



THE BLACKWELL COMPANION TO PHILOSOPHY

EDITED BY *Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James*



The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy

edited by Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James



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Reference

For Jessie and Carol

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Preface

This Companion complements the *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy* series by presenting a new overview of philosophy prepared by thirty-five leading British and American philosophers. Introductory essays by John Searle and Bernard Williams, which assess the changes that have shaped the subject in recent decades, are followed by chapters exploring central problems and debates in the principal subdisciplines of philosophy and in specialized fields, chapters concerning the work of great historical figures and chapters discussing newly developing fields within philosophy. Throughout the course of its chapters, the Companion examines the views of many of the most widely influential figures of contemporary philosophy.

Although wide-ranging, the Companion is not exhaustive, and emphasis is placed on developments in Anglo-American philosophy in the latter part of the twentieth century. A premise underlying the Companion is that major participants in philosophical debate can provide accounts of their own fields that are stimulating, accessible, stylish and authoritative.

In its primary use, the Companion is an innovative textbook for introductory courses in philosophy. Teachers can use the broad coverage to select chapters in a flexible way to support a variety of courses based on contemporary problems or the historical development of the subject. Specialist chapters can be used selectively to augment standard introductory topics or to prepare students individually for term papers or essays. Chapters include initial summaries, boxed features, cross-references, suggestions for further reading, references and discussion questions. In addition, there is a common glossary. These features and the problem-setting nature of the discussions encourage students to see the subject as a whole and to gain confidence that explorations within philosophy can lead to unexpected and rewarding insights. In this aspect, the Companion reflects the contributors' experience of small group teaching, in which arguments and perspectives are rigorously tested and in which no solution is imposed.

In its secondary use, the Companion will accompany students throughout their undergraduate careers and will also serve the general reader wishing to understand the central concepts and debates within philosophy or its constituent disciplines. Students are unlikely to read the whole volume in

their first year of study, but those continuing with philosophy will find their appreciation of the work deepening over time as they gain insight into the topics of the more advanced chapters. The Companion will help them to formulate questions and to see connections between what they have already studied and new terrain.

In its final use, the Companion bears a special relationship to the *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy* series. Many readers will wish to read the integrated discussions of the chapters of the present Companion for orientation before turning to the detailed, alphabetically arranged, articles of the volumes in the Companion series. Although conceived as a separate volume, the Companion to Philosophy will serve as a useful guide to the other excellent Companions in what amounts to a comprehensive encyclopedia of philosophy.

The general reader might begin with the introductory essays and turn to chapters on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics and Political and Social Philosophy, or to historical chapters from Ancient Greek Philosophy to Hume. Cross-references and special interests will lead readers to other chapters.

Cross-references in the text are marked in small capitals followed by a chapter number or page numbers in parentheses: ETHICS (chapter 6) or PROBABILITY (pp. 314–16). We have used our judgement in marking terms appearing many times in the text for cross-references, and hope that we have supplied guidance without distracting readers. The Companion also provides a glossary of 170 terms and a comprehensive index. Both appear at the end of the volume, and readers are advised to use them regularly for help in reading the chapters. When an author does not refer to a book by its first edition, a recent publication is cited in the text, and the original date of publication (or in some cases of composition) will appear in square brackets in the references.

As editors, we are fully aware of our good fortune in attracting superb contributors. The complexity of their insights and the clarity of their presentations are the chief attractions of the Companion. We appreciate their care in making the difficult not only accessible but delightful as well. We also wish to thank the Departments of Philosophy at the University of Essex and the University of Hong Kong for their support throughout the preparation of this volume. We are especially grateful to Laurence Goldstein, Tim Moore and Frank Cioffi for their comments and advice. A version of the Companion is published in Chinese by the Shandong Academy of Social Sciences, and we appreciate the friendly co-operation of our Chinese co-editors.

Our cover illustration, R. B. Kitaj's philosophically resonant 'IF NOT, NOT', is a work by an American artist working in London during the period that provides the main focus of our volume.

Nicholas Bunnin
E. P. Tsui-James

Acknowledgements

With two exceptions, the contributions to the Companion were specially prepared for the volume. John R. Searle's introductory essay initially appeared in a slightly different form in D. Easton and C. S. Schelling (eds), 1991: *Divided Knowledge*, New York: Sage. Susan Haack's chapter is a significantly extended version of her contribution to J. Dancy and E. Sosa (eds), 1992: *A Companion to Epistemology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

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Contemporary Philosophy in the United States

John R. Searle

Philosophy as an academic discipline in America has considerably fewer practitioners than do several other subjects in the humanities and the social sciences, such as sociology, history, English, or economics; but it still shows enormous diversity. This variety is made manifest in the original research published by professional philosophers, whose differing points of view are expressed in the large number of books published each year, as well as in the many professional philosophy journals. There are over two thousand colleges and universities in the United States, of which nearly all have philosophy departments, and the number of professional philosophers is correspondingly large.

Because of this diversity, any generalizations about the discipline as a whole, which I am about to make, are bound to be misleading. The subject is too vast and complex to be describable in a single essay. Furthermore, anyone who is an active participant in the current controversies, as I am, necessarily has a perspective conditioned by his or her own interests, commitments and convictions. It would be impossible for me to give an 'objective' account. I am not therefore in what follows trying to give a neutral or disinterested account of the contemporary philosophical scene; rather I am trying to say what in the current developments seems to me important.

In spite of its enormous variety, there are certain central themes in contemporary American philosophy. The dominant mode of philosophizing in the United States is called 'analytic philosophy'. Without exception, the best philosophy departments in the United States are dominated by analytic philosophy, and among the leading philosophers in the United States, all but a tiny handful would be classified as analytic philosophers. Practitioners of types of philosophizing that are not in the analytic tradition – such as phenomenology, classical pragmatism, existentialism, or Marxism – feel it necessary to define their position in relation to analytic philosophy. Indeed, analytic philosophy is the dominant mode of philosophizing not only in the United States, but throughout the entire English-speaking world, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is also the dominant mode of philosophizing in Scandinavia, and it is also becoming more

widespread in Germany, France, Italy and throughout Latin America. I personally have found that I can go to all of these parts of the world and lecture on subjects in contemporary analytic philosophy before audiences who are both knowledgeable and well trained in the techniques of the discipline.

1 Analytic Philosophy

What, then, is analytic philosophy? The simplest way to describe it is to say that it is primarily concerned with the analysis of meaning. In order to explain this enterprise and its significance, we need first to say a little bit about its history. Though the United States now leads the world in analytic philosophy, the origins of this mode of philosophizing lie in Europe. Specifically, analytic philosophy is based on the work of Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, as well as the work done by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s. Going further back in history, one can also see analytic philosophy as a natural descendant of the empiricism of the great British philosophers Locke, Berkeley and Hume, and of the transcendental philosophy of Kant. In the works of philosophers as far back as Plato and Aristotle, one can see many of the themes and presuppositions of the methods of analytic philosophy. We can best summarize the origins of modern analytic philosophy by saying that it arose when the empiricist tradition in epistemology, together with the foundationalist enterprise of Kant, were tied to the methods of logical analysis and the philosophical theories invented by Gottlob Frege in the late nineteenth century. In the course of his work on the foundations of mathematics, Frege invented symbolic logic in its modern form and developed a comprehensive and profound philosophy of language. Though many of the details of his views on language and mathematics have been superseded, Frege's work is crucial for at least two reasons: Firstly, by inventing modern logic, specifically the predicate calculus, he gave us a primary tool of philosophical analysis; and, secondly he made the philosophy of language central to the entire philosophical enterprise. From the point of view of analytic philosophy, Frege's work is the greatest single philosophical achievement of the nineteenth century. Fregean techniques of logical analysis were later augmented by the ordinary language analysis inspired by the work of Moore and Wittgenstein and are best exemplified by the school of linguistic philosophy that flourished in Oxford in the 1950s. In short, analytic philosophy attempts to combine certain traditional philosophical themes with modern techniques.

Analytic philosophy has never been fixed or stable, because it is intrinsically self-critical and its practitioners are always challenging their own presuppositions and conclusions. However, it is possible to locate a central period in analytic philosophy – the period comprising, roughly speaking, the logical positivist phase immediately prior to the 1939–45 war and the post-war phase of linguistic analysis. Both the pre-history and the subsequent history of

analytic philosophy can be defined by the main doctrines of that central period.

In the central period, analytic philosophy was defined by a belief in two linguistic distinctions, combined with a research programme. The two distinctions are, firstly, that between analytic and synthetic propositions, and, secondly, that between descriptive and evaluative utterances. The research programme is the traditional philosophical research programme of attempting to find foundations for such philosophically problematic phenomena as language, knowledge, meaning, truth, mathematics and so on. One way to see the development of analytic philosophy over the past thirty years is to regard it as the gradual rejection of these two distinctions, and a corresponding rejection of foundationalism as the crucial enterprise of philosophy. However, in the central period, these two distinctions served not only to identify the main beliefs of analytic philosophy, but, for those who accepted them and the research programme, they defined the nature of philosophy itself.

1.1 *Analytic versus synthetic*

The distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions was supposed to be the distinction between those propositions that are true or false as a matter of definition or of the meanings of the terms contained in them (the analytic propositions) and those that are true or false as a matter of fact in the world and not solely in virtue of the meanings of the words (the synthetic propositions). Examples of analytic truths would be such propositions as 'Triangles are three-sided plane figures', 'All bachelors are unmarried', 'Women are female', ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' and so on. In each of these, the truth of the proposition is entirely determined by its meaning; they are true by the definitions of the words that they contain. Such propositions can be known to be true or false *a priori*, and in each case they express necessary truths. Indeed, it was a characteristic feature of the analytic philosophy of this central period that terms such as 'analytic', 'necessary', '*a priori*' and 'tautological' were taken to be co-extensive. Contrasted with these were synthetic propositions, which, if they were true, were true as a matter of empirical fact and not as a matter of definition alone. Thus, propositions such as 'There are more women than men in the United States', 'Bachelors tend to die earlier than married men' and 'Bodies attract each other according to the inverse square law' are all said to be synthetic propositions, and, if they are true, they express *a posteriori* empirical truths about the real world that are independent of language. Such empirical truths according to this view, are never necessary; rather, they are contingent. For philosophers holding these views, the terms '*a posteriori*', 'synthetic', 'contingent' and 'empirical' were taken to be more or less co-extensive.

It was a basic assumption behind the logical positivist movement that all meaningful propositions were either analytic or empirical, as defined by the conceptions that I have just stated. The positivists wished to build a sharp boundary between meaningful propositions of science and everyday life on the one hand, and nonsensical propositions of metaphysics and theology on the

other. They claimed that all meaningful propositions are either analytic or synthetic: disciplines such as logic and mathematics fall within the analytic camp; the empirical sciences and much of common sense fall within the synthetic camp. Propositions that were neither analytic nor empirical propositions, and which were therefore in principle not verifiable, were said to be nonsensical or meaningless. The slogan of the positivists was called the verification principle, and, in a simple form, it can be stated as follows: all meaningful propositions are either analytic or synthetic, and those which are synthetic are empirically verifiable. This slogan was sometimes shortened to an even simpler battle cry: the meaning of a proposition is just its method of verification.

1.2 The distinction between evaluative utterances and descriptive utterances

Another distinction, equally important in the positivist scheme of things, is the distinction between those utterances that express propositions that can be literally either true or false and those utterances that are used not to express truths or falsehoods, but rather, to give vent to our feelings and emotions. An example of a descriptive statement would be, 'The incidence of crimes of theft has increased in the past ten years'. An instance of the evaluative class would be 'Theft is wrong'. The positivists claimed that many utterances that had the form of meaningful propositions were used not to state propositions that were verifiable either analytically or synthetically, but to express emotions and feelings. Propositions of ethics look as if they are cognitively meaningful, but they are not; they have only 'emotive' or 'evaluative' meaning. The propositions of science, mathematics, logic and much of common sense fall in the descriptive class; the utterances of aesthetics, ethics and much of religion fall in the evaluative class. It is important to note that on this conception evaluative propositions are not, strictly speaking, either true or false, since they are not verifiable as either analytic or empirical. The two distinctions are crucially related in that all of the statements that fall on one side or the other of the analytic-synthetic distinction also fall within the descriptive class of the descriptive-evaluative distinction.

The importance that these two distinctions had for defining both the character of the philosophical enterprise and the relationships between language and reality is hard to exaggerate. One radical consequence of the distinction between descriptive and evaluative propositions was that certain traditional areas of philosophy, such as ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy, were virtually abolished as realms of cognitive meaningfulness. Propositions in these areas were, for the most part, regarded as nonsensical expressions of feelings and emotions, because they are not utterances that can be, strictly speaking, either true or false. Since the aim of philosophers is to state the truth, and since evaluative utterances cannot be either true or false, it cannot be one of the aims of philosophy to make any evaluative utterances. Philosophers might analyse the meaning of evaluative terms, and they might examine the logical relationships among these terms, but philosophers, *qua*