

The Game of the Name

INTRODUCING LOGIC, LANGUAGE,
AND MIND

Gregory McCulloch

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The Game of the Name

For Ros

Preface

This book is an introduction to central aspects of contemporary philosophy. It started life in 1978 as an undergraduate dissertation on John McDowell's insufficiently celebrated paper 'On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name'. Then, as now, that paper seemed to me to concentrate into one vivid issue many of the major concerns of twentieth-century philosophy. At length the undergraduate dissertation grew into an Oxford B. Phil. thesis, which in turn was expanded, under McDowell's supervision, and awarded the D. Phil. in 1983. This book is the latest member of that series, although not one sentence even of its immediate predecessor remains.

The reason for this abrupt discontinuity has already been given: the book is intended primarily to introduce undergraduates to the major philosophical concerns on which McDowell's paper focuses so vividly. These concerns are almost exclusively to do with language and logic, on the one hand, and mind, on the other, and thus with the organizing notion, meaning. Of course, anyone who knows anything about modern philosophy will probably know that it has had these rather exclusive concerns for the best part of the present century. But the obsession with meaning has been refocused and, if anything, intensified of late by the growth of, and partial invasion of philosophy by, the discipline called 'cognitive science'. This development gives rise to mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is no doubt that philosophy, at least in English-speaking circles, has been enjoying something of a renaissance since, say, the mid-1960s. It needs little imagination or expertise to appreciate the qualitative improvement in resourcefulness, depth, focus, and professionalism shown by the average post-1970 philosophical book or article over its counterpart of the 1950s: and a chief reason for this, it seems to me, is the presence of fall-out from the re-emergence of the 'computer model' of the mind. But on the other side of the matter is an increasing problem. The new mind/language/computers 'interface' philosophy is helping to generate a vast secondary literature of technical and pseudo-technical material, much of it presupposing highly specific and contentious answers to profound philosophical questions which usually receive, at best, a cursory mention. Thus new students who wish to work into

this contemporary material have a serious problem. They realize they have to know a bit about modern logic, and rather more about its attendant metaphysics and about the elements of materialism in the philosophy of mind. And they certainly receive the impression from much modern literature that some grand synthesis has taken place which somehow incorporates all that is best in these three fields. What, in my experience, they are unlikely to find much explicit help with is the original shape and nature of the material that has allegedly been thus synthesized. But without this they are helpless.

So I have attempted to provide such help here. I have assumed the small familiarity with elementary symbolic logic which the usual introductory course makes available, the general awareness of the problems, aims, and methods of analytic philosophy which one or two years of undergraduate studies would provide, and little else besides. My hope is that by working through this book the student will gain the sort of orientation that an entry into central contemporary debate requires: a sense of where the 'interface' philosophy has come from, and thus a feel for the typical philosophical concerns and alternatives that its background dictates.

I should, however, admit here to a certain somewhat ulterior motive. Despite my admiration for much recent work on language, mind, and logic, I am rather sceptical about the 'interface' philosophy, and doubt whether much of it is even on the right lines: certainly I do not suppose, as some of its more enthusiastic proponents seem to do, that it is only a matter of time before someone gets all the details right and we can stop worrying about mind and language. Thus, as well as being intended to serve as an introduction to the background of contemporary debate, this book is also partly intended to inculcate in the reader the right sort of philosophical attitude to its subject-matter. Philosophy flourishes best when people come together to cultivate the art and skills of good thinking: it degenerates into useless scholasticism, deservedly scorned by those in other walks of life, when its practitioners consider themselves to be the guardians and perpetrators of an overarching and all-powerful body of doctrine. In my view, too many contributions to the aforementioned secondary literature are barely philosophical at all, but instead read like popularizing sketches towards an adumbration of a prolegomenon for any future naturalistic metaphysic. But producing work like this is every bit as bad as looking for one's philosophy in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and equally to be avoided.

I have been aware of three of the particular vices to which a book of the present kind is prey. First, one should not merely attempt to produce a bland or even-handed conspectus of even the main possible positions in the field. Apart from the fact that such an enterprise would be virtually impossible in the present case due to sheer size and complexity, such handbooks can at best inform: whereas philosophy students should be encouraged to think for themselves as early as possible. But second, neither should the author of an introduction set out to defend rigorously and in detail one particular position in the field. Such an effort can exemplify the best of philosophical rigour and commitment to argumentation, and perhaps even inspire similar things in some readers. But it is perhaps more likely to bemuse or intimidate, to engender a sense of powerlessness and an ultimate disinclination to reason things out. Finally, of course, one should not merely discuss in a piecemeal and disconnected fashion whatever aspects of the contemporary scene one happens to find most interesting at the time. Some kind of unifying theme is required.

I have principally tried to avoid these three vices by a policy of ruthless suppression. For unity, I have taken one particular issue—that of the Proper Name—and pursued it through the various regions of logic, language, and mind with which I am concerned, barely glancing at any other phenomenon. What will emerge, I hope, is that the Proper Name is as good a peg as any on which the relevant topics may be hung. To avoid blandness I have written from one particular, and not exactly orthodox, perspective on how the matters with which I am concerned should hang together: and I have tried to make this perspective defensible and reasonable. However, I have not tried to have the last word on things, and have certainly not defended my orientation against all comers, or followed up the possible lines of development to any significant degree. Worse, as the more experienced reader will quickly realize, I have not skimmed on quietly suppressing complications when I deemed this to be necessary. I make no apologies for any of this. The business of the teacher of philosophy, above all, is to inspire discussion and a move towards understanding, to provoke reasoned debate in the context of a moderate knowledgeability. This is what I have tried to do.

I am grateful to a number of people for various kinds of help. Michael Lockwood supervised the B.Phil. thesis and John McDowell, besides supervising the D.Phil version, encouraged me to turn it into a book. Robert Black, Harold Noonan, Peter Smith,

and Tim Williamson commented on large portions of earlier drafts of the material, suggesting numerous improvements and generally forcing me to produce a better work than I could otherwise have done. An exchange of letters and articles with Peter Carruthers helped me to become clearer about what I wanted to say in chapter 6. Thanks are also due to Roger Gallie, Jonathan Harrison, Roger Montague, and Sir Maurice Shock. A special mention is due to Nick Measor, who over the years, first as tutor and then as colleague and friend, helped me in more ways than I could possibly now remember. But above all I am grateful to Rosalind McCulloch, without whose continued faith and support all would have been in vain, and to whom I dedicate this book with love and admiration.

G.W.McC

University of Nottingham
December 1987

List of Abbreviations

Books and articles

NN	<i>Naming and Necessity</i> (Kripke (1980))
OD	'On Denoting' (Russell (1905))
OR	'On Referring' (Strawson (1950))
PB	'A Puzzle About Belief' (Kripke (1979))
PLA	'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' (Russell (1918b))
RDD	'Reference and Definite Descriptions' (Donnellan (1966))
VR	<i>The Varieties of Reference</i> (Evans (1982))

(for full details see Bibliography)

Journals

A	<i>Analysis</i>
BBS	<i>Behavioural and Brain Sciences</i>
PAS	<i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i>
PQ	<i>Philosophical Quarterly</i>
PR	<i>Philosophical Review</i>
S	<i>Synthèse</i>

Propositions (in order of appearance)

(Def \forall)	' $\forall x(Gx)$ ' is T if and only if the function <u>G . . .</u> yields T for each argument of the domain.
(Def \exists)	' $\exists x(Gx)$ ' is T if and only if the function <u>G . . .</u> yields T for at least one argument of the domain.
(RTD)	'the G is H' = ' $\exists x(\forall y(Gy \leftrightarrow x = y) \& Hx)$ '
(Def I)	' $Ix(Gx, Hx)$ ' is T if and only if (i) the function <u>G . . .</u> yields T for just one argument of the domain, and (ii) the function <u>H . . .</u> yields T for that same argument.
(DQ)	Treat descriptions quantificationally
(NQ)	Treat natural names quantificationally
(ND)	Treat natural names as descriptions
(LL)	(Leibniz's Law) FROM <i>Ga</i> AND <i>a = b</i> INFER <i>Gb</i>
(PA)	(Russell's <i>Principle of Acquaintance</i>) 'You cannot name anything you are not acquainted with.'
(RP)	(Russell's <i>Particularism</i>) 'In every atomic fact [simplest imaginable fact] there is one component which is naturally expressed

by a verb. This . . . is a relation. . . Atomic facts contain, besides the relation, the terms of the relation. . . These . . . I define as “particulars”. Only particulars can be named.’

- (Def \diamond) ‘ $\diamond P$ ’ is T (at @) if and only if ‘ P ’ is T at at least one possible world.
- (Def \square) ‘ $\square P$ ’ is T (at @) if and only if ‘ P ’ is T at all possible worlds.
- (Def \diamond^*) an object x of @’s domain yields T (at @) for any function $\diamond G \dots$ if and only if x yields T for $\underline{G \dots}$ at at least one possible world.
- (Def \square^*) an object x of @’s domain yields T (at @) for any function $\square G \dots$ if and only if x yields T for $\underline{G \dots}$ at all possible worlds.
- (IND) A natural name ‘ N ’ as used by speaker S abbreviates the description which S would offer in reply to ‘Who/What is N ?’

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Bibliographical Note

Since this is an introductory text I have not attempted anything like comprehensiveness in the citation of references. Rather I have appended to each chapter a fairly short bibliography of works which are either too important to be missed from any list, or especially helpful in orienting the reader on a specific topic. Textual references to major historical sources, notably the works of Frege and Russell, and to works frequently mentioned, are by title, occasionally abbreviated in a manner explained at the relevant time. Other textual references are by authorial surname, with date of publication if appropriate (e.g. QUINE (1940)). In all cases, details are to be found in the Further Reading section at the end of the appropriate chapter, and also in the main Bibliography.

Introduction

ISSUES

This book is intended to introduce the reader to some central issues in contemporary philosophy. More specifically, it deals with topics in the philosophies of mind, language, and logic. More specifically still, it is a book about proper names. The link between these themes needs to be briefly explained.

That contemporary philosophers should be concerned with the mind is not surprising. Questions about minds, regarding how they fit into and interact with the world at large, are perhaps the oldest and most intractable philosophical issues of all. Some of them, moreover, become particularly pressing in the context of 'scientific' viewpoints: and contemporary philosophy is dominated by such viewpoints. That language should then be a focus is also hardly surprising. We ourselves are paradigm cases of beings with minds, and our use of language is central to our psychological mode of being. And once language is in the picture, logic cannot be far behind, since the logical analysis of linguistic structures is a crucial part of any understanding of how they work. In any case, philosophers have always been concerned with logic—logic being the study of what comprises a certain type of goodness in argument and reasoning, and philosophers being above all professionals in these two domains, how could things be otherwise?

BACKGROUND

There are, however, more specific and partly historical reasons why these stock philosophical interests should arrange themselves in the way that informs this book. Logic as a proper developing science came of age just over a hundred years ago, particularly in the work of Gottlob Frege. Frege set out to systematize the type of reasoning typically used by mathematicians, and his general use of examples indicate also an interest in the language used by scientists when going about their serious information-gathering business. So successful was his attempt that it would not have been surprising had it alone

encouraged philosophers to concentrate more and more on these typical uses of language. But the reception of Frege's work was influenced by a growing concentration by philosophers on the idea that science is the major, or even only, source of genuine knowledge of the overall nature of things. As a result, traditional philosophical and metaphysical work has come to be invaded by, and considered to overlap with, more specialized concerns to do with the elements of logic and language as considered in a scientific context. Not that these matters could ever be pursued in complete isolation from each other: but twentieth-century philosophy in English-speaking countries has certainly brought off a characteristic and distinctive synthesis.

Such general links with the philosophy of mind which immediately arise in this context were further strengthened by Frege's specific orientation. Part of his achievement was to devise a new symbolism to help formulate his logical insights. But he was concerned too with questions about the ways in which thinkers—the users of linguistic argument—understand the words and symbols used. This was partly because he considered the logic of his own time to be hopelessly on the wrong track owing to its mistaken conception of how mind and language are related. He therefore made efforts explicitly to embed his logical theses in what he believed to be a more adequate conception of mind and thought. And this moved his concerns into a wider arena: the philosophies of mind and language generally. In any case, one cannot do logic without involving such matters, at least implicitly. Arguments are, after all, usually propounded in ordinary language, and if logic could tell us nothing about these arguments then it would not be worth bothering with. The very least that a logical symbolism like Frege's should be capable of, then, is expressing, accurately enough for reasoning purposes, the arguments whose goodness and badness we are most interested in—the ones we are likely to use. But assessing a symbolism's adequacy in this way presupposes some grasp of *what it is* for a stretch of reasoning to 'give accurate expression to' the thoughts involved in the argument: and this is the business of the philosophy of language.

For these and other reasons one simply cannot claim to have a proper acquaintance with contemporary English-language philosophy unless one has some detailed appreciation of how the broad currents just mentioned have come together: and the main aim of this book is to provide the reader with the necessary perspective.