MICHAEL DUMMETT

ORIGINS OF ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Michael Dummett

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Preface

This book is a revised version of a series of lectures I gave at the University of Bologna in the spring of 1987; I regret to admit that the lectures were given in English and not in Italian. I had no idea, when I composed them, of turning these lectures into a book, or even of publishing them at all. I was persuaded to publish them by my friend and former student Professor Eva Picardi, of the University of Bologna; they accordingly appeared, exactly as delivered, in two successive numbers of the journal *Lingua e Stile*.[1] Later, Dr. Joachim Schulte, also a friend of many years' standing, proposed to translate them with a view to bringing them out as a small book. I welcomed the idea: I had not intended to write a book, but the thought of publishing a *short* book on philosophy, which I should never have achieved if I had set out to write one, attracted me greatly. Schulte made an impeccable translation, and added the transcript of an interview between him and me conducted in October 1987; the book was published by Suhrkamp under the title *Ursprünge der analytischen Philosophie* in 1988. There was later an Italian translation by Eva Picardi, published by il Mulino in 1990, without the interview, under the title *Alle origine della filosofia analitica*, and a French translation by Marie-Anne Lescourret, published by Gallimard in 1991, with the interview, under the title *Les origines de la philosophie analytique*. I take this opportunity to thank all three of my translators for the care with which they undertook this often insufficiently appreciated work and the success with which they accomplished it. I have never

[1] *Lingua e Stile*, Anno XXIII, 1988, pp. 3-49, 171-210.

published a translation of anything, but I have occasionally made translations, for my own interest or for use in lectures or seminars, and I am well aware of the extreme difficulty of the task. In my view translators, who obviously perform an essential function, are hardly ever given the credit that is due to them. Usually their names appear only in small print, sometimes not even on the title-page; reviewers seldom mention them, except to complain. Very often, however, they merit applause; and that certainly applies, not only to the three who translated the present book, but to others who have translated other works of mine.

Thus, although the English text of these lectures has been available, it has not been published in an English-speaking country, nor in book form. I have for some time been wishing to bring it out in English; but I have wanted to make some revisions in the text before doing so, having been convinced that some sections called for improvement. I could not undertake such revision during the academic year 1988-9, when I devoted a year's sabbatical leave to producing *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* and *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics*. Since then, I was, until October of this year, engaged in teaching, among other things, and could find no time in which to accomplish the task. Having retired, I have now been able to carry it out.

The book does not purport to be a history; the absence of the article from the title is intended to indicate this. This is in part because, as explained in Chapter 1, I have tried to attend to those causal influences which appear to operate in the realm of ideas independently of who reads what or hears of what, but also because it makes no attempt to be comprehensive: I have left undiscussed the role of the British philosophers Russell and Moore in the genesis of analytical philosophy; I have also left the Vienna Circle virtually unmentioned, let alone the pragmatists. The book is intended, rather, as a series of philosophical reflections on the roots of the analytical tradition: observations any writer of a genuine history would have, to the extent that they are correct, to take into account. I hope that such a history will be written: it

would be fascinating. But my aim has been far less ambitious, and my book very much shorter than a real history could possibly be.

It takes the shape that it does because of a realisation that had been growing on me for some years past that the roots of analytical philosophy go back a long way before there was such a school. What is more, they are the *same* roots as those of the phenomenological school, which appears to many the antithesis of analytical, or of what they think of as 'Anglo-American', philosophy. I understand that futile conferences, composed of British analytical philosophers and French phenomenologists in equal numbers, used to take place in the 1950s, in the hope of establishing communication; but it seems to me that communication is more likely to result from an effort on both sides to understand how their respective styles of philosophy originated from the work of those at one time quite close to one another, and certainly giving no appearance of founding divergent schools. The term 'Anglo-American' is a misnomer that does a great deal of harm. Not only does it have the vicious effect of encouraging those who would accept the label for their work to believe that they have no need to read, let alone to write in, any language but English, but it gives a wholly false impression of how analytical philosophy originated. Important as Russell and Moore both were, neither was the, or even *a*, source of analytical philosophy; and pragmatism was merely an interesting tributary that flowed into the mainstream of the analytical tradition. The sources of analytical philosophy were the writings of philosophers who wrote, principally or exclusively, in the German language; and this would have remained obvious to everyone had it not been for the plague of Nazism which drove so many German-speaking philosophers across the Atlantic.

My realisation of this has resulted from my painful and still highly incomplete retracing of the steps taken by the young Ryle, who began his career as the exponent of Husserl for British audiences and used to lecture on Bolzano, Brentano, Frege, Meinong and Husserl. It is a great pity that little of his

knowledge of those authors was preserved in print, and, equally, that, as far as I can see, little that he learned from them survived into his later work; the topic least successfully treated, indeed least treated at all, in *The Concept of Mind* is that of intentionality.[2] My interest in Bolzano was a by-product of my work on Frege, whom in many respects he so signally anticipated; in the earlier drafts of *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics* there were extended comparisons between Bolzano and Frege, of which little survived into the far sparer version that I eventually published. But it is to others that I owe my interest in Husserl: to David Bell, who has written a book about him which deserves to awaken interest in him among the British philosophical public,[3] and above all to Herman Philipse. Philipse visited Oxford in 1982 or '83 and lectured on Husserl, and I had the temerity to co-operate with him in giving a seminar on Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* in Oxford in the summer of 1984.[4] I have also greatly profited from the critical notice of *Ursprünge der analytischen Philosophie* by Barry Smith,[5] as well as from the writings of Dagfinn Føllesdal, J. N. Mohanty and many others.

There is some overlap between sections of this book and my essay 'Thought and Perception: the Views of two Philosophical Innovators'.[6] The explanation is that, before being invited to lecture at Bologna, I had written an essay about twice the length of a journal article; when I received the invitation, I used it as a basis for the lectures, expanding it to three times its length by adding much new material. During this process,

[2] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, London, 1949.

[3] D. Bell, *Husserl*, London and New York, 1990.

[4] See H. Philipse, 'The Concept of Intentionality: Husserl's Development from the Brentano Period to the *Logical Investigations*', *Philosophy Research Archives*, Vol. XII, 1986-7, pp. 293-328, for an excellent sample of his contributions to the seminar.

[5] 'On the Origins of Analytic Philosophy', *Grazer philosophische Studien*, Vol. 35, 1989, pp. 153-73.

[6] In D. Bell and N. Cooper (eds.), *The Analytic Tradition: Meaning, Thought, and Knowledge*, Oxford, 1990; reprinted in M. Dummett, *Frege and Other Philosophers*, Oxford, 1991.

I was asked by David Bell to contribute to the volume being edited by him and Neil Cooper. Explaining the circumstances, I asked permission to submit a reduced version of the original essay; Bell agreed, and I went back to that essay, this time cutting it down to half its length. Before the result was published, Bell persuaded me that I had not done justice to Brentano; I therefore expanded that section to a more subtle discussion. For this edition of the book, I have incorporated much of what I wrote about Brentano in the essay, being unable to do better now than I did then.

David Bell, John Skorupski and others have been for a little time co-operating on a long-term project of research into the origins of analytical philosophy; I hope that it will eventually result in a book tracing the stages of this tangled episode of intellectual history, an understanding of which I believe capable of bearing much fruit in an improved insight into the philosophical issues. It must in any case contribute to closing the absurd gulf that formerly opened up between 'Anglo-American' and 'Continental' philosophy, which many in the recent past have taken part in bridging. Philosophy, having no agreed methodology and hardly any incontrovertible triumphs, is peculiarly subject to schisms and sectarianism; but they do the subject only harm. I hope, too, that this book may serve in some degree to stimulate that interest in the philosophical past that I believe to be a precondition of mutual comprehension.

In the conflict between the analytical and phenomenological schools, one could be neutral only by regarding both as equally in error; such a book as this could therefore hardly be written from a neutral standpoint. This one has been written by a practitioner of analytical philosophy. Although I have been concerned to show how close were the founders of the two schools to each other at the beginning of the century, I could do no other than argue in favour of the analytical side on points where they diverged. A book covering the same gound, written from a phenomenological standpoint, would be a counterweight of the highest interest: I hope that someone will write it.

Oxford, December 1992 M.D.

To Joachim and Eva

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CHAPTER 1

The History of Thinkers and the History of Ideas

It is important to analytical philosophy that it understand its own history, seeing itself in the context of the general history of philosophy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: especially is this true at a time when it is undergoing profound changes. In what follows I shall try to explore the origins of analytical philosophy; but this will not be a genuine historical investigation, for two reasons.

First, I shall ignore the contributions to the birth of analytical philosophy of the British philosophers Russell and Moore, and concentrate on those of philosophers writing in the German language. This is not because I do not think the contributions of Russell and Moore to be of profound importance, but because this ground has been fairly well worked over, and because, despite Russell's familiarity with the work of German-speaking philosophers, especially of Frege and Meinong, he and Moore sprang from a very different philosophical milieu. A grave historical distortion arises from a prevalent modern habit of speaking of analytical philosophy as "Anglo-American". Apart from its implicit dismissal of the work of modern Scandinavian philosophers, and of the more recent interest in analytical philosophy that has arisen in a great many other European countries, including Italy, Germany and Spain, this terminology utterly distorts the historical context in which analytical philosophy came to birth, in the light of which it would better be called

"Anglo-Austrian" than "Anglo-American". In central Europe, that is to say, in the great cultural region defined by the use of the German language for purposes of publication, there were throughout the nineteenth century a great many diverse currents in philosophy, which did not, however, flow along isolated channels, but collided with each other because of the communication between representatives of the different trends in the universities. More than one of these currents contributed, in the twentieth century, to the formation of analytical philosophy, which, before Hitler came to power, was to be viewed as more a central European than a British phenomenon. The shifting of the scientific and philosophical centre of gravity across the Atlantic, now seen in the United States as already accomplished, and, by anyone, as at least threatened, was, of course, principally a long-term effect of political events, that is, of the Nazi regime which drove so many to take refuge in America: the process is now being completed by those many contemporary European governments that have set themselves to inflict the maximum damage on their countries' university systems. That, of course, does not make it any the less real; but it is a grave mistake to project present realities back into a past in which they were as yet unimaginable.

It is not merely that I shall concentrate on only one of the two strands which went to form analytical philosophy: I shall scarcely be concerned to respect historical causation at all. A genuine historical enquiry must offer evidence that influences were transmitted from particular philosophers to other particular philosophers. To establish this, dates of publication must be scrutinised, diaries and personal correspondence studied, even library catalogues examined to discover what specific individuals read or might have read. I shall be unconcerned with any of this, and therefore mine is not a genuine historical enquiry, at least not one of the usual sort.

The history of ideas is full of developments that cannot be explained by historical enquiries of the usual sort. Someone advances a new idea and supports it with certain arguments; only a short time later someone else puts forward the very

same idea, supporting it with very similar arguments: and yet it appears that he had had no opportunity to read the work of the one who anticipated him. Or, yet more remarkable, someone reacts against, or puts forward arguments to counter, that new idea, although, again, it proves that he had no knowledge that it had actually been advanced by anyone. Ideas, as it is said, are "in the air". The true explanation is presumably that, at a certain stage in the history of any subject, ideas become visible, though only to those with keen mental eyesight, that not even those with the sharpest vision could have perceived at an earlier stage. If we are interested in the history of thought rather than of thinkers, it is these developments that will concern us, rather than those discoverable by the processes of genuine historical enquiry. At any rate, it is these with which I shall be concerned: I shall talk about the directions in which various philosophical ideas led and what were legitimate developments from them, without much troubling myself about who read whose work or whether X derived a certain idea from Y or arrived at it independently. I am not depreciating genuine historical enquiry, which serves to satisfy a perfectly reasonable type of curiosity: I am simply engaging in a different, though allied, discussion.

CHAPTER 2

The Linguistic Turn

What distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained. Widely as they differed from one another, the logical positivists, Wittgenstein in all phases of his career, Oxford 'ordinary language' philosophy and post-Carnapian philosophy in the United States as represented by Quine and Davidson all adhered to these twin axioms. Some recent work in the analytical tradition has reversed this priority, in the order of explanation, of language over thought, holding that language can be explained only in terms of antecedently given notions of different types of thought, considered independently of their linguistic expression. A good example of this new trend is Gareth Evans's posthumous book,[1] which essays an account, independent of language, of what it is to think about an object in each of various ways, and then seeks to explain the different verbal means of effecting reference to an object in terms of these ways of thinking about it. On my characterisation, therefore, Evans was no longer an analytical philosopher. He was, indeed, squarely in the analytical tradition: the three pillars on which his book rests are Russell, Moore and Frege. Yet it is only as belonging to this tradition – as adopting a certain philosophical style and as

[1] G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. J. McDowell, Oxford, 1982.

appealing to certain writers rather than to certain others – that he remains a member of the analytical school.

On this characterisation, therefore, analytical philosophy was born when the 'linguistic turn' was taken. This was not, of course, taken uniformly by any group of philosophers at any one time: but the first clear example known to me occurs in Frege's *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*[2] of 1884. At a crucial point in the book, Frege raises the Kantian question, "How are numbers given to us, granted that we have no idea or intuition of them?". His answer depends upon the celebrated context principle, which he had laid down in the Introduction as one of the fundamental methodological principles to be followed in the book. The context principle is, however, formulated as one governing an enquiry into language rather than into modes of thought. If it had been formulated in the latter way, it would have said that there is no such thing as thinking *of* an object save in the course of thinking something specific about it. Frege's answer to his Kantian question would in that case have been that numbers are given to us through our grasping whole thoughts concerning them: the investigation would then have proceeded by enquiring what is involved in grasping such thoughts. The context principle is not formulated in that way, however, but as the thesis that it is only in the context of a *sentence* that a *word* has meaning: the investigation therefore takes the form of asking how we can fix the senses of sentences containing terms for numbers. An epistemological enquiry (behind which lies an ontological one) is to be answered by a linguistic investigation.

No justification for the linguistic turn is offered in *Grundlagen*: it is simply taken, as being the most natural way of going about the philosophical enquiry. And yet, as his philosophy developed, Frege became more and more insistent that thoughts, and not the sentences that express them, formed his true subject-matter. Natural language came to appear to him more of an obstacle than a guide in logical and

[2] Gottlob Frege, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Breslau, 1884; bilingual edn., *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, with German and English on facing pages, trans. J. L. Austin, second revised edn., Oxford, 1978. See §62.

philosophical enquiries. Especially was this so after his realisation that he had after all no satisfactory solution to Russell's paradox, and that therefore he had failed in what he had set himself as his life's work, to set number theory and analysis on indisputably firm foundations. This occurred in August 1906; and he thereafter rejected his whole former conception of logical objects, including classes (extensions of concepts), blaming language for the illusion of their existence generated by the possibility of forming apparent singular terms of the form "the extension of the concept F". Thus, in November 1906 he wrote to Husserl that "The main task of the logician consists in liberation from language",[3] and in the article 'Erkenntnisquellen', completed in the last year of his life, he said that "a great part of the work of the philosopher consists in ... a struggle with language".[4]

Had the linguistic turn taken in *Grundlagen* been an aberration, then? Had Frege inadvertently anticipated analytical philosophy, but subsequently set himself upon another path? Such a diagnosis is superficial. After all, while it is in the writings of his late period (mid-1906 until his death) that we find the most vehement denunciations of natural language, it is also in the writings of that period that we find the greatest insistence on the mirroring of thoughts by sentences. "The sentence can be regarded as an image of the thought in that to the relation between the part and the whole within the thought there by and large corresponds the same relation between the part of the sentence and the sentence", Frege wrote in his notes for Darmstaedter.[5] Language may be a distorting mirror: but it is the only mirror that we have.

What above all renders the proposed diagnosis superficial is the presence in Frege's philosophy of deep currents driving towards the investigation of thoughts through the analysis of language. It is clear that he himself was not fully conscious of

[3] G. Frege, *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, trans. H. Kaal, ed. B. McGuinness, Oxford, 1980, p. 68.

[4] G. Frege, *Posthumous Writings*, trans. P. Long and R. White, Oxford, 1979, p. 270.

[5] Ibid., p. 255.

the thrust in this direction, which came from certain of his doctrines, but was impeded by others. In *Grundlagen* his attitude to language was as yet unperturbed by the ambivalent feelings towards it that he later developed; but the linguistic turn that occurred in that book faithfully represents the general tendency of his thinking, a tendency obscured but not obliterated by the reservations about reliance on linguistic forms that he later expressed.

I shall discuss three features of Frege's philosophy which made the linguistic turn a natural development from it, even though he never explicitly acknowledged that they had this character.

(1) The discernment of constituent senses as parts of a thought is parasitic upon the apprehension of the structure of the sentence expressing it. Frege claimed that the structure of a thought must be reflected in the structure of a sentence expressing it, and indeed that seems essential to the notion of *expressing* a thought, rather than merely encoding it. But, conversely, it is hard to explain what is meant by speaking of the structure of a thought without allusion to its verbal expression. I do not mean to suggest that the relevant notion of the structure of a sentence is attainable without consideration of its sense: on the contrary, the syntactic analysis must be carried out with an eye to subsequent semantic explanation of how the sentence is determined as true or false in accordance with its composition. The two notions, of the structure of the sentence and of the structure of the thought, must be developed together. But that is enough to overturn the conception of a study of the structure of thoughts carried out without reference to their linguistic expression. It does *not*, conversely, overthrow the conception of a study of language independently of a *direct* study of thoughts, considered as unmediated by language. The sentence expresses a thought in virtue of its having semantic properties, of being assessable by certain means as true or as false. The thought is grasped in grasping the semantic properties of the sentence: to speak of the structure of the thought is to speak of the semantic interrelation of the parts