ERNST TUGENDHAT

Traditional & analytical philosophy

Lectures on the philosophy of language

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LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

TRANSLATED BY P. A. GORNER

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Preface

In so-called analytical or language-analytical philosophy there is little reflection on its own foundations, and today less than before. For the most part the problems treated are inherited problems which are not questioned. Partly this is due to a lack of historical consciousness. A way of philosophizing can only become a fundamental philosophical position by confronting it with earlier conceptions of philosophy. This reflection on foundations is not just an additional act of self-clarification. It is a condition of a philosophy's ability to perceive the task that has always been the genuinely philosophical task: the examination of existing questions, methods and basic concepts, and the development of new ones.

These lectures aim to provide an impetus in this direction. They therefore have the character of an introduction. By means of a confrontation with traditional philosophy's fundamental orientation to the subject–object schema they attempt to bring questions which already exist in analytical philosophy into the context of a specifically language-analytical fundamental question. As regards content they move in a field of investigation that is by no means new; and even in this field they take only a first step.

The book is directed at three different groups of readers. The reader whom it addresses directly in the form of lectures is the philosophical beginner, for whom it could serve as an introduction to the philosophical way of thinking. At the same time it is directed, if only in an oblique way, at the reader who is already well-versed in linguistic analysis. Above all, however, it is directed at those who, being more or less familiar with traditional philosophical modes of conception, miss in analytical philosophy a fundamental question which can be compared with the great traditional approaches. This book seeks to build a bridge for such readers, by trying to show that analytical philosophy contains a funda-

mental question which can not only compare with the traditional approaches but actually proves to be superior to them.

This aim is a reflection of my own development, which started out from Heidegger and led to language-analytical philosophy. I became convinced that Heidegger's question about the understanding of 'Being' can only acquire a concrete and realizable meaning within the framework of a language-analytical philosophy. Although there is hardly any mention of Heidegger in these lectures I owe to him the specific mode of access with which I approach the problems of analytical philosophy. For this reason the book is dedicated to him.

It has its origin in lectures I gave in Heidelberg in the Summer semester of 1970. Although I have re-written and expanded the text it seemed to me sensible to retain the lecture-form.

Starnberg, March 1976. E.T.

Translator's Preface

My aim throughout this translation has been to combine accuracy with readability, but at times the latter quality has had to take second place. Whenever possible long sentences have been broken down into several shorter ones, but in some cases to have done this would have significantly altered the sense of what is being said.

As for my translation of individual words the following require some comment. For *Vorstellung* I have used 'representation' rather than 'idea', for to have chosen the latter would have made it impossible to translate the verbal forms *vorstellen, vorgestellt* etc. I considered the more literal 'presentation', but in the end settled for 'representation' because of the currency it has acquired through Kemp Smith's translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For both *Bezugnahme, bezugnehmen* and *Verweisung, verweisen* I have had to use 'reference', 'refer'. For the most part it is clear from the context which sense is intended, but where there is the possibility of confusion I have put the German term in brackets. For *gegenständlich* I have used the artificial 'objectual' because 'objective' would have been positively misleading. *Gegenständlich* means something like 'having the character of an object'. It has nothing to do with 'objective' in the sense in which, for example, a judgment may be objective (rather than subjective).

In translating quotations from Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* I have in the main followed J. N. Findlay's translation. In the case of Wittgenstein I have simply reproduced the standard English translations without making any changes.

I would like to thank Professor Tugendhat for the thoroughness of his comments at every of the translation, my friends Eric Matthews and Guy Stock for some very helpful discussions of points relating to the translation, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for enabling me to have two periods of study in Germany with consequent

benefit to my knowledge of German philosophy and the German language. Finally, I wish to thank Professor Hans Werner Arndt of the University of Mannheim for having first drawn my attention to Professor Tugendhat's book.

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Part One

Introduction: confrontation of analytical philosophy with traditional conceptions of philosophy

A question of method

'Introduction to language-analytical philosophy' – that is ambiguous. From a lecture-course with this title one might expect a survey of a philosophical movement, an historical or systematic guide to the philosophical literature commonly called language-analytical. This is not what I shall be doing, particularly as such introductions to language-analytical philosophy already exist.[1] The title can also be interpreted in another sense, by understanding 'philosophy' in the sense of philosophical activity. The title would then denote an introduction to language-analytical *philosophizing*.

One introduces someone to a particular activity by demonstrating it to him by means of an example, so that he can imitate it. So I would have to demonstrate to you a characteristic language-analytical line of thought in a way that would enable you to follow it and stimulate you to carry out similar patterns of argument yourself. And indeed this is something I intend to do. But such a demonstration by means of an example cannot, taken by itself, suffice for an introduction if the activity in question is a way of doing philosophy.

A way of doing philosophy is not related to other ways of doing philosophy in the way that one form of dance is related to other forms. Forms of dance are not mutually exclusive or inclusive. On the same evening one can, with equal enthusiasm, dance a tango, a boogie and a rock 'n' roll – and simply not bother with the waltz. But one cannot philosophize in one way without having rejected or incorporated the others. A dance can be out of date; but it is not on that account incorrect. In philosophy, on the other hand, as in every science, the concern is with truth. For this reason, although ways of doing philosophy can be modern or old-fashioned, worrying about this is the business not of the philosopher but of the historian. If I am asked why I do philosophy in this way rather than that I cannot answer: 'Because it is up to date', but

only: 'Because it is the correct way.' But this implies an obligation to justify the claim to be correct. To introduce someone to a way of doing philosophy, therefore, involves relating it to other ways of doing philosophy and, by means of such a confrontation, demonstrating its correctness.

But this means that one must debate the idea of philosophy as such. If one's aim is to introduce someone to a particular way of doing philosophy one cannot simply presuppose the concept of philosophy. To introduce someone to a particular way of philosophizing is, hence, always also to introduce someone to philosophizing as such.

If it is true that one can only introduce someone to language-analytical philosophy, or any other sort of philosophy, by contrasting it with other ways of doing philosophy, then this affects the question of which line of thought is to be chosen to illustrate it. We cannot be content with just any example. In confronting language-analytical philosophy with other ways of philosophizing we are not just confronting methods. The important philosophical positions of the past always took as their starting-point certain fundamental substantive questions around which the whole field of possible philosophical questions was organized. In the case of language-analytical philosophy it may be less clear what its central substantive question is, indeed whether it has one. But then we may expect that it might be precisely in the confrontation with earlier philosophical positions that language-analytical philosophy will find its own central question. And this means that it is only in this confrontation that it will find itself.

If this is correct we cannot assume that language-analytical philosophy is already a fixed quantity which we can first introduce and then contrast with earlier positions in an appendix. Nowhere is it laid down what language-analytical philosophy is. If we sought to arrive at a definition of 'language-analytical philosophy' by a process of induction and abstraction from the existing philosophical literature which is described as language-analytical, then at best we would achieve an empty characterization; it could not serve as the basis for a concrete way of philosophizing.

So do I want to introduce you to something which does not yet exist? In the case of philosophy this is not as absurd as it sounds. A philosophy is only constituted in philosophizing. It follows from this that philosophizing, and a way of philosophizing, is an activity which only becomes what it is in the process of being introduced.

But in that case we must abandon yet another prejudice: if what is being introduced does not exist prior to its introduction then clearly

the person who wishes to introduce others to this activity cannot himself have it at his disposal. He can only introduce others by at the same time introducing himself.

Perhaps these reflections strike you as incredible and as a poor peda- gogical trick. Does not the pretension of seeking to introduce someone to something which does not yet exist, and is first constituted in the introduction, remind one of Münchhausen's attempt to pull himself up by his own bootstraps? Can I seriously wish to assert that I want to introduce you to something with which I am myself not yet acquainted? Obviously one cannot look for something of which one does not already have a vague preliminary conception (*Vorbegriff*). And obviously I do have a vague preliminary conception of linguistic analysis. But then no doubt so do you. On the other hand, it is unclear to us, and in general, in what linguistic analysis, as a philosophical position, really consists. We cannot expect to remove this unclarity by getting an answer from somewhere, but only by deepening the existing preliminary conception. And it may not be implausible to expect that precisely from a confron- tation of linguistic analysis – initially on the basis of the vague prelimi- nary conception we have of it – with important earlier philosophical positions there will emerge its own substantive fundamental question. To arrive at this fundamental question is the aim of the introductory part of these lectures (Lectures 1–7). In the main part which follows we shall, by analysing the predicative statement-form, take a first step in answering this question.

Let us begin, then, with that vague preliminary understanding (*Vor- verständnis*) which everyone can be assumed to have, inasmuch as it is simply an explication of its designation. Clearly 'language-analytical philosophy' refers to a way of doing philosophy which involves the belief that the problems of philosophy can be solved, or must be solved, by means of an analysis of language.

Immediately the question arises: by means of what sort of an analysis of language? The analysis of language would seem to be the task of linguistics. Does this mean, then, that philosophy, if it is understood as linguistic analysis, becomes linguistics or a part of linguistics? Or is the analysis of language carried out in philosophy different from that car- ried out in linguistics? And, if so, how is the difference to be character- ized? Notice how, from the very beginning, our enterprise becomes more complicated. Language-analytical philosophy finds itself con- fronted, not only with a demand to legitimate itself vis-à-vis other con- ceptions of philosophy, but also with the demand to define its relation- ship to a closely-connected empirical science.

We have here a specific instance of a difficulty philosophy has always faced when trying to define itself: how is it to define its relationship to the sciences? It is characteristic of modern philosophy that this question arises not just in general in relation to all sciences, but in a special way in relation to one particular science. For classical modern philosophy, particularly since Kant, this science was psychology. Now it is linguistics. Perhaps there is another way of doing philosophy for which sociology occupies a corresponding position. In modern philosophy this peculiar collision with a specific empirical science results from what is called its *reflective* character. It conceives of its enquiries as consisting not in the direct thematization of such and such objects but in simultaneous reflection on how these objects can be given to us, how they become accessible to us.

In classical modern philosophy the field of givenness reflected upon was conceived as consciousness, a dimension of representations or ideas; whereas in the new conception of philosophy it is conceived as the sphere of the understanding of our linguistic expressions. In every instance philosophy finds its sphere of reflection already occupied by a particular empirical science. And so each time the question arises: how is this sphere, if, from the point of view of philosophy, it is not just one sphere among others, accessible to a specifically philosophical mode of study?

I know of no satisfactory answer to the question of how language-analytical philosophy is to be distinguished from the empirical science of linguistics. Such an answer can certainly not be given with the aid of traditional distinctions between philosophy and science, since this answer would have to depend essentially on the new conception of philosophy. Anyway at the present stage of this introduction we clearly lack all the presuppositions for meaningfully tackling this question. All one can really say at present is: language-analytical philosophy differs from the empirical science of linguistics in that it has to justify itself as philosophy, and, hence, finds itself confronted by other philosophical positions.

I return to the nominal definition of 'language-analytical philosophy' as a philosophy which seeks to solve the problems of philosophy by means of an analysis of language. How can we get further if we start from this first preliminary understanding? We can turn to the person who hears this definition for the first time and see what his initial reaction is.

If he is a thinking person he will immediately raise the following objection (it is the standard objection that is always brought against the

language-analytical conception of philosophy). 'It is clear,' he will say, 'that verbal explanations belong to philosophy. They have always done so. But they represent only a preliminary stage and serve merely to remove the unclarity and ambiguity in the use of philosophical terms. This can only be a transitional stage on the way to the things with which we are concerned. After all, language is only a medium, and if a philosophy regards the analysis of linguistic usage as not just a preliminary task, but as its real task, then it has clearly lost contact with the substantial questions, the things themselves.'

We begin then with the negative in which the idea of a language-analytical philosophy first appears to an outsider. However, the objection just raised only remains on the periphery. It speaks of things in contrast to words without saying what sort of things it means, and where they are to be found. Only when we get our thinking person to explain what he means will we have taken a first step into the real field of dispute.

In which extra-linguistic sphere, we will ask him, are the things themselves to which he refers to be sought? If he is not a philosopher, but simply a thinking person, then he will most likely reply: 'The things themselves? Clearly they are given to us by experience. And the appeal not to remain with mere words had this meaning: to reach knowledge one must have recourse to experience.'

With reference to empirical knowledge the objection, thus interpreted, seems plausible, indeed conclusive. Precisely what it says is true of an empirical science: explanations of words are necessary, but they constitute only a transitional stage in research. Here the things themselves are the facts of a sphere of scientific experience. But if the objection is put forward as an objection to a conception of *philosophy,* then this can only mean either (a) that one denies that philosophy is a specific dimension of enquiry which is not reducible to the empirical sciences (in which case it is not an objection specifically to language-analytical philosophy, but to philosophy as such) or (b) that one supposes that philosophy has its own, and hence non-empirical, mode of experience. If the objection is not simply from a thinking person, but from a philosopher, then the second of these alternatives must be the one he has in mind.

The justification of the above objection cannot, therefore, be rationally discussed without going into the question of the specific subject-matter of philosophy, and what it is about this subject-matter which distinguishes philosophy from the empirical sciences. A dominant, though not undisputed, view of philosophy in the history of philosophy