reinforcing his decline.

compare heterogeneous data (occurrences in titles vs. occurrences in abstracts).

Consequently, the following results must be taken with a grain of salt, and most details have been ruled out.

We collected the data concerning the Academic Success Index for Wittgenstein (107 dissertations), Spinoza (33 dissertations), a random sample (100 dissertations), and two analytic philosophers such as Quine and Carnap (77 dissertations), who are supposed to take the place of Kripke, Lewis, Fodor and Dummett in the earlier period. Here is the main result, which happily (perhaps too happily?) aligns with the story we have just told (Table 17).

[Table 17]

Within the elusive context of this analysis, such differences do not seem significant enough to support sharp conclusions. We can simply assert that in the period 1951-1980 Wittgenstein did not yield a lower Academic Success Index than other topics for the dissertations, including analytic philosophy.

However, we also have the data concerning the number of occurrences of ‘Wittgenstein’ in the titles of the dissertations for the whole period 1951-2010,<sup>14</sup> and the Academic Success Index for the same decades.

[Table 18]

Table 18 shows that the decline of the Academic Success Index precedes that of the presence of ‘Wittgenstein’ in the titles, and this confirm our analysis.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, we can

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<sup>14</sup> For the period 1981-2010 we have the more reliable data concerning the occurrences of ‘Wittgenstein’ in the abstracts, which have been provided in Table 16, but in order to present data that are homogeneous for the whole period reference must here be made to the occurrences in the titles.



even point to the approximate time at which the decline began: the 1970s or at the latest the 1980s.

Given the explanation of the decline we have just suggested, it would be natural to ask ourselves: why did the recruiters behave in this way? We are somewhat tempted to answer, along with Wittgenstein, that ‘explanations come to an end somewhere’ (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 1), but not because we assume a straightforward deflationary attitude towards explanations. On the contrary, we think that a request for further (causal) explanation is perfectly legitimate here. Rather, our point has to do with the extremely conjectural character of any attempts to look for deeper causes, be them psychological, philosophical, cultural, social or political. A conjecture we find *prima facie* plausible is that the negative attitude of the recruiters towards Wittgenstein is symptomatic of three facts: some, or perhaps many, of them were analytic philosophers themselves or were sympathetic towards analytic philosophy; analytic philosophy has a hegemonic attitude; for historical reasons Wittgenstein was naturally regarded as a founding father of analytic philosophy, and this could explain a peculiar ostracism towards him by those who wished to give a new shape to analytic philosophy itself in America (a shape characterized by a science-

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<sup>15</sup> Of course the Academic Success Index of Wittgenstein can be evaluated only in comparison with the Academic Success Index of other philosophers. These are the (non-normalized) ASIs of a random sample for the whole period: 1951-1960 = 37.14; 1961-1970 = 39.69; 1971-1980 = 30.37; 1981-1990 = 38.55; 1991-2000 = 30.06; 2001-2010 = 31.75. With all due caution, we can observe that Wittgenstein’s ASI was much higher than the average in the 1960s, then it underwent a radical decrease in the 1970s (much more radical than the concomitant average decrease), the average ASI rose again in the 1980s, while that of Wittgenstein remained constantly lower than the average.

oriented metaphilosophy and philosophical style).<sup>16</sup> A way for testing this conjecture would be to conduct detailed research on the history of the philosophy departments in the United States. This kind of research, however, falls outside the limits of this article.

### **Appendix: The Procedure**

Here are some details about the procedure we followed in assigning numerical values (from 0 to 65) to each kind of academic career. This is the assignment matrix:

- (1) Full professor in a A-ranked university: 65.
- (2) Full professor in a B-ranked university or associate professor in an A-ranked university: 60.
- (3) Full professor in a C-ranked university or associate in a B-ranked university: 55.
- (4) Associate professor in C or assistant professor in A: 50.
- (5) Assistant in B: 45.
- (6) Full professor in a community college (with no graduate programme): 40.
- (7) Irregular (typically, adjunct professor) in A or associate in a community college (with no graduate programme): 35.

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<sup>16</sup> However, the conjecture concerning the development of analytic philosophy and its self-image, together with the appeal to metaphilosophy and philosophical style, may make one wonder (as we have remarked at the beginning of the article) whether there are differences, in the account we are reconstructing, in the legacies of the early as opposed to the later Wittgenstein. Our data is too poor to make any conclusions on this issue, and this is the reason why we decided not to dwell specifically on it. Yet, for the sake of curiosity, within Wittgenstein dissertations in the period 1981-2010 we can distinguish four subclasses and calculate the ASI for each of them: 54 early Wittgenstein dissertations (Academic Success Index: 35.6); 206 later Wittgenstein dissertations (ASI: 34.76); 39 ‘early and late’ dissertations (37.05); and 30 unspecified dissertations (43.38). With all due caution, this seems to suggest that there are no significant differences between the two Wittgensteins.

- (8) Irregular in B: 30.
- (9) Assistant in a community college (with no graduate programme) or irregular in C: 25.
- (10) Irregular in a community college (with no graduate programme): 10.
- (11) No academic job (i.e., the candidate had a different job or, in a few cases, we found no trace of his/her professional life): 0.

The Academic Success Index (ASI) of a certain group of PhD candidates (e.g., the ASI of the subset of the ‘Wittgensteinian’ candidates) is the average of the numerical values associated to such candidates, according to the matrix above. Actually, the numerical values have been normalized by academic age: each Academic Success Index has been multiplied by 1 in the period 1981-1995, by 1.2 in the period 1996-2000, by 1.5 in the period 2001-2005, by 2.1 in the period 2006-2010. The coefficients we have chosen are of course very rough (and perhaps too large) but they do not distort our results, which are significant above all in the context of a comparison between different groups of dissertations within a single time span.

The university ranking we have employed is deliberately ‘loose’ (it is made up by mixing together some existing rankings – e.g., Philosophical Gourmet, Leiter Report, and Times Higher Education World University Ranking – in different periods), but it is fair enough for our purposes. We don’t think it necessary to provide the complete list, not only because we are critical towards some political aspects of the ranking system and we don’t want to open a Pandora’s box of speculations concerning specific cases, but also – let us stress this point once again – because our results are significant only insofar as they are considered in an aggregate form and the values of the ASI values are relevant not absolutely but rather for their relative magnitude.

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Table 1. 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers in the titles (1861-2015).

Table 2. 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers in the abstracts (1981-2010).

Table 3. Academic Success Index. Analytic philosophers: +35% with respect to Wittgenstein.

Table 4. Academic Success Indexes of 5 groups of dissertations (abstracts, 1981-2010).

Table 5. Analytic philosophers: +35%.

Table 6. Data disaggregated by periods of 5 years (non-normalized by age).

Table 7. Wittgenstein: broad and narrow.

Table 8. Analytic Wittgenstein.

Table 9. Academic Success Index by university ranking.

Table 10. Academic Success Index: Wittgenstein and Frege/Russell (normalized by academic age).

Table 11. Academic Success Index: Wittgenstein and Frege/Russell (non-normalized by academic age).

Table 12. Academic Success Index: Wittgenstein and Heidegger (normalized by academic age).

Table 13. Academic Success Index: Wittgenstein and Heidegger (non-normalized by academic age).

Table 14. Academic Success Indexes and topics in philosophical dissertations.

Table 15. Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy: metaphilosophical terms (abstracts, 1981-2010).

Table 16. Percentage of dissertations in which 'Wittgenstein' occurs in the abstract (3 decades: 1981-2010).



Table 17. Academic Success Indexes of 4 groups of dissertations (1951-1980).

Table 18. Wittgenstein: Academic Success Index (non-normalized) and occurrences in titles.

Figure 1. Terms occurring in the abstracts of the Wittgenstein dissertations (1981-2010).

Figure 2. Terms occurring in the abstracts of the analytic dissertations (1981-2010).

Figure 3. A prototypical analytic abstract.

Figure 4. A Wittgensteinian abstract.