

Logical Positivism and the spurious fox

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OFTEN it is not what an intellectual movement says but what it takes for granted that matters. The discrepancy between self-portrait and real essence may be particularly important with regard to "Linguistic Philosophy" which is at present the biggest and dominant school of academic philosophy in this country.

A member of the movement, explaining what he called the deliberate abusiveness with which he treated certain older theories, said that he found it necessary so as to free himself of the hold they had on him. Such aggressiveness as I may display towards the movement is similarly motivated. Yet it is difficult to understand it without some sympathetic insight: kneeling so that I may lose faith, and coming to pray so that I may remain to scoff.

Its real essence is the belief that:

(a) The world is what it is (precisely).

(b) The world is what it seems (roughly).

We shall understand the movement when we see why (a) is not as vacuous as it seems, and why (b) is not as questionable as *it* seems. Neither slogan is used much or at all. They convey, however, the key image or idea.

Consider (a). What most pre-linguistic philosophy had in common was that it took philosophic questions for granted. It was only puzzled about their answers. Linguistic philosophy puzzles about the oddity of the questions, which may not be apparent. Questions such as *Are there (really) material objects? Are actions free? Does anything matter?* seem questions like any others. The traditional philosopher was a man who, stimulated by the weight of these interrogative formulae, charged into the realm of fact or speculation and came back with an answer, intelligible or otherwise.

The linguistic philosopher does nothing of the kind. He concentrates on the question, not on the possible answers: on trying to unravel the errors and confusions, the double meanings and no-meanings-at-all and changes of meaning which he suspects or is sure are present. What counts as a solution for him is a discussion of the terms occurring in the question, or related terms, such that it shows the question to be unnecessary or the answer obvious rather than difficult. Propounding and arguing for a solution does not count. Be it said that some traditional philosophy is treated with respect as honorary linguistic analysis, misunderstood by its authors and before its time; rather as some Christians have been concerned to include some of the more edifying pre-Christian philosophers amongst the Saved.

There is, to to speak, *no* problem. The muddle is in our own concepts. We are like a drunk falling over his own legs with no real obstacle tripping him up. Once he controls his own legs walking will be easy, for the actual road is straight and clear. The question is: why are they so confident that this is so?

Linguistic philosophy was preceded by Logical Positivism. That doctrine insisted on seeing statements in the context of their method of verification. If they had none, they were meaningless. Now linguistic philosophy differs from that in two ways. First, it is aware that the decision procedures, employment, use of sentences is far more manifold and varied than what is conveyed by the simple notion "verification". Secondly, it recognizes that even if the model of what it is that makes a statement meaningful is enriched and broadened, it is still useless to

outlaw statements that do not fit, as "meaningless". Extermination is no cure, and "metaphysical" questions and statements do not allow themselves to be exterminated by fiat.

Now, although linguistic philosophy has not taken over the simple model of how we ever manage to mean anything, it has quite properly taken over a strong sense of questions and statements not existing in a vacuum, but in the context of procedure-rules implicit in the meanings of the terms employed. (They *are* that meaning.) Hence if a question persistently resists attempts at answering it, it becomes reasonable to suspect, as a possible explanation, that something has gone wrong with the use of the terms employed in it. This becomes the only possible explanation if it is also assumed that no great difficulties are to be found in things as opposed to malformed concepts.

Consider this: philosophic questions seldom or never hinge on some particular fact being *thus* rather than *thus*. Indeed in general no specific fact is expected to be any different in virtue of the truth or falsity of philosophic theories, which are not concerned with whether this piece of matter exists, whether this man is free, whether this woman is beautiful, whether this cause has this effect, but with whether Matter, Freedom, Beauty, Causation as such exist or are of some general nature. And having wondered about such a point in general, we then go on to draw the lines in particular cases much as before. (Not always, but linguistic philosophers concentrate on the cases when we do.)

Two insights now converge: the concrete irrelevance of philosophic generalities, and the awareness that questions and statements only make sense in the implicit context of their decision procedures which are parts of human life. Both suggest the conclusion which linguistic philosophers draw: that philosophic questions through their very generality, through their detachment from the normal daily contexts of similar-sounding but less general questions, have so to speak unhinged themselves from reality and only reflect a confusion in their terms. The suspicion suggested by the alleged oddity of the question, brought out by contrast with the normal use of the terms used, is confirmed by the untestable, undecidable nature of philosophic theories.

This is where the apparently tautologous slogan, "The world is what it is", comes in. The point is that traditional philosophers have, by implication and by their practice, contradicted it. They implicitly supposed that alternative possibilities existed with regard to the very general truths about the world—such as whether or not there is Matter, Freedom, Mind, Rightness, Beauty, Probability, Knowledge and so on. But these categories correspond to kinds of uses of language, not to things which may be present or absent. They could only suppose there was a question here to be answered by failing to reflect that questions are only possible in the context of some rules for the use of the words occurring in them, and that these rules in turn form part of a system known as a *language*.

What have you said when you have called the universe names (such as being made of sense-data, of substance, of mind, of the Absolute, contains values, universals, etc.)? Calling the world names makes no difference, *it is what it is*. But when the methodologically crucial ques-

tion "What have you said when you've said . . .?" (or "What would it be like if . . .?") is applied to specific, non-philosophical questions, the answer is more positive, something *is* being said, things would be *this* way rather than *that*. Hence the important line drawn between general, philosophic name-calling and the healthy daily use of words built into real activities.

In its general features, it is held that the world cannot be other than it is, and there is nothing to find out. Or to put it a little less misleadingly, there are no general features of the world about which something could be decided. What we are really dealing with is not general features of things but broad types of the uses of language. Indeed, language is used for factual assertion, for moral claims and rebukes, for appraising beauty, for assessing probabilities, etc., etc. All these types of statement, and others, have their roles to play in life. Within each type, implicit rules exist for assessing the merits of rival assertions. But if we try to do outside one of these categories what is only appropriate within it, we attempt the absurd and only enmesh ourselves in self-induced confusions.

By now it should be clear that "The world is what it is" is an insight of importance and not a vacuous tautology. The slogan of linguistic philosophy might well have been: "Things are what they are and will be what they will be—why should we seek to be confused?"

The steps which took us here were: Statements can only be understood in the context of the implicit rules for the use of the constituent terms, and these rules may in the case of some questions be lacking or inconsistent or inadequate. This was the insight of Logical Positivism.¹

These rules are not homogeneous or simple, and cannot be seen in isolation from the varied activities and situations in which they occur. Man the proposition-stating animal is not to be seen in abstraction from man the agent, the social animal, and so on.

Puzzling about language

Given this view of language as a set of tools inside the world, it follows, or at least is plausible, that we cannot infer, from the general rules governing the use of our verbal tools, the answers to some special questions quite unlike those built into the normal employment of those tools. Moreover, there is nothing *to* infer. The alleged general features of the world, such as the reality of matter or mind or the moral law, are only so to speak shadows of classifications of uses of words. The world is and can be taken for granted, it contains no problems. Philosophic questions only occur concerning the intricacies and varieties of the uses of words *in* the world. Traditional philosophy is conceived as having a kind of heuristic use here: it is supposed that at any point where philosophic theories have proliferated—e.g., about freedom—there is some asymmetry, some dissimilarity under similar verbal appearance or vice versa, which gives rise to the oddity (philosophic theories being *ex officio* odd), and that it is

¹ But marred by the assumption that these rules were all of a very few simple kinds. Two key images underlay positivist treatment of empirical assertions: one, that of "atomic" sentences wedded in a one-to-one way to "atomic" facts in a strictly monogamous system with obligatory marriage, with non-"atomic" sentences only allowed in when vouched for by atomic ones. Sentences that failed to find partner facts were doomed to burn (be false), whilst those which did not even court facts were meaningless. The second image was that of consciousness facing the assembly of its own data and unable to transcend them. The first image is one of "language in the world", the second one of "mind *vis-a-vis* the world". The second has been emphatically rejected by

now our job to locate the oddity of usage and explain how it led to puzzlement. One might say: traditional philosophy took language for granted and puzzled about the world. Linguistic philosophy takes the world for granted and puzzles about language. Descartes once started a philosophy by systematically doubting *all* the general features of things: these philosophers have invented another by systematically *not* doubting *any* of them.

It must be stressed that the absence of mystery and problems in the world is not only a conclusion but also a premiss which determines procedure. In so far as this premiss is itself deduced from anything, it is so from the positivistic exclusion as meaningless of those answers or solutions to alleged problems that would be specifically philosophical. Thus everything dovetails in a self-authenticating circle of assumptions, procedures and conclusions. (And thus linguistic philosophy, disclaimers and superficial differences notwithstanding, is parasitic on positivism.)

Rival theory or anti-theory?

Thus from the model of language-a-tool-in-the-world it follows that every philosophic problem must have a linguistic solution. When the rules for the use of a type of word have been ascertained—rules *we* have made qua language-using animals—what further problem *could* there be?² The basic argument is as simple as this, and it underlines the procedures and outlook of linguistic philosophers. It is a gravely defective argument, even if *sometimes* relevant and apposite. But before proceeding to criticism, some further elucidation of the outlook: the alternative possible formulations, "The world is as it seems" or "Common sense is always right" seem questionable rather than vacuous. The world may be other than it seems, common sense may be wrong, one might think. On points of detail, certainly: on general issues, no. To contradict common sense or appearance on a general issue, to suppose that life may be a dream or that nothing matters, is not to have a rival theory but to declare an unpracticable intention of abstaining from using a whole category of language, whilst confusedly imagining oneself to have a rival theory.

All this being so, one might ask the linguistic philosopher—why bother to go through the rather tedious piecemeal solutions, why not content oneself with this general demonstration of their possibility? Why indeed: my own belief is that the general idea underlying it is the most interesting thing about this philosophy, far more so than the specific applications. But the practitioners do not agree and they lay great store by those applications.

Three reasons can be given for this: (a) that in the process of working out the applications, insight is gained into the functioning of language; (b) people bothered by a particular philosophic problem will not be satisfied by the general demonstration, but need to see it applied to their problem. (The reverse seems to me true. I have

linguistic philosophy, the first retained but made vastly more complex, not to say amorphous.

² Take as an example the problem of other minds. There *must* be some rules for when we say that we know that someone else thinks or feels something: there must, for we clearly do not use these expressions at random. Hence when we have succeeded in specifying those rules—which is admitted to be difficult, indeed the difficulties are sometimes exaggerated—we have our solution, we know what knowing the thoughts or feelings of another means or *is*. What else could we have or want? Note that it follows that there are no insoluble problems.

yet to meet someone impressed by a specific solution without being imbued by the spirit. But I am impressed by the general idea myself, and so are many of us.); (c) the general idea or model behind the arguments is not admitted by them, it is even disclaimed that there is one.

Thus there is tendency in the movement to deny the existence of a general theory or model, or even, rather absurdly, that there is a movement, and to pretend, no doubt sincerely, that problems are approached *ad hoc* and on their merits. This has the advantage, amongst others, that the general premiss not being supposed to exist cannot be challenged. What this claim to open-mindedness and flexibility could mean if true I don't quite understand, for there must be some general notion of what is a problem and what a solution. I am sceptical about the Heraclitus-like discoveries about thought and problems. Be that as it may, this claim is in fact spurious, and for that reason I have entitled this article *The Spurious Fox*, in terms of Mr. Berlin's Fox/Hedgehog dichotomy.

The ad hoc gimmick

The foxy claim can be rejected on a number of grounds: for one, general unplausibility. Loosely speaking, thinking which is not some kind of unification is not thinking and certainly provides no explanations. Not that linguistic philosophers have been much given to explicitly defending the notion of an idiographic science and *sui generis* clarification—though implicitly they seem to—but the difficulties of such a notion are considerable. No one has more than a limited number of party tricks (especially those who perform well!) and they are never really impromptu. If something like the model I have sketched did not underlie the manifestations of the technique, they would have neither the unity nor the appeal which in fact they have. Treated simply as a trial-and-error technique, it lacks the pragmatic justification of success which alone could keep such an *ad hoc* gimmick going. It has helped to clarify some problems without solving them (e.g., mind-body, other minds), it has left others where they were (e.g., ethics), and it has committed some absurdities in forcing its model on certain problems (e.g., freedom, induction, God).³ That the model is operating (and sustaining the practice) can be seen as follows: suppose that in addition to the legal principle that all men are innocent until proved guilty, there also developed a habit amongst judges of never treating any evidence as sufficient for the establishment of guilt. One would soon begin to suspect, and rightly, that judges were acting on the tacit theory that no man was guilty. Similarly, given the abstention from solutions and the treatment of normal philosophic theories as symptoms rather than as candidates to truth, one concludes that there is an underlying idea of the kind outlined at work. This can be confirmed from the conduct of a linguistic philosopher in discussion. Faced with a problem very plainly recalcitrant to his

³ Be it noted that Logical Positivism was abandoned not so much because of some refutation of *its* key ideas as because it failed to deliver the goods it promised, i.e. solutions of philosophic problems by the "reduction" of actual statements to constituents compatible with *its* model. The model itself had and retains great plausibility. By now, linguistic philosophy has had as much time—and more people—to produce its goods as reductionism had when it was abandoned.

⁴ Cf. "Use and Meaning", *The Cambridge Journal*, 1951.

⁵ Sometimes, however, these principles are forgotten. In his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society, 1956, Professor J. L. Austin makes an *en passant* remark implying that we are not yet really clear about anything. Has he

method, e.g., freedom, he predicts (without fulfilling this promise) that if we examine the words from the use of which the problem "is said" (by his own school!) "to arise", we shall, or more modestly may, no longer wish to ask the question. If pressed on the determinism/indeterminism issue, he exclaims impatiently that if you *must* have an answer in such terms then *of course* (great emphasis) he is an indeterminist: the suggestion being that he deplores the theory-about-the-world sound of this, but that the "of course" is clearly warranted by the fact that ordinary usage is indeterminist or at least not determinist. The very use of these theoretical terms he characterizes at the "tertiary stage" (of the philosophic disease), the secondary having been the unsystematized perplexity about terms which, he implies, preceded and cause the philosophic perplexity.

The notion that no theory can contradict the normal or standard or paradigmatic use of a word is deeply embedded in linguistic philosophy. It is ironical to find a movement rightly priding itself on its semantic awareness committing such a howler in semantics at the very centre of its thought, akin to the confusion of connotation and denotation, or the extension and intension of a term. The howler consists of inferring from the fact that words derive their meanings from their uses and contexts, the conclusion that a theory employing a word in its normal meaning, and yet implying that the word is mistakenly used in the whole range of its actual uses or in its paradigmatic use, *must* be mistaken. But this does not follow,⁴ and is based on a failure to realize that words derive their meaning not in any simple way from the actual range of situations in which they are used, but in all kinds of more complicated ways from the general language system of which they are part, and that the discovery of unsuspected implications or new facts may entail that the paradigmatic use, or the whole range of uses, is mistaken. Of course, the argument from usage is *sometimes* apposite. Linguistic philosophers behave as if it always were.⁵

Linguistic naturalism

Let us return to the key image. What it amounts to is *naturalism with regard to language*, seeing language as a natural process and activity and solving philosophical problems in the course of an investigation of this process. Now naturalism with regard to *man* or the *world*, the awareness that things which give rise to philosophic problems (e.g., morality, inference, knowledge, etc.) can be seen as natural processes or aspects of them, is *vieux jeu* and in its time also gave rise to philosophies. Nowadays that is rare, for whilst most philosophers admit that the natural history or psychology of morals or inference or cognition, etc., are relevant, at the same time they are not adequate for the solution of the philosophic problem. When however the naturalistic account is introduced in linguistic guise, in the form of "when do we say, etc", this point is not yet sufficiently appreciated.⁶ The old-

forgotten the many occasions in daily life when we say, in full accordance with the rules of usage and expecting to be understood, that we are *quite* clear about something? Why is *clarity* not to receive the treatment that was meted out, for instance, to *certainty*? A generation ago Frank Ramsey wittily denned scholasticism as pretending that what is not clear, is. A new species has emerged: pretending that what is clear, is not.

⁶ This point is simply not met by saying that over and above linguistic clarification there is also a residue of personal value commitment. There is a vast area of philosophic discussion which quite properly is neither a matter of what we say nor what we decide.

fashioned led to an interest and respect for the facts of human life. Linguistic naturalism, on the contrary, leads to a diminution of curiosity, for it suggests that all the necessary and relevant facts are already in the possession of the philosopher qua language-user, or at his elbow in the O.E.D.

Linguistic naturalism could only make its impact after philosophy had already received a linguistic twist: for a philosopher who did not think language relevant in the first place, seeing it as a natural tool would make no difference. But this twist is just what did occur.⁷ Once upon a time, much of philosophy was carried on in terms of goings-on between *mind* and the *world* (and at a certain stage Kant's Copernican Revolution occurred, consisting of saying that the problems were less about the world than about what mind did with it and to it). As a result of the early work of Russell, Wittgenstein and others, philosophy was carried on more in terms of the relation of *language* and the world. Linguistic philosophy was the second Copernican Revolution of this kind: it insisted that not much sense could be made of questions about the fundamental or general or necessary features of the world, and that these questions had to be re-interpreted as being about the other factor, language.⁸

Old-fashioned style

Linguistic philosophers say that if we carefully examine the actual use of the terms occurring in philosophic questions, we shall no longer wish to ask them. The very opposite is true: if we carefully examine, as I have tried to do, *in conventional philosophic terms and manner*, the motives, the underlying model, of being pre-occupied with ordinary language, we shall no longer in general want to know about it. Of course we may want to on occasions when particular reasons for it arise.⁹

The need for conventional, old-fashioned philosophic style is important. For note that whilst the movement may rightly be called one of ordinary language, it spurns ordinary *thought*. The movement in fact most remarkably combines great esotericism (in method) with the counteresoteric doctrine that the world is as it appears to everyone.¹⁰ In fact, old-fashioned philosophy, some extravagant systems apart, is far closer to ordinary thought. There are games in which the natural, instinctive moves of the beginner are usually wrong: I gather that the natural batting stance is usually wrong, that the neophyte rockclimber has to be cured of hugging the rock, using his knees, etc. *Thought* is similar, according to linguistic philosophy. The natural reaction of the thinking man, the assumption that interesting questions should have conclusive answers and that these are attain-

able by *systematic* thought, is a basic error, they imply. The attitude practised and inculcated by linguistic philosophers, the meticulous, not to say extremely tedious examination of the normal uses of the relevant words, leading to that (quite hypothetical) point at which "one no longer wishes to ask the question", is, however, the last thing the intelligent but unconverted man would do.

Neither history nor sociology

Now this rejection of ordinary systematic thought about general issues is only another aspect of the aforementioned howler in semantics, the restricted and narrow application of the truism that the meaning of words resides in their use. Indeed: but that *use* includes their place in the system of concepts (or language, if you prefer) which is open to revision and has historically witnessed such revisions. The smugness, the absence of a sense of general alternatives, which often characterizes the movement, is part of a lack of historical view, not to mention sociological sophistication, against which classical scholarship does not appear to be a barrier. For instance, their discussions of metaphysical doctrines seldom discuss the wider social *uses* of certain theories, or the general social role of key ideas. When linguistic philosophers examine usages in the context of the *social* situation in which they occur, the word "social" occurs in the narrower sense closer to that which interests the gossip-columnist than to the broader sense which interests the sociologist.

The key insight, that meanings are roles not things, that entities and realms must not be multiplied as correlates of ways of using words, is of course both important and true. The unmasking of the tacitly operating fallacy that things lurk behind all words can be compared with the demolition of anthropomorphism, the interpretation of things non-human as human. Like that fallacy, this one too produced a whole cluster of semi-conscious mistakes.

But the narrow application of the notion of role or use has been as harmful. Systematic thought about important issues—in other words philosophy—is quite properly unimpressed by the antecedent use of words. The suggestion that about these general issues there is nothing to be settled, draws too sharply a line (between the real and the verbal, roughly) which is neither clear nor sharp nor settled. The questions on either side of it are neither separate nor separable. About the *general* viability of, say, ethical or teleological or religious or responsibility-attributing discourse, questions can be asked which it is a grotesque travesty to treat linguistically and by appeal to usage. Concerning this new method of dealing with them, let this be said: a leader of the movement is plausibly credited with the dictum that in philosophy one knows one is getting somewhere when one is getting

⁷ Though in certain cases the discovery that something was "about language" was not so much a "discovery" as a shift in the meaning of *language*, a shift of the kind that is derided by the movement in other cases.

⁸ Bertrand Russell aptly remarked somewhere that Kant's switch was really an anti-Copernican Counter-revolution, for its effect and perhaps intention was to put Man back at the centre of things. The same is true of linguistic philosophy, which also has the effect and appeal of putting the focus of all issues back home, in our own speech habits.

⁹ Linguistic philosophers are in the habit of saying that when an (old-fashioned) philosopher says . . . , he really means . . . (something quite different: usually, that things could be described in quite a different way from the way we normally do. Though the poor man was also supposed to mislead himself into thinking that he had a rival theory).

Now it should be clear that when a linguistic philosopher says . . . , *he* really means something quite different: roughly, that as no philosophic problems and solutions are possible, . . . is the only possible answer we can have. There being no de jure answers, a description of the de facto usage is all that can be had. But, absurdly, he misleads himself into thinking that . . . is in some more important sense a solution.

¹⁰ Cf. "The Philosophy of Wittgenstein," *The Tutor's Bulletin for Adult Education*, 1954. Essentially, Wittgenstein believed two propositions: in his youth, that language reflects the world; in his age, that it does *not*.

¹¹ The latter view made him the Heraclitus of language, and led to the *use* and *heterogeneity* (of uses) theory of language. This gave him the reputation of a fox despite the unique and hence hedgehog-like nature of the premiss.

bored with the question. One can only wonder whether the practitioners know how to distinguish the boredom of attrition from the boredom of illumination.

Far from being a neutral and open-minded technique of clarification, the method is in fact rigidly committed to its model of an inherently unmysterious world, with language as a natural activity and tool within it, with purposes and rules implicit in its actual working, and strange or undecidable questions arising as by-products of breakdowns in its use. The rigidity of the application of this model has been re-inforced by the illusion that no model was being employed. Moreover, the application of this interesting and inherently plausible model has been pushed to absurd lengths through sticking to it with regard to problems unsuitable for such treatment (e.g., freedom). The origins of linguistic philosophy are connected with the healthy reaction against the absurdities of Idealism, against tortuous arguments which claimed to show that the world was *quite* other than it seemed. The new dogmatism to the effect that the world is quite as it seems has by now produced its own crop of absurdities and arguments which silence without convincing. One might perhaps profitably make a list of these, of things said but not possibly believed, and use them as probable indices of points at which non-linguistic problems arise or where we do have some kind of general knowledge of things (the model showing the impossibility of this notwithstanding); just as the absurdities of earlier philosophy were used as indices of linguistic oddities.

A crypto-hedgehog

The assumption of a totally transparent world is as unsatisfactory as that of a wholly deceptive one. Above all, it must be realized that such a total assumption is operative. This fox is a crypto-hedgehog!

As a philosophy, it is simply a great evasion of all questions. Issues are prejudiced by the assumption of an unmysterious world and of mysteries as by-products of the misuse of word-tools within it. Past philosophic systems have indeed often been attempts to reduce everything to some simple unity and symmetry. Linguistic philosophy fancies itself free from the drive which it considers to be the crucial hedgehog's fallacy of overrating the homogeneity of things or usages. In fact it has its own version of the *drang* to unification: the unmysterious world of common appearance with difficulties as verbal illusions. Passionate pro-foxes, of whom I am not one, may derive satisfaction that this unification is at least as abortive as earlier ones.

Another aspect of the defects of the movement is the implicit abdication of normative and critical functions. At one stage members of the movement even thought that the de facto use of language could settle normative or evaluational problems. This has been abjured, but the "discovery" that it is an error was included in one of those collections of essays which communicate the doctrine to the public! If a man believes that 2 and 2 make 5, it is sad. If he (quite rightly) considers this a Revolution in Arithmetic and persuades others, it is sadder still. If he

¹²I must make unambiguously clear that these and similar earlier comments are not intended to apply to men such as Professors Ryle, John Wisdom, or Ayer (who in any case does not really fit in this group, though may be mistaken by Third Programme listeners as one of them), for whose work and manner of conducting argument I have the utmost admiration. On terms of *doctrine* Ryle and Wisdom do of

is cured, that is a matter for rejoicing. But if he then claims the (re)-discovery of 2 plus 2 makes 4 to the credit of his Arithmetical Revolution, it is time to protest.

Most philosophical problems always have had a normative or evaluational aspect which was their most important part, and were known to be such: *quid juris* as well as *quid facti*, in Kant's legal metaphor, was asked. This being so, the linguistic approach not only does not provide normative answers but is largely irrelevant. There is Bradley's definition of metaphysics as "the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct". Linguistic philosophy had tried to turn it into showing why no reasons are required for what we believe through linguistic habit.

Bank manager ideologist

There are objections to the movement other than strictly philosophical ones. It is an ideology. Its ideas are diffused and maintained in part by a set of self-authenticating devices, a dovetailing of doctrine, procedural rule and semi-institutional organization, a reinforcement by pressures which are psychological rather than strictly rational. Now this is true in some measure of any intellectual movement, and any group of men communicating ideas might be called a "movement". (One cannot waste time on any crank who wishes to examine one's first principles.) The point is that the extent to which all this is true of linguistic philosophy is far greater than is necessary or salutary.

The charismatic leadership introduced into philosophy by Wittgenstein is still in evidence. The symbols have changed: the charismatic leather jacket has been replaced by the manner and appearance of a conventional bank manager. Yet how appropriate: if the esoteric insight of philosophy is that the world is as it seems, it is suitable that the philosopher should be as other men are. This volte-face is, after all, matched by that other innovation, the discovery that ascendancy can be obtained by the use of short and common words, replacing that quite dated technique of obtaining it through long and abstruse ones. There is an old definition of the philosopher as the man who talks about important matters so that one does not understand, but feels that it is one's own fault. Linguistic philosophy has certainly revolutionized the techniques for obtaining this last effect. In addition to the type of leadership, there is also what one may perhaps call argument by lifemanship, going back possibly to G. E. Moore.¹¹ In brief, to understand the movement properly it is desirable not merely to know the key image and the techniques for applying it, but also to have some acquaintance with the sociological writings of Max Weber and Stephen Potter, and possibly with the *ambiance* of group therapy sessions.

Moreover, *as* an ideology it is in a decadent stage.¹² In the earlier stages, the intellectual values, which were well served, were clarity and honesty. (These were shared with Logical Positivism.) There was also an air of excitement and discovery *vis-a-vis* both traditional and positive philosophy. These are now largely lacking, as is perhaps typical of Second Generations. Paraphrasing the

course belong to the movement, but their manner of reading is not facile and their exposition not derivative or unperceptive. These comments are directed at what is sometimes described as the latest avant-garde of the movement, and what I should call the Second Generation of Stalinist phase.

immortal words of Groucho Marx: It *seems* trivial, but don't be deceived—it *is* trivial.

In certain ways, the movement is extremely English despite deriving from the work of an Austrian: "English" not perhaps as the English are but as a well-received humorous tradition (Maurois, Mikes, Daninos) has painted them. (It is worth noting that the stereotype of the pragmatic, untheoretical race is fairly new. Hume remarked somewhere that nowhere else are the abstract and abstruse studies pursued so much as on this island.) Philosophy in the past has been a matter of over-statement: even melodramatic over-statement. Linguistic philosophy is a philosophy of under-statement.

What its doctrine boils down to concretely is that the mid-morning view of the world of a stable and balanced stockbroker, who was perhaps a rowing man in his youth,¹³ is fundamentally right, whilst the nocturnal preoccupations of a longhaired egghead, interested in his inner life, in the human predicament, etc., or in strange cosmic possibilities, are *demonstrably* phoney and a by-product of verbal confusion. Well, I daresay there is a great deal in this. At the same time I wonder what happens to linguistic philosophers when they reach that stage in every Babbitt's life when the crucial questions are *faced*, as opposed to being just indices of uses of words.

Weltschmerz is wortschmerz

Past philosophy has indeed often been a kind of cosmological *Bovarisme*; and a response to being thrown into a strange and alien world which one never made. Linguistic philosophers on the other hand are perfectly at home in it and show you that you are, too, if only you will examine your terms. *Weltschmerz* is but *Wortschmerz*. Santayana said that all a philosopher could do was provide a world poem. This movement restores the status quo and reduces everything back to prose, preferably the prose of a civil service directive. It may all be seen as part of the *Entzauberung aer Welt*, applied to philosophy.

Philosophy in the past was held to start from wonderment, and perhaps to end in it, too. It still starts from it, but the wonder sheds no light on the world, it is a mere index of confusion. The world itself evokes no such feelings. It must be said that in Wittgenstein himself there was a marked strain of suggestion that when the verbal confusions are cleared up, what remains is all the more mysterious, not less so. This strain is almost wholly absent in his successors. Voltaire once said that philosophy was about what everyone knew and about what no one will ever know. It is now held to be only about what everyone knows, but confirmed in a way no one would ever have suspected.

It must be admitted that this pedantry and a cultivated lack of inspiration (in some cases it also comes naturally) has a poetry all its own. A dry and restrained dish may be welcome after exotic exaggeration. As in tailoring, there can be great elegance in restraint. No doubt this is the psychological appeal of the school: after so many visions and so much strain after wonderment, a prosaic and uninspired view may be an illumination of kinds. Moreover, its elaboration has a certain Veblenesque appeal, and conspicuous triviality is a kind of Conspicuous Waste. It flourishes most in a suitably Veblenesque environment.

¹³My apologies to stockbrokers if I do them an injustice, and to rowing poets.

One may have doubts about the educational value of this outlook. Of course, one can think of worse examples for the young than the almost neurotic caution which suggests that nothing can be feared more than making a fool of oneself by having some general idea, an attitude which must make such ideas positively a matter of secret guilt . . . About one leader of the movement one could paraphrase Wittgenstein's aphorism about logic: he is never wrong, for he says nothing.

Having said a little about the spirit and inner cohesion of the movement, something should also be said about the external conditions of its emergence. Now its predecessor, Logical Positivism, was in essence an attempt to explain the sterility of philosophy and the phenomenal successes of natural science. *Traditional* philosophy, on the other hand, was a kind of apex of a literary culture, of the kind of thinking that a cultivated man equipped with a good library and mind (but not necessarily a lab or a taste for calculation) would count as essential to a full life. Logical Positivism, though in fact many of its protagonists were extremely cultivated people, undermined and derided the rationale of that activity. It stated that if you wish to avoid sterility and self-delusion in your intellectual activities you must go to work in the lab or calculate, or, *faute de mieux*, be some kind of logical assistant to those who do.

This was difficult to put into practice. Professional philosophy is too well established institutionally to be abolished. The transformation of its practitioners into logicians is difficult in view of the fact that the majority of them have a humanist or at best "modern studies" educational background, and not a scientific or mathematical one. (Some tried to catch up on these subjects, in the sweat of their brows, but doing it belatedly in adult life does not appear to be very fertile, and also there is something faintly comic about learning up a subject just so that one can *then* be philosophically puzzled by it.) Furthermore, people working in labs do not appear to be in the habit of asking for extraneous logical assistance.

In this situation, linguistic philosophy was a godsend. It provided an alternative to shutting up shop, to swotting maths, to the old idea of a transcendental rival of science, now unpopular. (On the Continent, Existentialism presumably filled a similar need.)

Poor whites of the mind

In the republic of the mind, linguistic philosophers have a position a little like that of poor whites of aristocratic origin in a play about the American South. The *untranscendental* nature of their activity enables them to claim, emphatically, community with the rich, powerful white and elect race of science. They are second to none in despising those who do not belong to it but wish to *pass*, or those who they think do not belong to it (such as the social sciences). At the same time, a certain something, a superior subtlety and longer history, enables them to feel superior to the *nouveau riche* and vulgar whites of actual science. Their own aristocratic origin and training is both an obstacle to taking up science themselves and a justification for not doing so. The scientists in turn feel a certain contempt, tempered on occasion by a suspicion that there might after all be something in all this age and refinement . . .

Finally, a general assessment: The central insights of the movement are of the greatest importance. That statements and questions must not be taken at their face value but seen in the context of the rules of the use of

the terms occurring in them; these rules in turn to be seen as part of a system, language; that these rules are very complex and manifold and built into the actual practices of life; and that this calls for the reinterpretation of some philosophic questions at least;—all this is new and important. It is one of those shifts of viewpoint which alter thinking for good (in both senses). But the exclusive, repetitive, indiscriminating hammering in and application of these points at suitable and unsuitable occasions, the effective equation of philosophy with it, the unquestioning confidence in the underlying model and the illusion that there is no such model, only a neutral technique—it would be a great boon if we saw the end of all these.

Amongst what I have called the ideological techniques of the movement is a kind of informal, and sometimes formal, proscription of unpopular words. (In-group membership is displayed by knowing which words may not be seriously used.) For instance, "sense-data" and "logical constructions" once received this treatment, and recently I have heard the good word "decision" recommended for the same. Would it not be healthy to turn this inwards and prohibit for a time the use of the phrases (and their equivalents) "In ordinary English we never say . . .", "rooted in the ordinary use", "there is a use for . . ." and all references to the Oxford English Dictionary?