THE NATURE OF LOGICAL ANALYSIS

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> ....*Methods perpetually refined but never applied be-*
> *come a new form of scholasticism.*
>
> Stuart Hampshire

This paper attempts to do two things. The first is to proffer and describe briefly a method of doing philosophy, the method of "analytic philosophers" or "linguistic analysis," as is commonly and misleadingly called.[1] If it needs a name, perhaps the best and the least misleading would be — "logical analysis". Such a title would emphasize the attention to detail and the caution about conclusions that characterize the best of such work. The second aim of this paper is to apply this method of analysis[2] to some conceptual confusions as is often encountered in recent philosophical discussions.

Philosophy, like other kinds of investigation, can be carried on at many different levels of generality. One could almost order its practitioners in a continuous scale according to the level at which they seem to operate most happily and efficiently. Towards one end of the scale is the region of those high theoretical systems where contact with the familiar and particular fact is only vaguely made and where the evident importance of the issues discussed is liable to be shadowed by a certain unclarity as to what exactly they are.

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[1] Since some critics make much of this, a note may be excused. The misleading character of the phrases referred to is perhaps due to the following considerations: One is to suppose that philosophy can be replaced by philology or etymology; this is plainly wrong. The second error, is to suppose that philosophy chronicles usage as its central concern; and one of the most absurd jibes of recent years, one which seems to be repeated despite incessant demolition, is that the usage recorded by philosophers is the usage of Oxford senior common rooms. But, the issue is (as has been said so often) one of *use* rather than *usage*; this is not to say that the meaning of a word is its use, for this is dubious. Rather it is to say that use is very often the best (and sometimes the only) guide to meaning, and also that probably most philosophers are more interested in the use, the point, of words than in anything else about them. To talk of usage is to say who says what; to talk about use is to explain why we say what we do. And in the same way that we do not need to look at what other people in the room are doing to know what we are doing, so our asking what we should say when...does not require us to record usage, but rather to think what sort of intention we should form. Philosophy is certainly full of people telling us what we really mean by saying what we do; indeed the great sign of a philosophical problem in the offing is that "really;" for that only appears when we are quite sure that we do not mean what we are said to mean, but cannot quite see why we do not. All of these was seen and claimed by Socrates, when he first betook himself to the way of Words.

[2] For a cogent and critical appraisal of this method — though at times misconceived — see Karl Popper's Preface 1958 to his now classic *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (New York: Science Editions Inc., 1961), p. 15ff.

At the other end is an area, cultivated assiduously and with some success of late in which accuracy, and discrimination, of detail are primary concerns and nothing is obscure except (some say) the bearing of the results of the large and ambitious questions which have traditionally agitated philosophers. Perhaps, a brief but neatly put characterization of this area is that of Stuart Hampshire:[3] "At no previous period in the history of philosophy has there been such insistence as there is now in exact argument, on consistency in the use of words, on formal rigour as the only guarantee of truth in abstract argument. Philosophy — it is now generally believed — is essentially argument, and there is an ethics of argument: one must test one's sentences, word for word, to see that they are clear, consistent, immune to objections, correctly used." In a way, this new idea combined — magnitude of claim with modesty of pretension. The results it promised were to be achieved not by the inspiration of genius but by the careful and cooperative labours of men of sense. The means to this revelation was a refined, thorough and, above all, a realistic awareness of the meanings of words. For the purposes of ordinary and specialized discourse reasonably instructed adults had all mastered, had *all* had to master, a set of instruments at great subtlety, flexibility and power. The thorough and unprejudiced study of the use which we actually made of these linguistic instruments in the course of our business with one another and the world would at last make it possible for us *to understand and explain the most general features of our conceptual system, those that underlie the massive, historically unchanging core of our way of thinking and speaking about the world,*[4] and thereby free us from the philosophical fantasies or perplexities engendered by a reflection which was incomplete, uncontrolled or obsessive.

Indeed, a new level of refinement and accuracy in conceptual awareness has been reached, and an addition to philosophical method has been established which will, or should, be permanent. To the application of this method in the analysis of linguistic confusions — we shall now turn.

Many philosophers have maintained statements which seem to common sense not only plainly false but also paradoxical. The following are example of such statements: "There are no material things," "Time is unreal," "No material thing exists unperceived," "All empirical statements are hypothesis." G.E. Moore has a way

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[3] Cf. "Hume's Place in Philosophy," *David Hume: A Symposium,* (London: Macmillan & Co.. 1963), p. 1.

[4] This view has shown itself most impressively and developed with unfailing elegance and skill in two books published recently (1959) in England. P.F. Strawson's *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* is the more finished and careful; Stuart Hampshire's *Thought and Action* the more comprehensive and ambitious.

of refuting such statements which are so simple and direct that it looks at first sight as though it is merely a *petitio principii.* To the sceptical philosopher who maintains that there are no material things, Moore replies in some such way as this: "You must be wrong, for here's one hand and here's another. So there are at least material things." To the statement "No material thing exists unperceived," Moore would reply: "That statement is absurd, for no one is now perceiving the money in my pocket; but it certainly has not ceased to exist." To the philosopher who maintains that we are not certain of anything about material things, Moore might say: "We both know for certain that there are chairs in this room, so you must be wrong." And so on.

Some philosophers now maintain that the justification of Moore's method of refutation proceeds in two ways. Their argument begins by indicating that "the essence of Moore's technique of refuting philosophical statements consists in pointing out that these statements *go against ordinary language,*"[5] and then show (i) how such statements contravene ordinary language and (ii) to prove that they do so is to refute them. The main example is the statement: "We are not certain of anything about material things."

The first point is established by rephrasing both the paradox of the sceptical philosopher and Moore's refutation of the paradox in order to show more clearly what each is affirming. From thence, proceed to the contention that the notion of certainty does not apply to propositions about the existence of material objects. Some however think that this is equivalent to an admission that the point of issue between the philosopher and the plain man about the certainty of these empirical statements is merely one of language. "The philosophical statement 'We do not know for certain the truth of any statement about material things,' is a misleading way of expressing the proposition, the phrase, 'know for certain' is not properly applied to material-thing statements'." And Moore's reply to the sceptic is a good refutation of the paradox because by saying "Both of us know for certain that there are chairs in this room," Moore is showing that there is a perfectly well-established usage of the phrase "know for certain" which is appropriate to material-object statements. Both the philosophical statement and Moore's reply is a refutation because in showing how the word "certain" is commonly used in such contexts he is pointing to a standard use of the word

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5 Cf. Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore,* edited by Paul Schilpp (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1942), p. 349. Malcolm's italics. For an excellent account of the use of the term "ordinary language" — see Gilbert Ryle, "Ordinary Language" in *The Philosophical Review,* LXII (1953), pp. 167-86. Both articles are reprinted in *Ordinary Language: Essays in Philosophical Method,* edited by V. C. Chappell (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964).

and giving us what one calls "a paradigm of certainty." One can show in this way that the statement of the sceptical philosopher contravenes ordinary linguistic usage. And similar treatment of the other examples would show that they also violate the canons of ordinary linguistic usage.

We can now proceed to the second point of the argument and ask how the mere fact that such philosophical statements involve unconventional verbal usages constitutes a refutation of them. Some philosophers think that it does so because "ordinary language *is* correct language."[6] It can therefore never be correct for a philosopher to maintain any statement which entails that ordinary usage is improper as for instance, the philosopher, A. J. Ayer seems to do when he declares that the notion of certainty does not apply to material-object statements. Ayer says:[7]

> We do indeed verify many such propositons to an extent that makes it highly probable that they are true; but since the series of relevant tests, being infinite, can never be exhausted, this probability can never amount to logical certainty...
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> It must be admitted then that there is a sense which it is true to say that we can never be sure, with regard to any proposition implying the existence of a material thing, that we are not somehow being deceived; but at the same time one may object to this statement on the ground that it is misleading. It is misleading because it suggests that the state of "being sure" is one the attainment of which is conceivable, but unfortunately not within our power. *But, in fact, the conception of such a state is self-contradictory.* For in order to be sure, in this sense, that we were not being deceived, we should have to have completed an infinite series of verifications; and it is an analytic proposition that one cannot run through all the members of an infinite series... Accordingly, what we should say, if we wish to avoid misunderstanding, is not that we can never be certain that any of the propositions in which we express our perceptual judgments are true, but rather that *the notion of certainty does not apply to propositions of this kind.* It applies to the *a priori* propositions of logic and mathematics, and the fact that it does apply to them is an essential mark of distinction between them and empirical propositions.

Now, ordinary language may, of course, be used wrongly in the sense that it may embody an error of fact (or of logic). Everyone in a given language community might believe, for example, that the earth is flat or that two plus two is five. But would not this amount to a difference in the *use* of language? But it would not be possible for *everyone* in the community to use the wrong language to express the fact that the earth was flat. For the meanings of words and

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[6] *Op. cit.,* p. 357.
[7] Cf. *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge,* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1940), pp. 44-45. Italics mine.

phrases are *constituted by their conventional usage.* The philosophers who maintain that ordinary language can be incorrect or improper or involve self-contradictions is like a man who agrees that a certain animal has all the observable characteristics of what is ordinarily called a fox but still insists that it is really a dog after all. This, then, is the main argument by which we can possibly justify Moore's method of refuting the sceptical statements of the philosophers.

What, then, are the reasons which induce us to say that language has no meaning other than those conferred by conventional usage? This question is not an easy one to answer. The reason for this is that we are asking for evidence for a statement which seems so obviously true that it does not require any proof. We feel inclined to reply to such a question by another: How else *could* words acquire their meanings? Yet it is obvious that almost all philosophers have believed that words could have legitimate connotations other than those conferred by ordinary usage. For they have all used technical terms like "sense-data," "idea," "species," "universal," and so on which either have no established usage in ordinary language of a usage so ill-defined as to leave their meaning too vague for the terms to be serviceable in philosophy. And, indeed, it is difficult to see how it would be possible to write philosophy without using a good many technical terms.

But we are not objecting to the use of technical terms whether in philosophy or in any other department of inquiry. One would no doubt admit that we may properly introduce a new term into our discourse provided that we introduce it with an explicit definition. For in such a case, the definition will serve as a proposal to establish a convention which ordinary usage has not hitherto supplied. But these two classes of expressions, those sanctioned by ordinary usage and those introduced by explicit definitions, exhaust the expressions which we may properly use. Any others will be "improper" and "without sense," because they will be "a misuse of language."

Now, I do not suggest that any one would approve of this defense but it seems to me a plausible way of developing a point of view. A cardinal feature of philosophical discourse is its *inferential* character. Philosophers have to prove their own conclusions and refute those of their opponents. Now, many of their arguments are not purely formal; they are *intentional* arguments which depend for their interest and validity on the *meanings* of the terms employed. Thus there is an important difference between the use of analogically extended meanings in ordinary discourse and in philosophical argument. In ordinary discourse we do not tend to draw inferences from these shifts of meaning; in philosophical discourse we do. We

therefore tend to be misled by new ways of talking in philosophy. As long as the words in philosophical discourse are used only in the senses which have been established by convention, the conclusions of such arguments will not, in general, be philosophically interesting. But if words are used in new senses, whether or not such new senses are explicitly defined, our philosophical arguments do no more than trace the intentional connections between the terms. They cannot be of any extra-linguistic significance.

This point of view could be developed as a criticism of traditional metaphysical speculation. A linguistic sceptic could present the metaphysicians with the following dilemma: "The words you use in your arguments have no other meaning than those conferred either by convention or by your own definitions. In so far as your words have the meanings conferred on them by common usage, these meanings will be, in the case of abstract words, imperfectly delineated. For the conventions which govern the use of a word are normally established only as exactly as the conventions of ordinary discourse require. Thus you will not be able to draw any philosophical conclusions, as the meanings of abstract words in ordinary use are imprecise and fluctuating. Nor will it help you to supplement the inadequacies of conventional usage by prescribing new and more exact rules of use. For in the case your philosophising will do no more than trace the logical connections between your own definitions. And this can tell you nothing about the world."

I do not believe that metaphysics can be disposed of in this simple way, but I think, never the less, that there is some point to this objection. It draws attention to an important fact which was overlooked by most philosophers in the past and even some contemporary philosophers. We have to remember that the gaps in our rules of usage for abstract words are not in any way like the gaps on the map of an imperfectly explored territory. The blank spaces on the map can be filled in as a result of direct observation, and, moreover, we can use our imperfect map as a guide to the very investigations which are to perfect it. But abstract words the intentional relations between them do not refer to the features of the world in the way that the lines and coloured patches on a map refer to rivers and mountains. Metaphysics is not cosmic map-making.

There is, however, an obvious objection to this defense of ordinary language which has now to be considered. This objection is constituted by the fact that there is no sharp division between ordinary language and the language of philosophy. The most we can do to make the distinction as sharp as possible is to construct, as some philosophers have done, an artificial philosophical language with exactly defined rules of syntax and semantics. But were we

to find (as most philosophers do not find) that such an artificial language was a satisfactory medium for philosophical discourse, it would still be true that our "language" must be embedded in a matrix of natural language. And this matrix, which constitutes, in the current jargon, the "meta-language" or our philosophical arte-fact, is a necessary condition of its effectiveness. Philosophical "languages," whether formalized or not, must always be dependent on natural languages.

In any case, almost all philosophising is carried out in the medium of a natural language. Where this is so, we can no doubt make a rough distinction between ordinary ways of talking and philo-sophical technicalities but we can make no clear cut division between them. Such terms as "sense-data," "the Absolute," or "internal rela-tion" would probably be conceded to be technicalities. But what are we to say of terms like "cause and effect," "mind," "probability," "substance," "knowledge," and many others like them? They all have cause in everyday discourse but the philosopher does not merely adopt their current usage. There are those who find that such usages are always vague and sometimes fluctuating and ambiguous. They therefore try to *correct or improve upon* ordinary usage by provid-ing an analysis or definition of the term in question which will avoid its philosophical defects.[8] However, there are those philosophers who would now say that this enterprise is absurd in principle be-cause ordinary language is incorrigible, being correct by the very fact that it is ordinary.

No doubt ordinary language is incorrigible in this sense so long as it is used for everyday purposes and in the familiar contexts in which its meaning was acquired. But we have to remember that the area of meaning of almost any linguistic expression is vague. Unless precise criteria are available for determining whether or not a given case is an instance of the class named by a given expression, we can always produce borderline cases. We are not, of course, troubled with these borderline cases in the application of terms like "square," "even number," or "gold." Here we have precise defini-tions which delimit the area of meaning of these terms; for they are technical terms which fall within the province of a science and

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[8] Among philosophers whose main work has been done on this direction in the last decade, none has been more original and influential than the late J.L. Austin of Oxford. His paper, "A Plea for Excuses" (*Philosophical Papers*, ed. J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.) provides an excellent account and illustration of some of his aims and methods. His method, which is characteristic of a really astonishing rigour and minuteness in the analysis of everyday concepts has not been universally appealing. However, though difficult to imitate, it is not, difficult to understand.

For a brief account of Austin's method of doing philosophy, see Gerardo M. Acay, "J.L. Austin and the Way of the Words," *The Philippine Law Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 5 (Dec. 1964), pp. 663-669.

are defined there. But where such exact conventions are not available there is always a no man's land of vagueness, even where the terms in question are familiar empirical terms with well-established and consistent uses. We would theoretically arrange the words of a language in order of the completeness of the criteria which govern their use. And we should find, if we do so, that the criteria of correct use for the words which are common on both common-sense and philosophical discourse are very far from complete. And indeed it is impossible that they should be so. That is to say, there are many contexts where we might naturally wish to use words like "mind," "knowledge," "universal," and so on; but we find that the rules which prescribe the meaning in such contexts have not been laid down by any convention because the contexts in questions are new or unusual.

So the proposition "ordinary language *is* correct language" is true enough but it is unhelpful and, indeed, inapplicable in philosophy. For philosophical uses of language are not quite ordinary. Moreover the proposition is quite misleading if it is intended, as it seems to be, to imply its converse, "correct language is ordinary language." For if we are to philosophise at all we have to use words in senses which no established usage has yet sanctioned. But in doing so philosophers are not introducing entirely novel senses for their terms as might be done by an arbitrary definition. They are trying to improve on ordinary language in the sense that they are trying to make it suitable for philosophical discourse. There are, of course, a good many ways in which they can try to do this. They can, for example, try to fill in important gaps in the conventions which govern the use of the abstract terms which are needed for philosophy. In this way, they can disperse, to some degree, the vagueness which cloaks the borderline instances of the use of these terms. They can also attempt to remove the ambiguity of such words by distinguishing the different senses in which they are used. These differences, which may be vital for philosophy, are usually masked by the imprecise rules of use which custom has formulated. Again, a philosopher may be trying not to eliminate vagueness or ambiguity but to show that certain analogies suggested by ordinary language are misleading or to stress certain other anologies which may be philosophically illuminating but are obscured by our usual ways of talking. For example, much of the criticism of the teleological argument for the existence of God has been directed to show that the apparent analogy between the order of nature and the order shown in the products of human planning is misleading. Or, again, the critics of the ontological argument were anxious to show that the similarity of the verbal forms "x exists" and "x moves" suggest-

ed an analogy between "existence" and ordinary predicates which is quite delusive.

Let us consider an example of the philosopher's attempt to improve on ordinary language. It is the example to which some philosophers direct most of their criticism: "No statement about material things can ever be certain." (Let us call this statement "S" for short.) No doubt, as these philosophers insist, the sceptical philosopher is using the word "certain" here in a sense which is very different from that which ordinary usage has created. But is it a final refutation of "S" to point out that everybody, including the philosopher himself, sometimes uses sentences like "I'm quite certain that I have my wallet with me." Or to point out that unless the word "certain" *sometimes* has a correct use in statements about material objects "S" itself cannot be significant? Of course it is not. The philosopher's new sense of "certain," just because it is a new sense, has a *new criterion* of correct usage. The ordinary evidence for saying "I am certain that *p*," where *p* is a material-object statement, is that one is able to see the object, handle it, and so on. But the philosopher's new criterion for the use of "certain" is that the negation of the statement which we claim to know for certain shall be *self-contradictory*. Thus the two statements "S" and "I am certain that there is a table in this room" are not contradictory, for we have different rules of use for the word "certain" in these two contexts.

But it is important to notice, that the philosopher's new rule of use is not an arbitrary one. His new sense of "certain" is analogous to the ordinary sense and derived from it. We ordinarily claim certainty when the evidence in favour of our proposition excludes all reasonable doubt. The philosopher wishes merely to point out that this criterion of certainty is a vague one and that if the concept of certainty is to be used for philosophical purposes, it must be made precise. According to the ordinary (and therefore canonical) use of the word "certain," the more evidence we have for *p*, the more certain we are entitled to tell that *p*. Thus by a natural extension of the ordinary usage of the word, *absolute* certainty would be justified only by *all the possible evidence*. But evidence in support of a given empirical statement may be accumulated *ad infinitum* and there is no theoretical upper limit to such a series of verifications. Thus in stating "S", the sceptical philosopher is doing no more than to say that as there is no limit to the amount of empirical evidence which may be offered for a given factual statement, we specify no *precise* standard for the use of the word "certain" in empirical matters.

Thus the moral of this article is that one source of the philosopher's temptation to improve on ordinary language is a desire for a greater precision that can be conveyed throughout usual modes of expression. He takes the common rule of use and tries to make it precise. If it can not be made precise, as in the case just cited, he can at least indicate the impossibility and conclude that the term in question has no *philosophical* use, however valuable and necessary its ordinary uses may be. And if it can be given a philosophically serviceable precision, he has to stretch its meaning to cover analogous contexts or contract it to exclude its use in contexts which seem not to be relevantly similar to the standard cases of its use. Or, if he is trying to dismiss the misleading analogies embodied in current usage or to emphasize those which are philosophically illuminating, in these cases too he has to depart from current usage. But what these analogies are and what are their relative importance can be decided only by investigation of particular cases.