• 25a •

P. F. STRAWSON

Analysis, Science, and Metaphysics

It has been said, rightly, that English philosophy between the wars was dominated by the notion of analysis. One might say the same of English and American philosophy after the Second World War, but then one would have to add that the conception of analysis was entirely different from that held earlier. It is true, of course, that even before the Second World War, the word "analysis" was given several different interpretations. Nevertheless, I think that a certain central idea was never far from the minds of all those who praised, or claimed to practice, the analytic method during this earlier period. This was the idea of translation, of an ideal paraphrase as the proper goal of philosophical analysis — even though this goal might itself be a mere ideal. On this conception of analysis, the principal philosophical problems would be resolved if one could translate sentences of ordinary language which contained problematic concepts by means of other sentences — expressions which would exhibit clearly the underlying complexities of these concepts; or if one could transpose ordinary sentences whose grammatical structure was misleading into a form which would exhibit clearly the true structure of the thoughts they expressed or of the facts they signified. Some among those who held this view thought that the new formal logic offered by *Principia Mathematica* would supply the general structure of the language of paraphrase, the general forms of the clarifying sentences. Some philosophers even thought they knew what the ultimate elements of analysis would turn out to be — what kind of terms would provide the content for these general forms. These primitive terms, they thought, would denote what was immediately presented to the senses — those ephemeral "givens" beloved of British empiricists from the seventeenth century down to the present. Still other philosophers remained skeptical or neutral about these points, while nevertheless accepting the general notion that clarifying paraphrases were, ideally, what analysis should produce.

Toward the end of this earlier period, a sense of disillusion began to be felt by the analysts of this persuasion. On the one hand, Wittgenstein had begun to give lectures of a quite new sort at Cambridge. His ideas, as they spread beyond the small circle of his auditors, made it possible to envisage a more flexible and more fruitful philosophical method. On the other hand, the results of actual attempts to

A translation of a paper, and the ensuing discussion, presented at the Royaumont Colloquium of 1961, printed in the proceedings of the colloquium (*La philosophie analytique* [Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1962], pp. 105–38). Translated and printed by permission of the author and the publisher.

Editor's note: Mr. Strawson's paper contains many sentences and paragraphs which occur, in English, in his essay in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap* (Strawson [1]). At these points, I have followed the wording of the latter essay in my translation.

apply the method of analysis were disappointing. The sentences of ordinary language seemed to resist being forced into the molds which had been shaped by men who had preconceived ideas about the proper form or the proper content of the clarifying paraphrases. Even translations which had, at first, seemed obviously successful began to be hedged about with doubts and qualifications, and were often in the end repudiated altogether. In the end, analysts began to feel a pervasive doubt about what they were doing. It seemed that one could only achieve a translation by sacrificing all or part of the meaning of the expression which one was trying to analyze. What was intended as analysis turned out to be falsification; or, if the original meaning was successfully conserved, fidelity was secured only at the cost of circularity.

If translation, as a philosophical method, cannot produce any sound results, it seems clearly necessary to abandon it. But it is possible, in abandoning it, to preserve something of what the analysts had originally intended. This can be done in either of two, apparently opposed, ways. Sentences of ordinary language fulfill our ordinary needs. In general, they leave nothing to be desired in the way of clarity for practical purposes, even though they leave much to be desired from the point of view of *philosophical* clarity. Thus the attempt to replace these sentences with clarifying paraphrases — clarifying in the sense that their form and their content would meet our need for philosophical understanding — was very natural. But since ordinary sentences resisted such translation, a choice had to be made. One could either retain the construction of clarifying paraphrases as one's goal, while admitting that these paraphrases could never have precisely the same meaning as the ordinary sentences they replaced, or else one could retain the goal of explaining the precise meaning of these expressions, while admitting that the construction of paraphrases in an ideal language would not produce this result. The first choice gives rise to the program of linguistic constructionism, the second to that of description of linguistic usage. If one adopts the most rigorous and most highly developed form of the first program, one will construct a formal system which uses, generally, the apparatus of modern logic and in which the concepts forming the subject-matter of the system are introduced by means of axioms and definitions. The construction of the system will generally be accompanied by extra-systematic remarks in some way relating the concepts of the system to concepts which we already use in an unsystematic way. This is the method of "rational reconstruction"; and indeed the system of elementary logic itself, which provides the general form of the system as a whole, can be regarded as a reconstruction of the set of concepts expressed by the logical constants of daily life. Following the other method seems very different. For it consists in the attempt to describe the complex patterns of logical behavior which the concepts of daily life exhibit. It is not a matter of prescribing the model conduct of model words, but of describing the actual conduct of actual words; not a matter of making rules, but of noting customs. Obviously the first method has certain advantages. The nature and the powers of the apparatus to be used are clear. Its users know in advance what *sort* of thing they are going to make with it. The practitioner of the second method is not so well placed. Unless he is to be content with the production and juxtaposition of particular examples, he needs some metavocabulary in which to describe the features he finds. *Ex hypothesi*, the well-regulated metavocabulary of the first method is inadequate for his purposes. So he has to make his own tools; and, too often, hastily improvised, overweighted with analogy and association, they prove clumsy, lose their edge after one operation and serve only to mutilate where they should dissect.

I wish to examine in more detail these

two apparently opposed methods. I shall compare their merits in respect of that philosophical clarification which they both hope to achieve. Obviously, the result of such a comparison will depend in part on the sense one gives to the notion of "clarification." One could interpret this word in such a way that there was no interesting question as to which of the two methods would be better for this purpose. Such a result would ensue, for example, from taking "clarification" in the sense which Carnap seems to give it in the first chapter of *Logical Foundations of Probability*. A prescientific concept is clarified in this sense if it is supplanted or succeeded by one which is more *exact* and more *fruitful*. The criterion of fruitfulness, according to Carnap, is that the concept should be useful in the formulation of many logical theorems or empirical scientific laws. The criterion of exactness is that the rules of the use of the concept should be such as to give it a clear place "in a well-connected system of scientific concepts." Such a well-connected system, it seems, is a formal system which incorporates them. If one agrees with Carnap on all these points, then clearly the thesis that clarification can be best achieved by system-construction appears as an understatement.

Even if we abjure this last step, and think of clarification more vaguely as the introduction, for scientific purposes, of scientifically exact and fruitful concepts in place of some of those we use for all the other ordinary and extraordinary purposes of life, the issue between the two methods remains less than exciting. I am not competent to discuss the extent to which theoretical scientists either examine minutely the behavior of words in ordinary language or construct axiom systems. It seems to me extremely improbable that they do much of the first; and I suspect (but may be quite wrong) that logicians exaggerate the extent to which they do, or ought to do, the second. But my incompetence in this area troubles me not at all. For however much or little the constructionist technique is the right means of getting an idea into shape for use in the sciences, it seems *prima facie* evident that to offer formal explanations of key terms of scientific theories to one who seeks philosophical illumination of essential concepts of non-scientific discourse is to do something utterly irrelevant — is a sheer misunderstanding, like offering a text-book on physiology to someone who says (with a sigh) that he wished he understood the workings of the human heart. In the case of many a philosophically troubling concept, indeed, it is hard to know in what direction to look for a scientifically satisfactory concept which stands to it in the required relation of correspondence or similarity. But the general conclusion holds even for those cases where there is a clear correlation. I may mention, for example, Carnap's own example of the clarification of the prescientific concept of warmth by the introduction of the exact and scientifically fruitful concept of temperature. Sensory concepts in general have been a rich source of philosophical perplexity. How are the look, the sound, the feel of a material object related to each other and to the object itself? Does it follow from the fact that the same object can feel warm to one man and cold to another that the object really is neither cold nor warm nor has any such property? These questions can be answered, or the facts and difficulties that lead to our asking them can be made plain; but not by means of formal exercises in the scientic use of the related concepts of temperature, wavelength, and frequency. Indeed the introduction of the scientific concepts may itself produce a further crop of puzzles, arising from an unclarity over the relations between two ways of using language to talk about the physical world, the relations between the quantitative and the sensory vocabularies. This unclarity is another which will scarcely be removed by exhibiting the formal workings of the quantitative concepts.

It is possible, however, to understand the idea of clarification, and of the contribution which system-construction may make to it, in a different and more philosophical way; in such a way, in fact, that the issue stated at the outset remains open, requires to be argued further. The partisan of constructionism may well concede that introducing exact concepts for scientic purposes is one thing, and clarifying ordinary concepts is another. He may also concede that the latter task is the peculiarly philosophical one. Conceding all this, he may still maintain that the latter task will be best fulfilled by system-construction. He can maintain that attempts to analyze the forms of ordinary discourse are inevitably futile, because of the untidiness, the instability, the disorder, and the complexity of ordinary language. In place of undertaking such an analysis, he may say, let us construct perspicuous models of this language (or at least of some parts of this language) in which all the *essential* logical relations between our ordinary concepts are evident, because they will have been freed from the incidental ambiguities of every-day speech. Such a model of language has the following features. First, it is intrinsically clear, in that its key concepts are related in precise and determinate ways, whereas, *ex hypothesi*, the ordinary concepts to be clarified do not have such precise and determinate relations to each other or to the other ordinary concepts in terms of which we might seek to explain them. Second, at least some of the key concepts of the system are, in important respects, very close to the ordinary concepts which are to be clarified. The system as a whole then appears as a precise and rigid structure to which our ordinary conceptual equipment is a loose and untidy approximation.

The way in which the debate could once more reach an uninteresting deadlock is the following. It could be maintained dogmatically on the one hand that nothing but the mastery of such a system would really *be* understanding in a philosophical sense, of the concepts to be clarified. Or it might be maintained dogmatically on the other hand that since, *ex hypothesi*, the ordinary concepts to be examined do not behave in the well-regulated way in which the model concepts of the system are made to behave, there can be no real understanding of the former except such as may be gained by a detailed consideration of the way they do behave, i.e. by an investigation of the ordinary uses of the linguistic expressions concerned. Here the deadlock is reached by each party refusing to count as *understanding* a condition which is not reached by the method he advocates.

There may be something final about this deadlock. For there may here be something which is in part a matter simply of preference, of choice. Nevertheless, there are considerations which may influence choice. For surely, in deciding what to count as philosophical understanding, it is reasonable to remind ourselves what philosophical problems and *un*clarities are *like*. Such a reminder I shall briefly attempt later. But I shall partly anticipate it now, in mentioning some general difficulties which arise for the constructionist in the position he is now assumed to occupy.

The constructionist would of course agree that it is necessary to supply an interpretation for the linguistic expressions of his theory. This is not secured merely by the formal relationships between the constructed concepts which the theory exhibits. At some point it is necessary also to explain the meaning of the linguistic expressions for the constructed concepts in terms which do not belong to the theory and the meaning of which is taken as already known. So *some* extra-systematic remarks are essential. This point need not in itself raise any particular difficulty. So long as a small number of extra-systematic points of contact are clearly made, the meaning of the remaining elements follows from their clearly defined relationships within the system to those to which life has been given by the extra-systematic remarks. But if the constructionist claim to achieve clarification is to be vindicated, it

is not sufficient, though it is necessary, that the interpretation of the linguistic expressions of his theory should be determined. For the claim to clarify will seem empty, unless the results achieved have some bearing on the typical philosophical problems and difficulties which arise concerning the concepts to be clarified. Now these problems and difficulties (it will be admitted) have their roots in ordinary, unconstructed concepts, in the elusive, deceptive modes of functioning of unformalized linguistic expressions. It is precisely the purpose of the reconstruction (we are now supposing) to solve or dispel problems and difficulties so rooted. But how can this purpose be achieved unless extra-systematic points of contact are made, not just at the one or two points necessary to fix the interpretation of the constructed concepts, but at *every* point where the relevant problems and difficulties concerning the unconstructed concepts arise? That is to say, if the clear mode of functioning of the constructed concepts is to cast light on problems and difficulties rooted in the unclear mode of functioning of the unconstructed concepts, then precisely the ways in which the constructed concepts are connected with and depart from the unconstructed concepts must be plainly shown. And how can *this* result be achieved without accurately describing the modes of functioning of the unconstructed concepts? But this task is precisely the task of describing the logical behavior of the linguistic expressions of natural languages; and may *by itself* achieve the sought-for resolution of the problems and difficulties rooted in the elusive, deceptive mode of functioning of unconstructed concepts. I should not want to deny that in the discharge of this task, the construction of a model object of linguistic comparison may sometimes be of great help. But I do want to deny that the construction and contemplation of such a model object can *take the place* of the discharge of this task; and I want also to suggest that one thinks that it can only if one is led away from the purpose of achieving philosophical understanding by the fascination of other purposes, such as that of getting on with science.

Moreover, the general usefulness of systems of constructed concepts as objects of comparison with the unconstructed concepts in which our problems are rooted is necessarily limited. For the types or modes of logical behavior which ordinary concepts exhibit are extremely diverse. To detect and distinguish them is a task in which one may well be hindered rather than helped by fixing one's eye too firmly on the limited range of types of logical behavior which the concepts occurring in a formal system can there be shown to display. Such a system can only offer us relations between constructed concepts which have been fixed by stipulative definition. In this respect, system-construction reproduces the limitations and the narrowness of the original conception of analysis. Like it, it simply puts to one side a great number of widely different features of the functioning of our language — features which it is important to observe and describe with precision, if one wishes to resolve philosophical problems. One might put the point metaphorically as follows: living, linguistic beings have an enormous diversity of functions, only some of which can be reproduced by the computer-like machines which the constructionist can build.

It is still, however, too soon for us to say that we have reached a definitive judgment concerning the relative merits of the two methods. It is, in fact, impossible to make such a judgment without attempting a general description of philosophical problems, difficulties, and questions. It is rash to attempt such a general description, but at any rate this much will be broadly agreed: that they are problems, difficulties and questions *about* the concepts we use in various fields, and not problems, difficulties and questions which arise *within* the fields of their use. To say more is to risk the loss of general agreement.

Nevertheless, I think it is possible roughly to distinguish, though not to separate, certain strands or elements in the treatment of this diverse mass of conceptual questions. First, and very centrally, we find the necessity of dealing with paradox and perplexity. For it often happens that someone reflecting on a certain set of concepts finds himself driven to adopt views which seem to others paradoxical or unacceptably strange, or to have consequences which are paradoxical or unacceptably strange. Or — the obverse of this — it may happen that someone so reflecting becomes unable to see how something that he knows very well to be the case can *possibly* be the case. In this situation the critical philosopher must not only restore the conceptual balance which has somehow been upset; he must also diagnose the particular sources of the loss of balance, show just how it has been upset. And these achievements are not independent of each other. It also seems to me possible to say in general what kind of thing the source of conceptual unbalance is. Such unbalance results from a kind of temporary one-sidedness of vision, a kind of selective blindness which cuts out most of the field, but leaves one part of it standing out with a peculiar brilliance. This condition may take many different, though interconnected forms. The producer of philosophical paradox, or the sufferer from philosophical perplexity, is temporarily dominated by one logical mode of operation of expressions, or by one way of using language, or by one logical type or category of objects, or by one sort of explanation, or by one set of cases of the application of a given concept; and attempts to see, to explain, something which is different in terms of, or on analogy with, his favored model. The distortions which result from such attempts are of equally many kinds. To correct the distortions, one must make plain the actual modes of operation of the distorted concepts or types of discourse; and, in doing this, one must make plain the differences between their modes of operation and those of the model concepts or types of discourse; and, in doing this, one must, if one can, make plain the sources of the blinding obsession with the model cases.

This, then, is one strand in the treatment of philosophical problems — one which is in itself quite complex. I call it central, partly because the need for it has in fact provided so strong an impetus to the whole activity. From it can be distinguished, though not separated, certain other strands. One is the attempt to explain, not just how our concepts and types of discourse operate, but why it is that we have such concepts and types of discourse as we do; and what alternatives there might be. This is not a historical enquiry. It attempts to show the natural foundations of our logical, conceptual apparatus, in the way things happen in the world, and in our own natures. A form which propositions exemplifying this strand in philosophy may often take is the following: if things (or we) were different in such-and-such ways, then we might lack such-and-such concepts or types of discourse; or have such-and-such others; or might accord a subordinate place to some which are now central, and a central place to others; or the concepts we have might be different in such-and-such ways. It might reasonably be maintained, or ruled, that full understanding of a concept is not achieved until this kind of enquiry is added to the activities of comparing, contrasting and distinguishing which I mentioned first. Of course speculations of this kind are restricted in certain ways: they are limited by the kinds of experience and the conceptual apparatus we in fact have. But this is only the restriction to intelligibility; it leaves a wide field open to philosophical imagination.

The distinction I used above between the way things happen in the world, and our own natures, is here, though vague, important. For it is a part of our nature that, things other than ourselves being as they are, it is natural for us to have the con-

ceptual apparatus that we do have. But human nature is diverse enough to allow of another, though related, use of philosophical imagination. This consists in imagining ways in which, without things other than ourselves being different from what they are, we might view them through the medium of a different conceptual apparatus. Here, then, is a third strand. Some metaphysics is best, or most charitably, seen as consisting in part in exercises of this sort. Of course, even when it can be so interpreted, it is not *presented* as a conceptual or structural revision by means of which we might see things differently; it is presented as a picture of things as they *really* are, instead of as they delusively seem. And this presentation, with its contrast between esoteric reality and daily delusion, involves and is the consequence of the unconscious distortion of ordinary concepts, i.e. of the ordinary use of linguistic expressions. So metaphysics, though it can sometimes be charitably interpreted in the way I suggest, in fact always involves paradox and perplexities of the kind I first mention; and sometimes embodies no rudimentary vision, but merely rudimentary mistakes.

Still other strands need to be distinguished. That examination of current concepts and types of discourse to which paradox and perplexity so commonly give the initial impulse, can be pursued with no particular therapeutic purpose, but for its own sake. This is not to say that puzzlement is not in question here. One can, without feeling any particular temptation to mistaken assimilations, simply be aware that one does not clearly understand how some type of expression functions, in comparison with others. Or, having noticed, or had one's attention drawn to, a certain logico-linguistic feature appearing in one particular area of discourse, one may simply wish to discover how extensive is the range of this feature, and what other comparable features are to be found. Of course, the resulting enquiries may well pay therapeutic dividends. But this need not be the purpose for which they are undertaken. Here, then, is a fourth strand.

I think that there is a fifth philosophical aim to which those which I have so far sketched should be subordinated. So far, I have spoken of metaphysics as if its principle aim were the reformation of concepts, and its most frequent achievement their deformation. I have contrasted reforming metaphysics with descriptive analysis. However, we should recognize the existence of another sort of metaphysics, one which shares the descriptive aim of analysis. The descriptive metaphysician resembles the descriptive analyst in that he wishes to make clear the actual behavior of our concepts, rather than to change them. His enterprise differs from that of the analyst only in scope and in level of generality. But this difference is important. An analytical examination of a certain area of human thought — an analysis, say, of the concept of memory, or of cause, or of logical necessity — may, and should, take a great deal for granted, presuppose a great deal. To clarify a particular part of our conceptual apparatus, there is no need to make a profound study of the general structure of that apparatus. But the goal of descriptive metaphysics will consist precisely in the exhibition of that structure. It will try to show how the fundamental categories of our thought hang together and how they relate, in turn, to those formal notions (such as existence, identity, and unity) which range through all categories. Obviously the conclusions which descriptive metaphysics reaches must not conflict with those arrived at by a careful descriptive analysis. Still, it is not evident that the tools and the method of descriptive analysis can suffice by themselves to do the job which descriptive metaphysics attempts.

If these are the tasks of philosophy, what can we now say about the pretensions of the two heirs of the classical program of analysis — the two contrasting methods of philosophical clarification which we have been examining? It seems

to me that the roles of these two methods become clear when we consider the first and the fourth objectives of philosophical inquiry which I have distinguished. The description of the modes of functioning of actually employed linguistic expressions is of the essence of the fourth aim; and it is simply the least clouded form of a procedure which is essential to the achievement of the first. Here the arguments put forward above apply. To observe our concepts in action is necessarily the only way of finding out what they can and cannot do. The right kind of attention to the ordinary use of expressions provides a means of refutation of theories founded on mistaken assimilations; it provides a description of the actual functioning of the problematic concepts, to take the place of the mistaken theory; and, finally, it helps, or may help, with the diagnosis of the temptations to the mistakes. This last it may do because the analogies which seduce the philosopher are not, in general, private fantasies; they have their roots in our ordinary thinking, and show themselves in practically harmless, but detectable ways, in ordinary language — both in its syntactical structure and in the buried metaphors which individual words and phrases contain. I have already acknowledged that system-construction may have an ancillary role in achieving these two types of aim, and given reasons for thinking that it must remain ancillary — and limited. Model objects of linguistic comparison may help us to understand the given objects; but it is dogmatism to maintain that the construction of model objects is the best or the only means of achieving such understanding.

In the case of those exercises of philosophical imagination which I have referred to as the second and third strands, the case is somewhat different. To understand the foundation of our concepts in natural facts, and to envisage alternative possibilities, it is not enough to have a sharp eye for linguistic actualities. Nor is system-construction a direct contribution to the achievement of the first of these two, i.e. to seeing why we talk as we do. But it may be to the second, i.e. to imagining how else we might talk. The constructionist may perhaps be seen as an enlightened reforming metaphysician — one who, perhaps wistfully, envisages the possibility of our situation and our need for communication so changed and simplified that such a well-regulated system of concepts as he supplies is well adapted to both. It is only when the claim to exclusiveness is made on behalf of the constructionist method, and of particular constructions, that one must begin to query the enlightenment. But, again, this claim may be softened to the expression of a preference — which leaves one no more to say.

There remains the fifth strand in the philosophical enterprise. It is obviously interlaced with the others, and cannot be detached from them. Still, it imposes its own demands. It is possible to stick to the scrupulous examination of the actual behavior of words, and to claim that this is the only sure path in descriptive philosophy. But it seems to me that if we do no more than this, then the relations and the structures which we shall discover will not be sufficiently general, or sufficiently far-reaching, to satisfy our urge for full metaphysical understanding. For when we ask ourselves questions about the use of a certain expression, the answers we give ourselves, revealing as they are at a certain level, presuppose, rather than exhibit, the general structural elements which the metaphysician wishes to discover. This does not mean that the metaphysician can ignore either the conclusions or the methods of descriptive analysis. On the contrary, these methods and conclusions serve as an indispensable control in the working-out of properly metaphysical solutions. But neither do these methods suffice, of themselves, to arrive at such properly metaphysical conclusions. For myself, I can offer no general recipe for achieving the sort of comprehension I have in mind here. It would indeed be the vainest of

dreams to imagine that the structure which descriptive metaphysics wishes to discover could be crystallized in any formal system.

To conclude, then. There is not just one thing which is legitimately required of the philosopher who would increase our conceptual understanding. In particular, it is certainly not *enough* to say that he should describe the functioning of actually employed linguistic expressions. For simply to say this would not be to give any indication of the sort of description he should provide. That indication is given when it is shown how description of the right sort may bear upon our conceptual confusions and problems. Next we see how more may be required of him than the resolution of these confusions with the help of those descriptions; how a more systematic classification and ordering of the types of discourse and concept we employ may be sought; how a fuller understanding of both may be gained by enquiring into their foundation in natural facts; how room may here be found for the envisaging of other possibilities; how he may, in the end, strive for the goal of a descriptive metaphysics. If the philosopher is to do all or only some of these things, it is true that he cannot stop short at the literal description, and illustration, of the behavior of actually used linguistic expressions. Nevertheless, the actual use of linguistic expressions remains his sole and essential point of contact with the reality which he wishes to understand, conceptual reality; for this is the only point from which the actual mode of operation of concepts can be observed. If he severs this vital connection, all his ingenuity and imagination will not save him from lapses into the arid or the absurd.

Editor's note: For comment on the notion of "descriptive metaphysics" which Strawson presents here, see the items cited in footnote 74 of the Introduction. For comment on his criticism of "constructionism" see the article by Maxwell and Feigl reprinted above at pp. 193–200; and also Carnap [7].

· 25b ·

Discussion of Strawson's "Analysis, Science, and Metaphysics"

(Chaired by Jean Wahl)

Mr. Jean Wahl: I will give the floor first to Mr. Taylor, who, I think, has a question on a very particular point.

Mr. Charles Taylor: The question which I should like to ask bears, I think, on the content of your paper rather than simply on its form. I am puzzled about what sort of proposition one would end up with after following out the "fifth strand of the philosophical enterprise" which you have discussed. Would it be simply a sort of abbreviated synthesis of the results obtained along the other four routes (particularly the first and fourth)? Would it be a systematization of the results which one gets from following the second route — namely, a set of reflections on the world and on human nature, taking their point of departure from facts about language? If the latter, would not following out the fifth strand lead one to a sort of conceptual structure? I do not know whether I have followed your train of thought properly, but I would like to know more about the sort of propositions which might emerge along this fifth route.

Mr. Strawson: Perhaps I can answer Mr. Taylor by putting forward one or two examples of what I have in mind. These may be ill-chosen, but if they are sound, they represent what I mean by "descriptive metaphysics."

Let us first take the case of Kant. When he tries to prove that the existence of an objective temporal order (or, more precisely, that our capacity to dispose phenomena in an objective temporal order) depends necessarily on the use we make of the concept of causality in relating a phenomenon to its cause, he then undertakes an enterprise which, if successful, would establish that a fundamental relation existed between two general concepts — that of an objective temporal order, and that of causality. To establish this, if such a thing could be established, would be a part of descriptive metaphysics as I conceive it.

I can offer another example. If one sets one's face against the empiricist tradition, which tries to reduce everything to the experiences of an individual subject, then one will try to demonstrate that such subjective experiences can only be fitted into an ontology which includes such entities as persons and animals (since these experiences can only be identified if one can identify such entities). This latter thesis, which I personally think is true, is another example of descriptive metaphysics. It relates two very general types of entity — two clearly identifiable categories — and makes manifest the subordination of the one to the other within a general conceptual scheme.

Do these two examples seem sufficient to illustrate what I mean by descriptive metaphysics?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, except that they strike me as simply prolongations of your *second*

type of philosophical inquiry. They are very close to the classical forms of ontology.

Mr. Strawson: No doubt. But when I described what I called the second effort of the philosophical imagination, I said that the propositions at which it aimed would have the following form: "If things were different from what they are in such-and-such respects, then our conceptual structure would also differ in certain respects." Now it seems to me that one can cite many cases of such possible differences, and that in these cases we can ask ourselves just how our conceptual structure would be modified. On the other hand, when we reach that higher level on which I have placed descriptive metaphysics (although I concede that it is very difficult to mark off such levels of inquiry from one another), we often encounter the fact that it is almost impossible to describe what an alternative conceptual structure might look like. At this higher level, we attempt something more general and more fundamental than was attempted in the second approach, although obviously closely related to it.

Mr. Leon Apostel: My first question bears upon the following phrase of Mr. Strawson's: "If things were different than they are in certain respects, then we might lack a certain way of speaking . . ." If the world were different, then our language would be different. I am curious to know how one could demonstrate such a proposition. While reflecting on this point, an example has occurred to me. Consider that we are familiar with two languages: L1 and L2. In the first, the verb agrees with the subject. In the second, it agrees with the object. (I am, of course, using "subject" and "object" in the ordinary sense which the grammarian gives them.) Can Mr. Strawson describe a possible world in which L1 would be applicable, and another in which L2 would be applicable? I have tried, in reflecting on this model, to imagine what he might propose. I came up with the following: if we imagine a world where the causes, movers, forces, and agents were extremely diverse and almost completely determined their effects, whereas the matter upon which they acted was homogenous and, so to speak, amorphorus, playing no role in causal interaction, then I can see that a language in which the verb agreed with the subject would be possible, whereas one in which it agreed with the object would be hardly conceivable. Is this the sort of thing Mr. Strawson has in mind? I doubt it, but if not, then I would like to know what would be an illustration of the situation expressed by the phrase I have quoted from his paper.

My second question bears on the notion of "descriptive metaphysics." What is the method of the discipline? Is it, for Mr. Strawson, similar to or different from the inquiries conducted by Benjamin Whorf? You will remember that when Whorf studied certain primitive languages, he claimed that they contained many more modalities than ours, that they had no names for objects, that they placed a much greater emphasis upon action, etc. He inferred from this the existence of an enormous number of modes and degrees of existence, the primacy of becoming over being, and of events over things. Is this the sort of method you envisage for descriptive metaphysics, or is there another?

Mr. Strawson: In the first place, I should say that even if I could form no such picture of the world as you speak of, this would make no difference to the topic under discussion. The question is not really about our being able to say what changes in our vision of the world would produce such-and-such profound modifications in the structure of our language, but rather about being able to say what changes might enter our language as a result of such-and-such profound changes in our vision of the world. However that may be, I think that the first part of your question had a more general import, and that you were really asking me about how one could hope to demonstrate this sort of proposition. I must answer that I do not think there *is* any way of demonstrating that an answer to this sort of question is correct. This is an important point of difference between descriptive metaphysics and analysis as currently practiced, for in the latter we can always provide a demonstration by reference to the current usage of language. Such an appeal is pointless, however, when we want to know what changes of current usage would be brought about by changes in our vision of the world. All I dare to say, on a question as delicate as this, is that one may hope for something like a demonstration — namely, an agreement among those who are particularly aware of, and sensitive to, all the nuances of linguistic expression, about what modifications of language would *probably* be entailed by such changes in our vision of the world. I do not say that such agreement would meet our ideal standards of proof, but I do not think that we are going to get anything better. One sign of the probative value of such agreement seems to be that it is, in fact, relatively easy to achieve on certain points. If you wish, I shall modify the schema for the sort of proposition I would hope might be formulated into the following: "It seems to us extremely probable, in the present circumstances, that our language might adapt itself in such-and-such a way to such-and-such modifications in the way things happen . . ." In this limited form, such propositions seem to me quite plausible, and even demonstrable.

Mr. Apostel: If you don't mind, I should like to add something to suggest why I asked my original question. Propositions from which one can infer certain conclusions concerning unrealized possibilities seem to me to be properly characterized as *laws*. It therefore seems to me that one would first have to lay down the laws which govern the relations between the world of language and the world of things, before one could say anything useful about the possible effects upon one world of a change in the other. If this is so, I think it follows that you would have to construct a formal model of language before you were in a position to put forward any counterfactual proposition.

Mr. Strawson: Yes, but now you are appealing to a certain view about counterfactual conditionals which one can refute by invoking certain propositions which are themselves counter-factual conditionals. (*Laughter from the audience*). The examples which would help to defend this view are probably borrowed from contexts very different from those with which I am concerned. It does not seem proper to extrapolate conclusions drawn from such examples to cover theses of the type we have just been discussing, which seem obviously to belong in a very special context. I would add also that when we are concerned with purely descriptive analyses of languages, we do not appeal to the results of the statistical methods currently practiced in empirical linguistics. Rather, we appeal to our own experience, our own intimate acquaintance with the language which we are studying. This practice seems legitimate as regards the descriptive aspect of linguistic analysis, and I think it may also be applied in descriptive metaphysics. For myself, I see no reason why it should be linked to empirical and statistical methods.

As I have gone along, I have partially anticipated my answer to your second question, for I have admitted that I cannot cite any features which are peculiar to the method of descriptive metaphysics. Still, I have said that the conclusions reached by the descriptive metaphysician cannot conflict with those reached by the other methods practiced within analytic philosophy, and so whatever one can say about these other methods will also apply to descriptive metaphysics. I cannot offer anything more precise than that.

Mr. Wahl: I think that Professor Leroy has a question on a related problem.

Mr. Georges Leroy: I have collected some passages (taken, unfortunately, from the translation of your paper) which may per-

haps undermine your position. You can tell me whether in fact they do. First, you say that "We try to uncover the natural foundations of our logical and conceptual apparatus." This will of course, on your view, be achieved by a method which is distinct from a simple historical inquiry. (By "logical" I take it you mean "what concerns language" rather than "what concerns the logical structure of discourse," but we need more precision on this point.) You continue the previous passage by saying ". . . by finding them in the way things happen in the world, and in our own natures." This passage, which is not the only one of its kind, seems to say that language can express, in a rather precise way, not only how things happen in the world, but also how they happen in our own natures. I find confirmation of this interpretation in a passage at the end of your paper where you say that "The actual use of linguistic expressions remains his sole and essential point of contact with the reality which he wishes to understand; conceptual reality." This is the first point which I find troublesome. It becomes still more troublesome when you add "for this is the only point from which the actual mode of operation of concepts can be observed. If he severs this vital connection, all his ingenuity and imagination will not save him from lapses into the arid or the absurd."

I understand from this that you hold that our concepts must always correspond to a certain concrete reality, and that language has no value except insofar as it expresses this reality. Language, then, in its normal usage, as well as the logic which is manifested in this normal usage, proceed directly from the concrete subject — are somehow engendered by life itself. Do we agree on this point? If so, then a question comes to mind at once: Does logic really express the foundation of things, their natural foundation? Does language really express this foundation? If it does, then it is not a descriptive, but an explicative, metaphysics which you are proposing. Such a metaphysics would describe the foundation of things, and not only the way our language functions. I confess that I find it very difficult to follow you here, for I regard language as expressing hypotheses and inferences about the foundation of things. This is why our language continues to evolve, in order to adapt itself to what we know about things. Here we have two quite different views of the matter, and it seems to me that you tend, at times, to veer toward the second — as when you say "It would indeed be the vainest of dreams to imagine that the structure which descriptive metaphysics wishes to discover could be crystallized in any formal system." I find myself caught in a dilemma here, and I should simply like you to clear up your own position on the topic.

Mr. Strawson: You have raised several points here. In the first place, I should defend the passage which you quoted from the conclusion of my paper by saying that the philosopher's principal task is the understanding of how our thought about things works, and that we cannot find out about these workings except by looking at how we use words. To put it another way, linguistic usage is the only experimental datum which we possess that is relevant to inquiry about the behavior of our concepts. It seems to me to follow that if we want to understand these concepts, we should look to the way in which they are articulately manifested — namely, to language.

You point out that if I adopt the view that our conceptual apparatus depends, in a certain way, on how things happen in the world, then it follows that a description of that apparatus is simultaneously a description of how the world goes. You support this point by citing the passage where I say that part of our job consists precisely in laying bare the foundations of our conceptual structure, and that these foundations will be found by looking to how things happen in the world.

It does not seem to me that there is a real difficulty here. All that we can say about how things happen in the world boils down to a few very general and very commonplace propositions. The relation between how things happen and the nature of our conceptual apparatus only appears clearly when we ask how that apparatus would be affected if the world were to behave differently. Only thus can we get at those particular features of the behavior of things in the world which directly affect the conceptual structures we use. The analyst's first job, nonetheless, remains that of describing the existing conceptual apparatus, and I do not think that from *such* an analysis one can get any interesting new information whatsoever about the nature of things. This admission does not prevent me from saying, as I have, that the behavior of things is the foundation of our conceptual structure. It does not follow from this thesis that language can tell us anything new about the world. I hold to this thesis simply because I think that if things were different, then our language would be different, and this fact seems to me a valid indication, if not a decisive proof, of the interaction in question.

Father H. L. Van Breda: I had at first thought that I would hold off my questions until later, but I am concerned to keep in focus the important point which Professor Leroy has raised concerning the passage in which you say: "The actual use of linguistic expressions remains the philosopher's sole and essential point of contact with the reality he wishes to understand, conceptual reality; for this is the only point from which the actual mode of operation of concepts can be observed."

This thesis, which you have put forward in a very sweeping way, has led me into a certain train of thought. I hope that Mr. Strawson will pardon me for summarizing these reflections. For some years, I have watched the development of the analytic movement in philosophy — not from very near at hand, perhaps, but nonetheless fairly closely. The failure of communication between all (or most) Continental philosophers on the one hand and Anglo-American philosophers on the other is really striking. The sentence I have cited from Mr. Strawson's paper has provided me with an occasion to formulate two or three problems which, I think, are at the bottom of this failure.

I myself, as many of you know, am a representative of the phenomenological movement, rather than of any of the other philosophical traditions which my clerical costume might suggest. For the phenomenologist, or the philosopher who takes his point of departure from the phenomenological movement, the thesis that the sole point of contact with that reality which philosophy wishes to understand is language is entirely inadmissable. To say that the reality we wish to understand is *conceptual* reality is still more objectionable. Here we have a first, and very important, point of difference between the two schools. To the question "What does the philosopher want to understand?" Continental philosophers would firmly reply that it is *not* conceptual reality, but the world in which we live, in all its complexity.

In the second place, you claim that language is the *only* point of contact with reality. I see no good argument for this whatever, especially if I adopt a purely descriptive attitude of the sort which the analytic method recommends. The simple description of my own consciousness, and of all that of which *I am conscious*, shows me that there are a great many ways of being-in-the-world, and thus shows me that I have the ability to understand, to find intelligible, what happens in the world. Such a description in no way suggests that language has the privileged status you claim for it.

Finally, there is a third point of difference which needs emphasis. (I am sorry to restrict myself to pointing out differences between us, but doing so will help us in the ensuing discussion.) For me, the essential philosophical question about language is this: what is language for man? I am not sure I know the answer to this

I cannot be satisfied simply to say, for example, that language in general is that phenomenon which exteriorizes itself in this or that particular language (English, French, etc.). I just do not know what to say. I am still trying to find out what language is. We have already had to drop the traditional view that language is an epiphenomon of the process of comprehension. It seems probable that language is something absolutely essential to comprehension, something at the very heart of consciousness. But I am not willing to take any theses about language for granted, and I leave myself open. I fear (but this is the confession of an adept at phenomenological analysis) that one over-simplifies too much in saying that language is a phenomenon which can more or less be identified with the ensemble of particular languages, or in saying that language is the only path to an understanding of the conceptual world, or in saying that the only goal of philosophy is an understanding of that world.

Mr. Strawson: I think that I can reformulate your point by saying that, for you, philosophy is not a matter of understanding conceptual reality through understanding language (in the sense in which one arrives at this latter understanding by studying observable facts about particular languages), but that its goal is to understand the world.

I think that your second point is entailed by your first, in the sense that if one tries to envisage the world as a whole without direct and precise reference to language one will feel no compulsion or desire to examine our every-day ways of talking about the world. I do not think we can discuss the two questions separately. You have not, however, contested my claim that if what we want to do is to elucidate the conceptual structure which regulates our usual ways of thinking about the world — ways which are revealed in everyday speech — then our essential (if not unique) point of contact is through language, in which our concepts take on an articulate form. I do not think, then, that I have to defend this claim.

The essential issue between us comes up in connection with your first question, about whether the proper end of philosophy is to understand the conceptual structure which the analysis of language reveals, or is rather to undertake that marginal activity which consists in trying to understand the world and our existence in the world.

Father Van Breda: Let us say simply: our *relation with* the world. When you say "our existence in the world" you are adopting a different philosophical jargon.

Mr. Strawson: I have to confess that neither the concept of a relation with the world, nor that of existence in the world, strikes me as very clear. Can't we simply leave all that to the psychologists?

Father Van Breda: I do not believe that that is their job at all.

Mr. Strawson: I should like to be more confident that I grasp what it is that we are supposed to understand. It seems to be neither something which falls within the province of experimental science, nor something to which the methods I described in my paper are relevant. If it is not a conceptual structure, I do not know what it is.

Father Van Breda: You seem at least to be familiar with one of the ways of being-in-the-world — *viz.*, the mode of apprehending the world through the use of concepts. But I am not quite sure I know what your conception of this mode is. You seem quite sure that you know what it is to be with things, to be in touch with them, when speaking about them in conceptual terms. I am still trying to find out what this is. For me, there are still problems about language, and in particular there is the problem of the nature of conceptual language. For you, it seems that apprehension of the world through concepts is the only, or the essential, mode of being-in-the-world. For me, it is only one among a great many others. I might mention, as examples of these others, love, religion, and emotion. Each of these are ways of being with things, of grasping things, and none of them is blind.

Mr. Strawson: I am aware of many ways of standing in relation to things in addition to that particular way which makes use of conceptual structures. But it seems to me that the study of these other relationships belongs elsewhere — in history, the social sciences, scientific research, the practice of the arts and skills which we use in daily life, in the experience of the individual . . .

Father Van Breda: But you have to distinguish what you are doing from what the philologist does! I am putting these questions to you as a *philosopher*. Surely there remains something to do after the historian or the scientist has had his say!

Mr. Strawson: After history has had its say, there will remain problems about, for example, the idea of causality as it is used in the historian's explanations. This is just the sort of problem which leads us to conceptual inquiry, to philosophy as I conceive it. But I don't see what *else* there is for philosophy to do than to conduct inquiry of this type concerning the underlying conceptual schemes, either of particular disciplines or of daily speech.

Father Van Breda: Let me take up the cudgels once again, briefly. To take your example of history, I should say that historical *being* is not a concept. It is a reality. The concept of a historical being is a poor thing in comparison with the reality of that being. What I wish, myself, to try to discover through reflection, and to express, is the totality of that historical being. To be sure, I shall have to express myself using concepts; I have the greatest respect for conceptual thought. But the reality that I shall thus express will always transcend whatever I am able to say. Further, I grasp this reality in my consciousness, apart from my poor concepts. I do not retain all of it when I reduce it to concepts. If I stuck to concepts alone, I should simply impoverish myself. Why, as a philosopher, should I abjure the right to try to discover something more, by any other method which seems good to me? You will tell me that this "something more" will simply be one more concept, since this is how we think. But despite all that, it will be *that which* I wish to express *in* concepts — not my concept of a historical being, but historical being itself. If I cannot do this, prove to me that I cannot. You have not done so yet.

Mr. Wahl: May I take the floor for a minute? I should like to complement what Father Van Breda has just said. Although I agree with him at bottom, I wish to disagree with part of what he has said, in an attempt to reinterpret Mr. Strawson's remarks.

We are, after all, talking to each other. Thus, at this moment, we are forced back on normal linquistic usage. It is because we trust language to some extent that a conversation like this is possible.

Consider the term "conceptual reality." I should like to ask Mr. Strawson if he intends this term to signify a reality which is purely and strictly conceptual. Does not the term really denote, at bottom, reality itself? Being human, we must, unfortunately, (as Father Van Breda would, I think, agree) see reality more or less in conceptual terms. Thus the passages which Father Van Breda has used to indicate his disagreement with Mr. Strawson may also be used to suggest how they might be brought to agree. Since, alas, we are men, our reality is by necessity conceptual, and therefore we must have confidence in normal linguistic usage (without, however, trusting it entirely).

Father Van Breda: I could easily accept what Professor Wahl has just said, but I fear that this topic takes us far away from anything relating to the goal or the method of analytical philosophy.

Mr. Wahl: But surely the whole question is to find out whether the analysts themselves are not sometimes forced to take positions which they do not reach by applying the methods of analysis. It is quite possible that they are, and if so, then there

may be more agreement between them and us than would at first appear.

Mr. Strawson: I think that the term "conceptual reality" is ambiguous, and was an unhappy choice. All that I meant by it was "the facts about our concepts." Given this interpretation, my talk about "conceptual reality" can hardly be construed as an insiduous attempt to reduce reality to concepts.

Mr. Wahl: Out of sheer curiosity, I should like to ask you another question. Once there were two philosophers who collaborated — Russell and Whitehead, when they wrote *Principia Mathematica*. Whitehead attempted a sort of descriptive philosophy. Is his the path you would have us follow? Or rather Nicolai Hartmann's? Or Husserl's? I am not sure which one you have in mind, but there would seem to be many possible paths.

Mr. Strawson: For the descriptive metaphysician to follow?

Mr. Wahl: Yes.

Mr. Strawson: Well, I should think the most illustrious example he could set himself would be Kant.

Mr. Wahl: Or Aristotle? Kant did not describe. Kant looked for conditions.

Mr. Strawson: He looked for conditions, but he described the relations between the fundamental categories of thought.

Mr. Wahl: I should not take up more time. Professor Perelman has asked for the floor.

Mr. Charles Perelman: I should like to take up two sentences which occur near the beginning of your paper: "Sentences of ordinary language fulfill our ordinary needs. In general, they leave nothing to be desired in the way of clarity for practical purposes, even though they leave much to be desired from the point of view of *philosophical* clarity." Later on, you repeat several times that the philosopher ought to concern himself with a specifically philosophical sort of understanding. Unless I am mistaken, you thus adopt an attitude quite different from that of therapeutic positivism. You seem to take philosophical problems to be *real* problems, rather than assuming that they will somehow be dissolved by the analysis of our every-day use of ordinary language. I take it that an alternative account of analytic philosophy would be that philosophical problems arise from a careless reading of ordinary language, or from a misuse of it, or from its extension beyond its proper domain. If this were the case, the search for philosophical clarity which you propose would hardly be a respectable enterprise. Philosophical problems would be mere pseudo-problems. But if we take philosophical problems seriously, if we do not regard them as simply the fruits of a misuse of language, and if we try to solve them, must we not then be prepared to modify ordinary language in order to provide such solutions? In that case, can we still say, as you did towards the end of your paper, that we are not justified in breaking the links which bind ordinary language to reality?

Let me sum up my point in a dilemma. I may, on the one hand, respect ordinary language, say that philosophers have misused it, and then claim that there are no real philosophical problems — that all so-called philosophical problems are merely results of misunderstanding the language. On the other hand, I may respect the perplexity which philosophers feel, admit that their problems are real, and thus be driven to modify ordinary language in certain respects in order to solve these problems. In the latter case, I cannot be entirely respectful towards ordinary language.

Mr. Strawson: I am not sure why you think that there is a dilemma here. I can quite well say that there are real philosophical problems, and still add that they result, usually if not always, from a misunderstanding, from a mishandling of ordinary language. And I can say that they are not dissolved, but rather are correctly solved, by appealing to a more rigorous analysis of usage. Thus I can manifest a decent respect for ordinary language, while also trying to resolve philosophical problems (treated as quite genuine problems) through analytic methods. I see no absolute opposition between the attitude which respects ordinary language and attempts to dissolve philosophical problems on the one hand, and the attitude which wishes to solve them by modifying language on the other.

Mr. Perelman: I think, then, that what you call "philosophical understanding" boils down to nothing but an understanding of the fact that philosophers have misunderstood ordinary linguistic usage. But in that case the problems are problems arising from misunderstanding — not real problems.

Mr. Strawson: Perhaps we need to distinguish between two sorts of problems. Some problems result from a misunderstanding of ordinary language. Others . . . Of course, the misunderstanding which is in question here cannot be reduced to a simple violation of rules of correct usage. One philosopher may express himself loosely, while another may write with scrupulous care, though still failing to grasp the use he is making of certain expressions. The first may be a better philosopher than the second.

Mr. Perelman: But if the philosopher, who understands ordinary language in practical situations, misuses it when he philosophizes, then on your view, his philosophizing cannot be taken seriously. So we have really come back to what has been called therapeutic positivism. It is a matter of curing a defect of language, not of seriously studying a genuine philosophical issue. Whenever we encounter a philosophical problem, we must set to work to understand our language better, trusting that the problem will then disappear. I need not emphasize once again that if we take this view, "philosophical understanding" is merely the result of a mistake, or of a faulty knowledge of how our language works.

Mr. Strawson: But not *all* philosophical problems stem from theses which philosophers have advanced as result of distortions of ordinary language! Some may arise from questions which we ask ourselves about a particular array of concepts and about how these concepts work. They do not all take the form of mistakes . . .

Mr. Perelman: If I do not understand how certain concepts work, I do not thereby encounter a philosophical problem, but only a philological one. A philosophical problem arises from encountering a difficulty, a contradiction, not just from simple ignorance.

Mr. Strawson: It does, indeed, often arise out of a contradiction or a paradox. But it may also arise simply out of something which, in the course of our study, provokes our curiosity.

Mr. Perelman: But the instinct of curiosity which directs inquiry is not specifically philosophical. It underlies all intellectual disciplines, not philosophy alone. Personally, I should say that if the use of familiar notions leads me into difficulties, then I have a genuine philosophical problem, and I should proceed to adopt new notions in order to avoid these difficulties. This is why taking philosophy seriously means admitting that philosophers may sometimes change ordinary language in order to solve their problems.

Mr. Wahl: We shall have to close the discussion shortly, but I see that Professor Ayer wishes to speak. We should all be happy that he has chosen to do so.

Mr. A. J. Ayer: I simply wish to make a suggestion which occurred to me as the discussion progressed, and also to put forward a slight reservation about Mr. Strawson's paper.

My suggestion is that you go too far (and needlessly provoke Father Van Breda and his friends) when you put so much stress on the differences between analysis on the facts of language and analysis of the facts which language describes. For after all, these two kinds of analysis come down to the same thing. Take, for example, belief — the fact of believing this or that. One may ask what belief is, or one may ask what one is saying when one says "I believe . . ." For practical purposes, the

difference is not great; the only point in emphasizing the "linguistic" aspect so strongly is to avoid confusion between the inquiry philosophers conduct and that conducted in such sciences as ethnology, psychology, or history. In stressing this aspect, however, you have laid a snare into which Father Van Breda and others have fallen only too easily. I think it pointless to set such traps.

I should like to express some reservations, and bring in some further considerations, on another point. To hear you tell it, analytic philosophy sounds like a strange sort of *omnium gatherum*, taking in every sort of study, technique, and preoccupation. And yet, your inventory is incomplete: your five strands do not account for everything that happens in analytic philosophy. In particular, it seems to me that you have left out the epistemological problems which Carnap made so much of and which have given rise to so many discussions and so many lines of inquiry. In the recent history of the discussion of these problems, I do not think that the urge to describe has been particularly important. Rather, a polemical urge has been dominant — the urge to impose one's own point of view, and to answer one's opponents' arguments one by one. This is a very important point, and one which your paper passes over — namely, that analytic philosophers spend their time arguing, refuting each other, and trying to impose their competing descriptions of "underlying conceptual schemes" upon each other. Again, I am not sure whether the sort of discussions which you find in, for example, Ryle's *Concept of Mind*, would fall under any of your five headings. I shall not try to classify these discussions. But I think one should emphasize that they exist, and that a deeper study of the sorts of arguments which are employed in pursuing them would be fruitful.

Mr. Strawson: I think that I am prepared to agree with Mr. Ayer on both points. I certainly had no polemical intention in underlining the distinction between analysis of language and analysis of facts. I would not have wished it to be a distinction at which one could take umbrage.

On your second point, it is of course quite obvious that philosophers never agree. Since the philosopher is concerned, among other things, with the logical relations between concepts which his colleagues are also discussing, it is quite logical and natural that description and argument should go hand-in-hand.

Mr. Gilbert Ryle: You say "among other things." What other things do you have in mind?

Mr. Strawson: I said "among other things" because it seemed to me that concepts which actually function have various facets, and that one can study them in other ways than by noting their logical incompatibility with other concepts.

Mr. Ryle: Such as?

Mr. Strawson: For example, what Professor Austin has called the "performative aspect" of certain concepts does not seem to me to have much to do with the logical aspect of these concepts. (Professor Austin will correct me if I am wrong.) One might also cite the study of presuppositions, which one cannot easily assimilate to the study of relations of logical incompatibility.

Still, it goes without saying that the logical relations between concepts are an important aspect, perhaps the essential aspect, of what we call their "behavior in speech." This is why every description of these concepts will tend to take the form of an argument about the validity (or lack of validity) of these relations. All that one can say by way of opposing description and argument is to say that there are bad descriptions and arguments that do not prove very much.

Mr. Ayer: It seems to me that the part played by description is so slight, and that played by argumentation so great, in certain cases, that your use of "descriptive" is hardly justified. But I do not want to insist too much on this point.

• 26 •

MAX BLACK

Language and Reality

Bertrand Russell once said, "The study of grammar, in my opinion, is capable of throwing far more light on philosophical questions than is commonly supposed by philosophers. Although a grammatical distinction cannot be uncritically assumed to correspond to a genuine philosophical difference, yet the one is *prima facie* evidence of the other, and may often be most usefully employed as a source of discovery" (*The Principles of Mathematics*, Cambridge, 1903, p. 42).

The grammatical distinctions that Russell proceeds to use as guides to philosophical discoveries are the familiar ones between nouns, adjectives, and verbs. But he says that he hopes for a "classification, not of words, but of ideas" (*loc. cit.*) and adds, "I shall therefore call adjectives or predicates all notions which are capable of being such, even in a form in which grammar would call them substantives" (*ibid.*). If we are ready to call adjectives nouns, in defiance of grammar, we can hardly expect the grammatical distinction between the two parts of speech to guide us toward what Russell calls a "correct logic" (*ibid.*). If grammar is to teach us anything of philosophical importance, it must be treated with more respect.

Reprinted from *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 1–16, by permission of the author and the publisher. (Copyright 1962 by Cornell University.)

First published in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, XXXII (1959), 5–17.

My object in this paper is to clarify the character of philosophical inferences from grammar. By "grammar" I shall understand a classification of meaningful units of speech (i.e., "morphology"), together with rules for the correct arrangement of such units in sentences (i.e., "syntax"). The conclusions of the kinds of inferences I have in mind will be propositions commonly called "ontological"; they will be metaphysical statements about "the ultimate nature of reality," like "Relations exist," or "The World is the totality of facts, not of things," or "There exists one and only one substance."

I

In seeking ontological conclusions from linguistic premises, our starting point must be the grammar of some actual language, whether living or dead. From the standpoint of a language's capacity to express what is or what might be the case, it contains much that is superfluous, in grammar as well as in vocabulary. Grammatical propriety requires a German child to be indicated by a neuter expression ("*das* Kind"), a liability from which French children are exempt. If we are willing to speak ungrammatical German or French, so long as the fact-stating resources of the languages are unimpaired, we can dispense with indications of gender. For to be told that the word "*Kind*" is neuter is to be told nothing about children that would have been the case had the German language