

MILTON K. MUNITZ

*Contemporary
Analytic
Philosophy*

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PREFACE

In writing this book I have had in mind primarily the needs of those students or other readers who, having had some introductory work in philosophy, are ready to undertake a variety of steps toward deepening their knowledge of the subject. For example, they may set out to explore particular periods or individual figures in the history of philosophy, or one or another specialized area of philosophy, each with its own budget of problems. I try to meet one aspect of this type of need by examining some of the leading thinkers and problems of twentieth-century analytic philosophy. Because this book is an introductory survey of its material, it does not aim at encyclopedic coverage or exhaustive detail. Selection, of course, is inevitable. Moreover, the important and representative thinkers I have chosen to dwell on, for all their diversity, have devoted themselves for the most part to topics in logic, the philosophy of language, and ontology. Hence it is on these topics that I have concentrated.

A feature of this book is its inclusion of extended quotations from the writings of the philosophers examined. I have integrated these quotations within my narrative and explanatory account. By this means, it is hoped, the reader will obtain a fair sample of the content and style of each thinker's way of putting matters. And of course a major purpose in my use of this device is to encourage readers to turn to the complete works of the thinkers whose ideas are here only briefly glimpsed and surveyed.

M. K. M.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

'CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY'

The major periods in the history of philosophy are commonly labeled 'ancient', 'medieval', 'modern', and 'contemporary'. Of these terms, 'ancient', 'medieval', and 'modern' are normally used in a fairly straightforward way to demarcate easily recognized blocks of a stabilized past. Each of the periods so designated has a structure that has been traversed often enough so that one can readily identify its broad outlines, characteristic features, undisputed peaks, and major accomplishments. For example, there is little disagreement that a study of ancient philosophy would begin with the pre-Socratic philosophers (e.g., Parmenides, Heraclitus, Anaximander, the Pythagoreans, Democritus) and the major Sophists. This would be followed by an analysis of the towering achievements of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It would conclude with an examination of the philosophies of neo-Platonism, Epicureanism, Scepticism, Stoicism, and the earliest formulations of Jewish and Christian thought. In a similar fashion, the material encompassed by the label 'medieval philosophy' would range over the views of such thinkers as St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Maimonides, and Avicenna. Again, the long period covered by the term 'modern philosophy' would normally include a study of Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes; the works of the seventeenth-century rationalists—Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz; the writings of the British empiricists—Locke, Berkeley, and Hume; the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant; and the contributions of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, among others, in the nineteenth century.

By contrast with these earlier periods, and for a number of obvious

or plausible reasons, what falls under the heading of 'contemporary philosophy' is not fixed or standardized to the same degree. For one thing, the sphere of the 'contemporary' has continually shifting boundaries with the advance of time. Thus an account of contemporary philosophy written in the 1980s has a partially different subject matter from one written, say, in the 1930s. Furthermore, like its cognate expressions 'now' or 'present', the term 'contemporary' has narrower and wider uses. It can be used to refer to what is most recent and current as well as to the entire period of the 'present century'. Most importantly, one must employ some principles of selection in deciding what to include, what to stress, what to identify as of primary and possibly enduring value, and what is of lesser significance. Because there are no simple or universally agreed-upon answers to these questions, at least of the degree of relative uniformity holding for earlier periods of the history of philosophy, there are greater opportunities for flexibility of approach and choice. The greatest differences of opinion are likely to concern the very recent past and what is currently under active discussion. Nevertheless, as one gains the advantage of a broadening perspective into the ever-lengthening past, the outlines begin to be clearer, the uncertainties fewer, and the possible divergences of opinion less pronounced.

With respect to the temporal span to be covered, 'contemporary philosophy' in its narrowest sense would signify only what is actively under discussion at the present time. In a slightly more liberal use, it might be extended to include philosophical discussions of the quite recent past, say the last two or three decades. The advantage of restricting the scope of 'contemporary philosophy' to the immediate present or the very recent past is that it leads directly to the active frontiers of research. One is plunged into an examination of the problems, options, and controversies that make up the content of lively ongoing discussion. Exploring this material in its various dimensions and directions provides an effective and stimulating way of participating in the activity of philosophical inquiry. One need not minimize or disparage these advantages in pointing to the possible shortcomings of this way of restricting the scope of 'contemporary philosophy'. These very advantages are enhanced and made more secure by enlarging the field to be covered beyond the narrow temporal limits just described. To have a better grasp of matters under current active discussion it is helpful to see them against the wider historical background out of which they arose. A broadening and deepening of that background is essential to a more adequate understanding of these discussions. To take one simple illustration: Certain questions in philosophical logic of a semantical nature—those for example having to do with 'the problem of singular reference'—are being much debated in the literature at the present time (as in the work of Kripke, Dummett,

Strawson, Quine, and others). However, these questions cannot be fully understood without seeing them in the context and against the background of a sequence of philosophical investigations stemming from the work of Gottlob Frege, who lived at the end of the last century and into the early part of this century. One is in a better position to understand the present-day controversies and distinctions if one is aware of how they are related to the earlier views not only of Frege but of Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and others. Examples could easily be multiplied that make a similar point outside the domain of philosophical logic or the field of analytic philosophy generally.

In addition to the foregoing there is a more conventional reason that argues for broadening the scope of the field to be covered under the heading 'contemporary philosophy'. If, as indeed is the case, the term 'modern philosophy' is conventionally used to extend roughly until the end of the nineteenth century, then the term 'contemporary philosophy' can be usefully reserved to encompass the whole span of twentieth-century philosophy. And this is how we shall understand the temporal scope of our interest in what follows.

ON CHARACTERIZING THE PRESENT EPOCH IN PHILOSOPHY

Our first task, before looking at the details concerning particular themes and individual thinkers, is to get some preliminary bird's-eye view of the main contours of our subject. What, if anything, sets off our age against earlier epochs? Even if we grant that philosophy, wherever and whenever it is pursued, tends to circle around certain fundamental and recurrent themes, still the differences between one period and another—changes in voice, emphasis, orientation, or prevalent doctrine—are noticeable and important features. Can we point, then, to some relatively distinctive and innovative features of the philosophic activity of our own time?

Our philosophic period is sometimes described as 'an age of analysis'. This characterization, although an oversimplification, calls attention to the fact that an outstanding feature of contemporary philosophy is the emergence of analytic philosophy to a position of dominance.

The expression 'analytic philosophy', as is the case with many classificatory labels, cannot be given a single, universally agreed-upon, precise definition. It can be used in wider or narrower senses. In its wider use it encompasses an assortment of differently oriented schools or philosophies that nevertheless have a number of points of overlap, affinity, and connection with one another. The term 'analytic philosophy' may be used in contemporary philosophy to cover the kind of analysis practiced by

George E. Moore; the conception of logical analysis championed by Bertrand Russell; the central teachings of the logical positivists (e.g., Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, Alfred J. Ayer); the 'Oxford School of ordinary language philosophy' as led, for example, by John Austin; the principal types of conceptual analysis associated with the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein; the examination of various semantical questions about reference and truth belonging to the sphere of philosophical logic associated with recent developments in formal logic and linguistics (e.g., the work of Willard Van Orman Quine, Peter F. Strawson, Jaakko Hintikka, Saul Kripke, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett). On the other hand, the term 'analytic philosophy' might be used, more restrictively, to apply to the views of some particular thinker or school of thought from among the above mentioned list.

Let us, for the moment, use the term 'analytic philosophy' in its wider sense and try to describe what in an overall way is distinctive of it. For this purpose, let us pause to take a brief backward glance at the history of modern philosophy from Descartes down to the end of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, in order to see in what way contemporary analytic philosophy represents a fresh development. The major difference between the earlier epoch and that of contemporary analytic philosophy is that whereas modern philosophy is dominated by a concern with *epistemological* issues, contemporary analytic philosophy represents a shift to issues of a *logico-linguistic* sort.

Modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes, has as its central preoccupation a concern with the problems of epistemology (the theory of knowledge). These problems can be summed up in such questions as: What are the powers of the mind in its efforts to achieve knowledge of the external world? To what extent are the mind's faculties able to penetrate the structure of reality? How adequate are the mind's ideas in representing and disclosing the nature of the world? What are the limits of the mind's abilities to achieve the truth?

The terms in which I have just couched the traditional interests of epistemology—terms such as '*the nature and limits of the powers (or faculties) of the mind*', '*the external world*', '*the extent to which the mind's ideas adequately represent the nature of the external world*'—recall some of the characteristic ways in which the problems of epistemology were posed and discussed throughout the modern period of philosophy. This is the case whether we turn to the writings of rationalists such as Descartes and Leibniz or empiricists such as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, or to the philosophy of Kant and the major successors of Kant up to the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, these problems, so phrased, continue to pre-occupy some thinkers well into the twentieth century. To be sure, there are important differences in the ways the continental rationalists, the Brit-

ish empiricists, Kant, later representational dualists of various sorts, phenomenologists, as well as numerous other epistemologists went about their business and offered their own distinctive solutions to 'the problem of knowledge'. Yet for all their differences they shared certain underlying presuppositions in dealing with the problem of knowledge. In following the implications and consequences of these presuppositions they faced various dialectical problems that they tried to solve, each in his distinctive way.

The commonly shared orientation that pervades modern epistemology is the contrast between *subject* and *object*, i.e., the distinction between *the knowing mind* and *the external world* that it confronts and seeks to know. Descartes' philosophy helped set the pattern for this way of formulating the problems of epistemology. A primary feature of his philosophy is the stress it places on the fact that the one thing we can be sure of, even in the face of thoroughgoing radical scepticism, is the existence of the mind itself. *Cogito, ergo sum*. (I think, therefore I am.) Much of his philosophy, as it undertakes to escape from its own self-imposed sceptical beginnings, is devoted to examining how to get 'outside' the mind, how to reestablish grounds for a responsible belief in the external world (the world of physical phenomena) and a belief in God. The route to be followed was to examine the various ideas and beliefs that form the *contents* of the mind, to examine which among these ideas and beliefs are to be taken as *adequate representations* of those entities that presumably lie outside and independently of the mind, and are possessed of their own properties and relations. Descartes' philosophic criterion for judging the adequacy of ideas and beliefs in this representational role was strongly influenced by his use of mathematical knowledge as a model or paradigm. As a rationalist Descartes appealed to the standards that reason imposes when it operates in its most rigorous form, as is the case in the deductive demonstrations of mathematics. He demands, as an ideal to be aimed at, that all our accepted ideas in any intellectual domain, even outside of mathematics, be 'clear and distinct'. He also demands that our beliefs start, as they do in a deductive system of mathematics, from certain intuitively certain, axiomatic premisses, and that they proceed, step by step, through necessary deductive inference to securely established, demonstrable conclusions.

The British empiricists, for all their rebellion against some of the rationalists' claims, started with the same 'subject-object' dualistic framework, the same mentalistic model and orientation to the epistemological problem. Instead of appealing, with Descartes, to rationally certified clear and distinct ideas or to demonstrative proofs, they emphasized the appeal to the *data of sense experience* as the basis for determining any legitimate claim to knowledge. The empiricists stressed the need for showing not

only that the *genesis* of all our ideas is to be found in certain sense-given originals, but also that it is to sense experience that appeal must be made in the end as the *testing ground* for all our beliefs. This is not the occasion to rehearse the full story of how the British empiricists, especially as we move from Locke to Berkeley and finally to Hume, worked out the dialectical consequences of this way of thinking. It will suffice to recall that the outstanding and impressive outcome of the relentless following out of the implications of the starting point of that philosophy was the scepticism of Hume. Hume's devastating critique carried out what Locke (to some extent) and Berkeley (more thoroughly in certain directions) had already shown: that the mind in fact is incapable of achieving any secure knowledge of an independently existing material world. What Hume called into question was the reliance upon, and appeal to, the very fundamental philosophical notions of *material or mental substances* and *necessary causal connections* as holding among such substances. Hume undermined the commonly employed framework of much of traditional metaphysics in its use of these concepts, in particular the way in which the epistemological problem was formulated insofar as it made use of these same concepts.

The monumental efforts of Kant's critical philosophy, as stated in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, were devoted in part to 'answering Hume'. Kant undertook to show how one can incorporate the best insights of the rationalists and empiricists and yet not agree with either one completely. His own solution to the problem of knowledge—what the mind can know and what it cannot—rested on recognizing the all-important distinction between what is *given* to the mind in the form of unordered data of sensory experience, and what the mind *contributes* as a result of imposing on given sensuous materials the *a priori* forms of the mind's own constitution. Kant's 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy consisted in challenging the commonly shared realism of older philosophies according to which knowledge is a *disclosure* of a preexistent structure in an independently existing world. For Kant, knowledge is a *product*, a construction, not a disclosure. Knowledge has to do with a domain of phenomena, of appearances. However, what things-in-themselves are, what lies beyond all actual or possible experience, is something of which no knowledge can ever be had. The claims of traditional metaphysics to know about the world as a whole, God, freedom, or the immortality of the soul, are, for Kant, also forever incapable of realization. These matters lie in the domain of the transcendent, the unknowable, the noumenal.

Kant's solution to the epistemological problem marks a milestone in the history of modern philosophy. However, in one respect it gives clear, unmistakable evidence of being itself dominated by the same subject-object dualism, of being constrained and guided by the same mentalistic model, as are all other varieties of epistemology in modern philosophy.

While in one respect Kant showed a way of answering Hume's scepticism, his philosophy raised a number of difficulties of its own. His successors and critics were quick to point these out. Chief among them was the problem of rendering coherent, even within the framework of Kant's own philosophy, the use of the 'concept' of things-in-themselves. How is it possible to give meaning to the very notion of a reality that is totally unknowable, that exists independently of all actual as well as possible experience? Kant left a rich but mixed legacy; it drove home even more deeply the difficulties of working with a philosophy whose central question is how it is possible for men to have knowledge of the external world, when we insist on construing the problem of knowledge as one of establishing a satisfactory relation between ideas as the contents of the mind and a world that exists beyond those ideas. What was needed in order to understand the nature of knowledge was to discard altogether the very model that lay at the center of the problem so conceived. That model required us to think in terms of the mind as a container, a substance facing the world beyond. It was a mind said to have certain ideas 'within' itself, and so presenting us with the need of somehow finding a way of breaking out of those ideas to determine the properties of the world 'outside'.

A noticeable feature of much of contemporary philosophy, beginning with the pragmatists, continuing with the work of the analytic philosophers deriving in one way or another from the Fregean concern with logico-linguistic issues, and continuing even into the efforts of many metaphysicians concerned with building world views, is the concerted effort to break away from the epistemological problem and its various 'solutions' as conceived in modern philosophy. This is not to say that such efforts always succeed, or indeed that they do not themselves betray in their very formulations the presence and continued influence of the older ways of thinking that they seek to replace. Still, insofar as we may make any valid generalization about the matter, what has happened in much of contemporary philosophy is the dropping altogether of the subject-object orientation for coming to understand the nature of knowledge. Instead of an *epistemological problem* as traditionally conceived, we find a concern (as in the pragmatists and analytic philosophies of the post-Fregean tradition) with questions of the *logic of inquiry* (methodology) and with clarifying the *language* in which we talk about knowledge and belief. Instead of asking *how*, or indeed *whether* it is possible for the mind to know an external world, these philosophies would start by presupposing the fact that we do already possess knowledge in many ways, and in any case can come to know the world. If scepticism or a doctrine of the essential unknowability of the world is the outcome of the dialectical tracing out of the consequences of our starting point, it is necessary to abandon the very model, paradigm, or set of presuppositions that leads to such

an outcome. Such scepticism shows there is something wrong with the way the problem was set up to begin with. There is no *problem* of the external world if this means either we cannot be sure there is such a world, or (as another view might hold) we can never come to know *what* its structure is, though we may claim to know *that* it exists.

To avoid scepticism, we begin by examining the fact that not only in everyday life and on a commonsense level do we have all sorts of perfectly reliable bits of information, satisfactory insights and explanations as to why things happen, but in the sciences, especially, the progressive achievement of reliable knowledge about various subject matters is a basic fact. The problem is not to understand *whether* it is possible to achieve knowledge. The problem is to show the ways in which this comes about: the conditions and procedures for achieving such knowledge. The task is one of correctly describing how we go from doubt, ignorance, and inadequately supported or crude beliefs to well-established ones, how we distinguish sound from unsound beliefs, how we are able to make progress on the level of the enlargement as well as in terms of the refinement of our beliefs about the world and its multitudinous parts.

In a broad use of the term 'logic', as derived from the Greek term *logos*, one can say that in conformity with the complex meanings of the latter term, logic deals with man's distinctive power of speech, inference, conceptual thought, and rational inquiry. If we take the term 'logic' in this broad sense (and so not restricted, as it sometimes is, to the study of formal deductive inference alone), we could say that contemporary analytic philosophy is dominated by attention to matters logical. It centers on questions having to do with the means for achieving clarity of linguistic meaning; with the characterization of methods of responsible inquiry for reaching the truth; with the conditions for realizing soundness and validity in argument. Analytic philosophy, in this many-faceted concern with logic, goes beyond the answers traditional logic gave to these questions. It seeks to show how a rejuvenated and more subtly developed discipline of logic can guide the employment of reason.

In general, then, we shall find three types of themes given special attention in contemporary analytic philosophy as well as in the work of some of the pragmatist philosophers.

1. A study of the role of *language* in communication and thought; and, in particular, the problem of how to identify, achieve, or insure the presence of *meaning* in the use of language.
2. An examination of the logic of inquiry or *methodology*, insofar as this has to do with evaluating the variety of techniques and conditions for achieving *true* beliefs and warranted claims to knowledge.

3. A philosophical examination of the resources of *formal logic* in its modern, revitalized forms, and the several ways in which these resources may be applied in helping to solve various philosophical problems.

These three themes are closely interrelated. However, the specific manner of their interconnection is manifold and receives differing kinds and amounts of attention or emphasis by various writers and special schools.

There is one common feature, one characteristic emphasis that belongs to all analytic philosophies and to some pragmatist philosophers. This consists in the careful attention paid to the use of *language* as the medium of communication of thought, and to the various conditions and resources that language makes available for such communication. In this connection, special concern is shown for the *problem of meaning*. What are the ways of achieving or insuring the presence of meaning in our use of language? Are there certain conditions for meaningfulness that have to be met? What ways are available for making explicit and clear the meanings and uses of various linguistic expressions? Given the frequent failure, difficulty, or inadequacy in achieving a clear use of language, what are the standards and techniques for achieving clarification? The attempt to answer questions such as these is a marked characteristic of contemporary philosophy, beginning with the earliest efforts of the pragmatists, and continuing in one form or another down to the present day in the work of various analytic philosophers. It is true, of course, that a concern with the clarification of meaning has always been characteristic of and essential to the philosophic enterprise, ever since the days of Socrates at least. What distinguish the focal interest of this question in contemporary philosophy are the different motivations and occasions that provoked a fresh and intensified concern with it. We shall examine some of the details later, but for the moment let me summarize some of these special motivations.

In some cases, for example in Moore's elaborate and painstaking exercises in analysis, we find a continuation of what we may call the Socratic (Platonic) tradition. It consists in the demand that we make explicit and *become* clear about some of our basic concepts, even about the ordinary terms and words we use in everyday speech. While we do communicate readily enough by their means, when pressed to give a careful *analysis* of their meaning (a statement of their basic components), we are often baffled and unable to do so. For example, to give an analysis of 'perception', 'description', 'morally right', 'truth', 'reality', is a matter of the greatest difficulty. To spend one's philosophic efforts in trying to give an analysis of the meaning of these and other basic concepts—this, for Moore, is the inescapable and difficult challenge a philosopher must meet.