AIUCD 2017 Conference

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DISTANT READING IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY: WITTGENSTEIN AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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0. The Project

It is now time to apply distant reading methods to the history of philosophy

DR2 Distant Reading and Data-Driven Research in the History of Philosophy

Late analytic philosophy

Analytic philosophy in the last forty years.

Leibniz: the LCA Project

Prosopographic networks of Leibniz's correspondents and acquaintances.

Forgotten logics

Non-mathematical conceptions of logic in 19th century.

Emotions and thick corpora

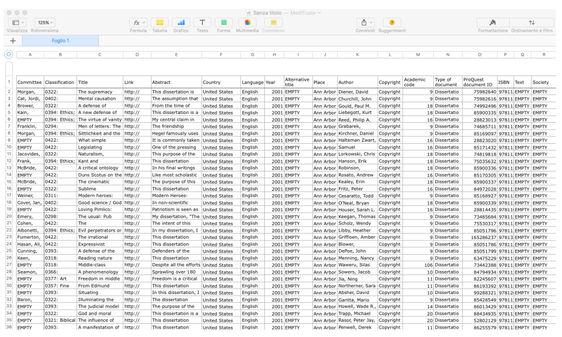
Anatomy of European emotions and passions in early modern thick corpora.

1. The question

Received view: the influence of Wittgenstein's philosophy has been declining in last decades (Hacker 1996, Tripodi 2009)

Is it possible to measure the decline?

Distant reading methods: correcting, enriching, improving the traditional interpretation.

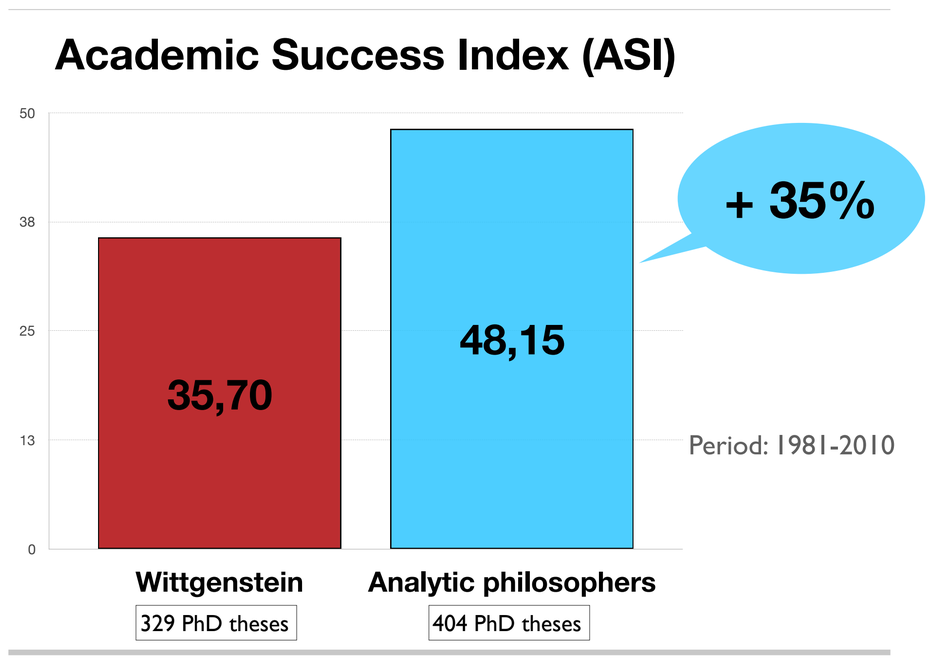


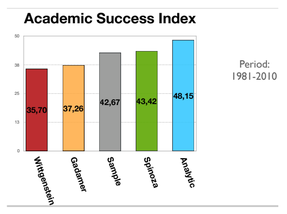
Starting point: metadata of more than 30,000 US PhD dissertations in philosophy

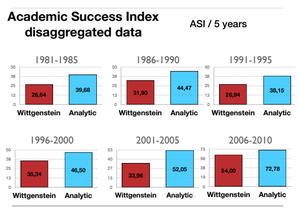
2. The result

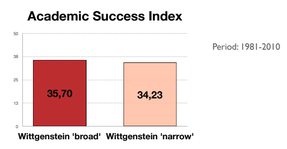
ASI: an average value, taking into account both the academic rank and the ranking of the department.

Wittgenstein theses have a lower ASI than analytic theses.

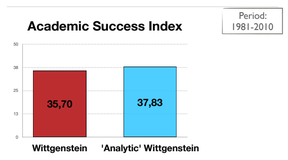






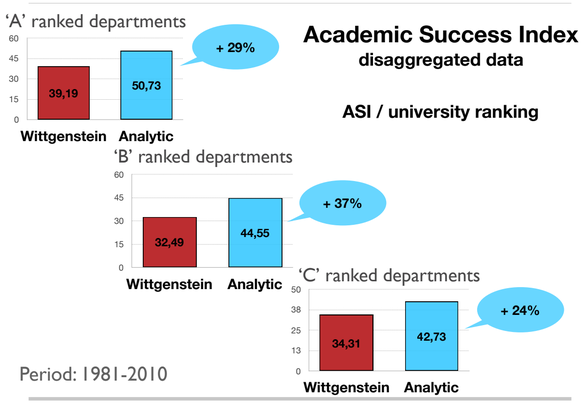


'Broad': theses in which "Wittgenstein" occurs in the abstract
'Narrow': theses specifically devoted to Wittgenstein



The ASI of 'Analytic' Wittgenstein refers to the authors of theses in which both "Wittgenstein" and the name of a typical analytic philosopher occur in the abstract

A solid result, corroborated by several comparisons

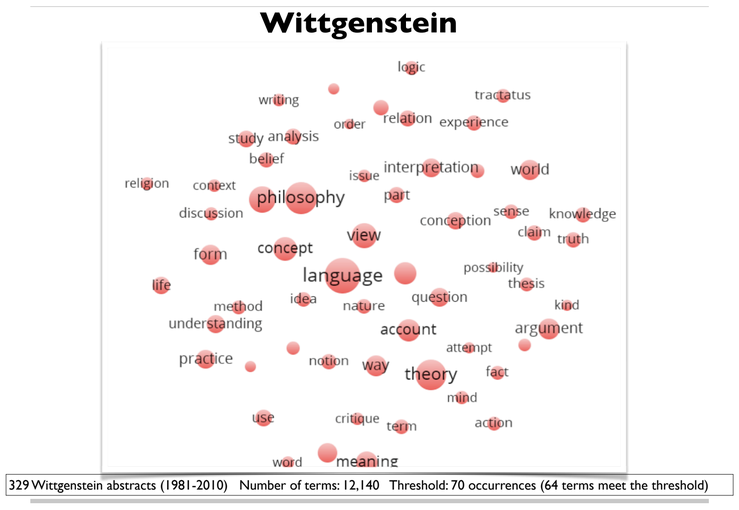


The causes of ASI:

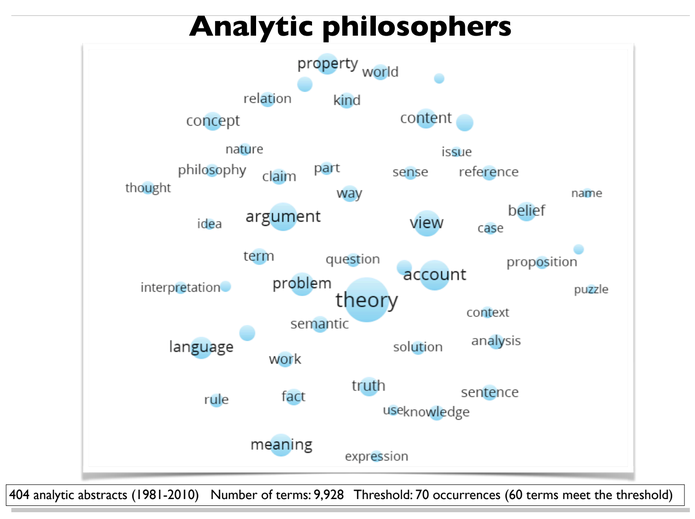
- Socio-economic condition? Yes, but it is an independent cause
- Ranking of the PhD program? Yes, but it is only a *partly* overlapping cause (see table above)
- Smarter students? No, it would be an arbitrary assumption or a circular explanation (see table above)

Therefore, the topic makes a difference

3. An explanation



329 Wittgenstein abstracts (1981-2010) Number of terms: 12,140 Threshold: 70 occurrences (64 terms meet the threshold)



404 analytic abstracts (1981-2010) Number of terms: 9,928 Threshold: 70 occurrences (60 terms meet the threshold)

Why does analytic philosophy have a better ASI:

- because of its science-oriented philosophical style and metaphilosophy (*see slide below on the left*)
- because it behaves as normal science (*see slide below on the right*)

'Analytic' philosophical style and metaphilosophy: 20 terms

Wittgenstein	'Metaphilosophical' terms	Analytic
518	theory	946
314	account	564
276	problem	379
245	argument	499
164	claim	197
145	thesis	186
47	explanation	167
82	solution	150
52	objection	119
0	system	98
18	puzzle	89
58	result	89
58	conclusion	85
64	assumption	72
18	constraint	60
0	hypothesis	49
36	consequence	48
24	defense	44
18	requirement	38
0	attack	31
2137	TOT	3910

7,30%

15,30%

Philosophy reflecting on its status versus Normal science

Wittgenstein	Analytic
526	142

1,8%

0,5%

"philosophy"

4. A hypothesis

The lower ASI of Wittgenstein dissertations came **first**; their decline in number came **after**.

This time lag suggests that the primary cause of the decline lies with **mechanisms of academic recruitment**, rather than in an autonomous change of the **Zeitgeist**.

	Wittgenstein theses / TOT PhD theses
1981-1990	2,79%
1991-2000	1,93%
2001-2010	1,2%

5. For discussion

Question-driven vs. methods-driven approach.

Engineering the procedures used to collect data concerning the academic careers (see Section 2).

Data-driven vs. interpretation-driven approach.

Pattern recognition: the problem of validation.

Visualization software for the history of philosophy.