

# Meta-philosophy, Once Again

## Chapter 1

Historicist and metaphilosophical self-consciousness, I think,  
is the best precaution against barren scholasticism.

– Richard Rorty

### I

I shall examine what I shall call meta-philosophy. That is, I will make a *philosophical* examination into what philosophy is, can be, should be, something of what it has been, what the point (if any) of it is and what, if anything, it can contribute to our understanding of and the making sense of our lives, including our lives individually and together, and of the social order in which we live.

Strictly speaking, there can be, as Wittgenstein realized, no philosophy that is meta-philosophy as there, by contrast, can be and is meta-ethics or meta-mathematics. In being philosophy this activity could not be meta to philosophy and still be philosophy. It could not be engaging in the same kind of activity or activities and making the same kind of inquiry that is typical of philosophy but is still meta to philosophy, though something which is now *directed at itself* though still in a philosophical spirit. This is a conceptual impossibility. There can be no philosophy that is meta to philosophy as there can be meta-ethics which is meta to ethics or meta-mathematics which is meta to mathematics. *Philosophizing* about philosophy cannot be an activity that is meta to philosophy, though we could have a psychologizing about philosophy which is meta to philosophy or a decription of philosophy which was meta to philosophy.

Historical, sociological, anthropological, economic, social-geographic, and psychological inquiries into philosophy can be meta to philosophy if they stick strictly to their disciplines or to some crisscross of such disciplines. But they could not coherently be called philosophical. Such a so-called meta-philosophical account, say, a sociology of philosophy, could not be philosophical, meta or otherwise. Such sociological, historical, economic, or other strictly empirical accounts, which are in some way empirically testable as a requirement of their being scientific (formal sciences, e.g., mathematics, aside), might slip up and unwittingly make some philosophical claims or assumptions. Then they would be mixing disciplines or, better put, activities. But that mixing of disciplines *without* an acute awareness of what they were doing (after all, they could deliberately mix activities or disciplines and *perhaps* sometimes that could have a point), would be a flaw in them. Moreover, if they did make such a mix, deliberate or not, that would also be a flaw in their *scientificity*, or at least in the purity of that. (We need that last qualification to take a proper account of much of history.)

However, there are relevant things that these social sciences could say about philosophy without themselves becoming philosophical and some of these things could be useful to philosophers, particularly when they are themselves taking a meta-philosophical turn (*philosophizing* about philosophy). Consider history, sociology, social anthropology or social geography (Harvey 2000). They could, for example, characterize how certain philosophers who during their own times were thought to be path breakers (or whom we even now think of as path breakers) lived and thought in relation to the regent philosophy or dominant social situations and attitudes of their time. They could make us clearly aware of the conditions and the context under which these philosophers thought and wrote. They could acquaint us with the characteristic conceptions, philosophical or otherwise, of the times in which these philosophers lived and wrote and of the matters with which they, in one way or another, had to contend.

Sociology (or economics or anthropology or history or social geography) about philosophy could also make us aware of the class or classes from which philosophers come or their social strata and the pressures on them. These disciplines, where their accounts are accurate, could make us aware of the educational environment from which philosophers came. They could also make us aware of the characteristic conceptions philosophical and otherwise of the time in which these philosophers lived and with which they had to contend in one way or another and of what they thought was reasonable. (To say they were reasonable is to do a philosophical thing; to say these philosophers took them to be reasonable need not be.) Sociologists and the like could make philosophers aware of the educational structures from which philosophers come or came and the like.

Philosophers *might* regard all this as irrelevant (I did not say should). They might, and some do, say we as philosophers are interested in *grounds, not in causes* (Cohen 2008). There is, of course, a distinction between grounds and causes, but we cannot determine what the grounds for many things are without taking note, often careful note, of their causes. Think of our grounds for opposing or for accepting deepwater offshore oil drilling or the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ doctrine in the U.S. military or, to be more general, the grounds for rejecting racism or racial profiling. Some philosophers, G. A. Cohen, for example, will say that causes are relevant to grounding in particular cases, but not for ultimate ones (Cohen 2008). Several things should be said here. First, it is unclear that there are any *such* ultimate grounds as Cohen envisages. Second, if there are, it is unclear *what* they are and whether, if the principles that articulate them (if such there be) are so fact-insensitive that we can, or even more extremely must, ignore the causes for these ultimate grounds or for *the* ultimate ground (if there can only be one) and just appeal to reason or ‘the rule of reason’, as if we knew what we are talking about here. Or is it the case that ultimate grounds can have no causes or, if they do, that their causes are irrelevant to ‘ultimate grounding’? We should be very skeptical concerning such talk and of the need (if any) for it. We should ask ourselves whether

we should limit ourselves to getting reasonable justifications (if we can) of the political and moral problems of our times—the specific ones that dominate our lives. And we should wonder if we can do so without worrying about such ‘ultimates’. I think here we should think seriously about taking such a Deweyian turn. But, that aside, and distinctly, we should carefully reflect on and take to heart Wittgenstein’s remark that it is difficult to recognize the extent of our groundless believing. Whether we go the Deweyian pragmatic way or the Wittgensteinian way or somehow amalgamate them, we should abandon (*pace* Cohen) the familiar rationalist assumption that philosophers are, or should be, interested in grounds and not causes. There is too much a Balkanization of our intellectual life here.

## II

I shall now turn to meta-philosophy itself (*philosophy* about philosophy). In doing so, I shall turn first to Richard Rorty because he, by attending more to the history of ideas than either Wittgenstein or Waismann (though all three are major contributors to the meta-philosophy discussion), sets a significant bit of his meta-philosophical account against the background of a story of the emergence of philosophy, its development, and its, he claims, becoming a *transitional genre* to what he calls, in a broad sense of ‘literary’, a *literary culture* (Rorty 2007a). (Does not this way of putting matters point to or suggest something of what he takes to be philosophy’s demise or, more properly, Philosophy’s demise, not philosophy’s, as we shall explain and see later?)

How does this go? Intellectuals, or at least those in the West, Rorty tells us, “have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy, and now from literature” (Rorty 2007a, 91). Redemption, as he characterized it, is locked into gaining, or at least seeking—incoherently or not—‘*redemptive truth*’. By this he means “a set of beliefs which would end, once and for all, the process of reflection on what to do with ourselves” (Rorty 2007a, 90).<sup>1</sup> Religion, or more precisely monotheistic religions

of salvation (Jewish, Christian or Islamic faiths), “offers hope for redemption through entering into a new relation to a supremely powerful non-human person” (Rorty 2007a, 91). Such a person is not only powerful, but supremely good and wise, an omniscient and omnipotent ‘super-person’ who can give significance and purpose to our lives. These religions of salvation have somewhat varying creeds (both internally within each one and between them), sometimes with (as with Quakers or Unitarians) rather minimal creeds. However, the creeds are not what is of central concern for such religious people. What is of supreme importance for them, if they are genuinely religious persons, is their affective relation to God. Rorty has it, not implausibly, that it is their personal relation to God that is of supreme importance to them. Intellectuals (as they came in some form into being) some, at first many, remained religious in this sense and some still do, but most over time have come (whether religious or not) to set aside or to downplay the importance and necessity of *such* a religious orientation, such a passionate, as Rorty calls it, non-cognitive relation with God (Rorty 2007a). Fewer and fewer intellectuals, as time goes by, turn to religion *in such a way*, or at least exclusively in such a way. They came to turn to philosophy, religious philosophy or not. Those who remain religious will *rationalize* their religion. They may in some sense keep their creedal beliefs, but they, in one way or another, will require a philosophical backup for them, a philosophical justification.

For philosophy, however, “true belief is of the essence: redemption by philosophy would consist in acquiring a set of beliefs that represent things in the one way they truly are” (Rorty 2007a, 91). Rorty contends, as does Gianni Vattimo as well, that such a philosophical belief has been undermined in the Twentieth and Twenty First centuries for most intellectuals; and indeed for most sensitive, reflective and reasonably educated persons (in the West at least), religion is becoming somewhat more problematic (Vattimo 2004; see Rorty’s Forward as well.) As time goes by, there are more and more intellectuals who are disenchanted concerning claims to redemptive truth, either from religion or from philosophy or from some blend of them or, for that matter,

increasingly from science. And this, Rorty claims, is as it should be. Intellectuals, he continues, are switching to literature or, more adequately put, to what is, in a wide sense, literary culture where both philosophy and religion are themselves seen as exclusively literary or more generally as cultural artifacts. In such a culture, we are offered redemption, Rorty has it, through making acquaintance with and becoming attuned to as great a variety of human beings as possible with their cultural creations: novels, plays, films, poems, songs, paintings. Here again, as initially with religion, “true belief may be of little importance, but redemption is” (Rorty 2007a, 91).<sup>2</sup> However, redemption of this broadly literary sort, Rorty has it, comes in different ways than in either religion or philosophy.

A literary culture construes both religion and philosophy, while distinguishing them, as themselves being parts of literary culture which subsumes them both. Religion extensively morphs into philosophy and then philosophy (with or without religion) morphs into a literary culture. Buddhism and Kant’s transcendental philosophy are plainly radically different activities, and they are both different from *Anna Karenina*. But novels, such as one of Tolstoy’s or Flaubert’s masterpieces, more than moral treatises, are becoming our principal sources of moral understanding: George Elliot more than John Stuart Mill. That is the way the *zeitgeist*, with its literary culture, is going.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than an attunement to an infinite person—an ‘infinite individual’ (if that makes sense) in whom we place our trust and give our love—in philosophy we move towards a belief in a set of practices which supposedly yields not only our attunements to life but the one true description and explanation of the world, the ‘really real’, *the truth* about how things really are in themselves. We have contrastingly, in a literary culture, religion and philosophy becoming themselves just cultural artifacts along with a lot of other cultural artifacts (novels, films, art, music) which answer to our various needs, our orientations, and that which give some enjoyment to our lives and surcease to our sorrows. But they are no longer taken to be sources of ultimate truth or

ultimate reality. Such notions increasingly disappear from the view of intellectuals. We come, more and more, to treat our religious and philosophical narratives *just as narratives*. Moreover, the more and varied we have of those narratives, the better off we are. We should not remain, for example, fixated on one religious narrative project, neither Christian ones of salvation nor Buddhist ones of inner enlightenment. As artifacts, they are just there to answer to, or fail to answer to, our needs and interests. Moreover, if one answers to our needs and interests, the other narratives do not have to fail to do so. They may and indeed do answer to the needs and interests of others. We humans have varied interests and needs that can be met in a great variety of ways. We must recognize we are cultural animals and that cultures vary.

The more and the more varied such artifacts there are, the better. Whether Islamic ones of salvation or Hindu ones of inner enlightenment or the Icelandic sagas, the *Republic*, *Summa Theologica*, *Meditations*, *Pensées*, *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Phenomenology of Mind*, *The Tractatus*, or *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, all are treated and viewed as cultural artifacts along with novels, plays, poems and films to be read or viewed or listened to and pondered often, engaging our imaginations and yielding enjoyment as well as enlightenment. And the more and more varied, the better; the more our imaginations are exercised. As I have just put it, it reeks of Western bias. We should abhor the remark that one famous English philosopher was alleged to have made—I do not know how reliable the claim is—in reply to a question about Indian philosophy. He was said to have replied that the only light that comes from the East is the sun. *Some* of that area is principally Moslem, but there is also a rich philosophical tradition and literary culture from Arab lands otherwise situated or, to mention another place that has been neglected by world culture, there is the Caribbean. I do not know as much about these cultural trends as I would like to but I know enough to know that they should not be neglected or patronized. (See Amartya Sen, Tariq Ali, Edward Said and Timothy Brennan in his *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*.)

None of them—Western or Eastern—are to be taken as vehicles of ‘ultimate truth’ or as yielding ‘Ultimate Reality’ or some *final* wisdom or *the truth*. None will yield the last word, that truth about life, that final and complete conception of how the world should be and how society should be organized—the sort of thing that Arthur Koestler throughout his life so desperately sought (Acherson 2010). Even if we immerse ourselves in many such cultural traditions, they will not give us *the* truth about life—for there is no such thing and people immersed in a literary culture have long abandoned such a futile hope as have Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo. What we can achieve, instead, is an enhanced sense of the vast number of purposes and alternative ways of living and viewing life that there are. And we can come to feel the pull that many of them, though surely not for any one of us all of them. We will be in situations where we, the reader, viewer, listener will have, whatever the author’s intentions, no belief, where we have morphed into a literary culture, as Rorty describes it, that one of them will finally show us the really right way to go so as to be the product of the very best possible reasoning or of the argument with the greatest claim to soundness or of the most adequate conceptualization or the one true depiction. Instead, these cultural artifacts, taken together, will enhance our imaginations and our sensitivity to things around us. As we read more and more, listen more and more, view more and more, appreciate more and more, and ponder life in these ways our imaginations will be enlarged and nuanced and become sophisticated as will our sensitivities and cultural understandings. With this enlargement we will increasingly enrich our lives and have a better understanding of our world. No ‘final truth’, whatever that is, is on offer, but just what I said: we will have a better understanding of our world. And that will include some contextualized claims to truth. We will never get ‘a best understanding of the world’, but we can gain new and broader understandings of it and this can go on indefinitely unless, for one reason or another, we become caught in a new Dark Age with a breakdown of civilization, say, one caused by our climate nihilism or a new and vast world war.



This literary culture, Rorty plausibly has it, is replacing or transforming, at least among intellectuals, philosophy, much as philosophy once replaced or transformed religion (though ‘replacing’ would be the more accurate description for philosophy). Philosophy now remains little more than a marginal cultural artifact. It no longer has the cultural weight that it had in the times of Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel or even that to a certain extent it had during Dewey’s time. As philosophy (what Rorty calls big P Philosophy, e.g., metaphysics and the like) is increasingly marginalized; it becomes, he claims, more and more transitional to a literary culture. What is left of it remains mired in a little specialist discipline—a discipline that has an increasingly localized specialized interest. Moreover, it is even within that specialized discipline breaking into sub-disciplines that often have very little, if anything, in common with each other. Rorty, however, is not *merely* making a historical or sociological observation and prediction, but is saying that this is the way that things are going and *should* go, though he might get a little nervous about the categorical sound of the ‘should’.

Rorty is giving us to understand that this morphing is the most reasonable way to view how things are transpiring and that, like religion and philosophy were in their days redemptive, now redemption rests, if it so rests at all, in a literary culture. That itself seems to me to be a philosophical claim with all the difficulties—including that of pragmatic contradiction—that it raises for Rorty. However, this fits well with Rorty’s rejection of Philosophical claims as not necessarily incoherent but *passé* (Engel, Rorty, McCuaig 2007, 32-38; 57-58; 65-66).<sup>4</sup>

Rorty could respond to the charge of pragmatic contradiction by saying that to say something is redemptive *tout court* is to give expression to an illusion. ‘Redemption’ so conceived is to say something that cannot be coherently asserted and to speak of ‘redemptive truth’ is to do the same. We have no way to ascertain that such claims are more reasonable than their denials or of ascertaining whether we should just remain thoroughly agnostic on such issues. That this morphing is going on does not show for its morph, either that it is more reasonable than its

alternatives, or that it is even reasonable, period. Moreover, Rorty is in no position to make or to deny his normative claim about reasonability. But it is evident from what he has just said that he has not shown that he is free of the charge of pragmatic contradiction. He needs a different argument here or a different showing that no argument is necessary. But this is not to say or even suggest that it cannot be done.

Suppose Rorty sticks to his guns and reiterates that to say that something is *redemptive, tout court*, is to give expression to an illusion and that the very idea of 'redemptive truth' is another illusion. But, it can be reiterated, how do we, on Rorty's own way of looking at things, ascertain that? Isn't that itself to make a Philosophical claim? It certainly looks like it. And given his own rejection of big P Philosophy, how can he be in a position to ascertain that (Rorty 1982, xiii-xxi)? Redemption can only be for him, and indeed for all of us, culturally determinate—in our time and place, contextualized by a literary culture, just as it has been previously contextualized by a religious culture or a philosophical culture. There can be no redemption, *tout court*. Redemption, after all, is only in the eye of the beholder. It is clearly culturally dependent, or *at least* centrally partially culturally dependent. That is all it can be for Rorty and rightly so. Moreover, he still faces the charge of pragmatic contradiction. It is such a situation that prompts Vattimo, a close ally of Rorty, to speak, misleadingly I think, of nihilism (Vattimo 2004).

The situation is this: the belief in religious and philosophical redemption has as a matter of fact begun to run dry for an increasing number of intellectuals and sometimes, as well, for other reflective people. However, that is not a philosophical claim, but *a historical and empirical* one. When we look at our cultures they all seem, in large measure and fundamentally, to be form-of-life dependent as indeed all cultures have been. That appears at least to be something that is empirically true. When we take a non-evasive look, this seems, at least, as true for us as it is true for others. Just observe how things go. This is all we get when we reason, even when we reason together, about anything substantive. The above remarks are not Philosophical remarks, namely,

metaphysical, epistemological, methodological remarks or even meta-ethical, normative ethical *theory* or normative political *theory* remarks about how things *must* be: claims to an absolute perspective. They, however, are interpretive as many descriptions are. Still they are empirical matters there for non-evasive observation and examination. But that does not require Philosophy or sometimes even philosophy.

It is important to remember that I am, as Rorty and Vattimo are, and many others are, a *historicist*. But that is not to espouse a silly relativism (not a pleonasm) saying that one belief is as good as another, e.g., 'I prefer kindness in the world and some other people prefer concentration camps and torture centers. It is all a matter of taste or of what you just happen to prefer.' "There is," such a silly relativism goes, "no way ever of saying one judgment is better than another. All we can do is express our preferences and preferences differ" (Rorty 2006a, 126).

Historical relativism, by contrast, claims that our beliefs, or at least many of them, including the most crucial of them, are time and place dependent. We, to echo Hegel, cannot overleap history; we can attain no Absolute perspective, no culturally transcendent substantive Archimedean point which categorically just lays out how it is and must be and should be. We do not even have a coherent understanding of what such things would or could be. Accurate description and careful reflection, *pace* Rorty, is what we need and all that we can have. We cannot escape contingency. We can say, but cannot validate in some culturally and historically free way, how things not only are but must be and should be categorically. Accurate description and careful reflection on it, sometimes with causal explanations, is all we can have. Here we have a TINA. But in saying this we do not make a transcendental or quasi-transcendental claim or something that somehow is beyond contingency. We just make a historically grounded empirical claim while recognizing that like all empirical claims that claim, at least logically speaking, *might* be false. But that is not to say that it *is* false or even likely to be false. However, it will be claimed, there is still no possibility of validating the general claim Rorty has been making without pragmatic contradiction. He is making a claim

about a *historical* relativism, a historical contextualism that he just asserts to be empirically true without validation on his part. There is—or so it seems—no possibility of validating what Rorty has been claiming without asserting it as a Philosophical claim and that involves him in a pragmatic contradiction which means there is no validating it, full stop.

Pragmatic contradiction aside, and I think avoidably as the last two paragraphs show, it seems to me a mistake for Rorty to claim that there is redemption in a literary culture. But whatever its status is, it is not that of an Absolute claim. He does say, as we have seen, that ‘redemptive truth’ is a term “for a set of beliefs which would end, once and for all, the process of reflection on what to do with ourselves” (Rorty 2007a, 90). But our engagement with the world runs against that. Moreover, there is for humanity, as Rorty well realizes, no such once and for all. That is the very thing that a literary culture sets its face against. Moreover, literary culture, with its ever expanding horizons is, Rorty contends, a repeated search for something new, something that would enhance our imaginations, sensitivity and historical awareness. But someone with such an awareness might be wary—very wary—of speaking of redemptive truth or even of hoping for it or thinking it might, just might, be possible or consistently thinkable. But she might well think of what she was striving to achieve as providing the redemptive virtue in the value of the struggle to achieve something of worth. In dropping the idea of ‘redemptive truth’ increased awareness could increase insight into the life around us as well as into our own lives and that practice would be redemptive.<sup>5</sup>

Rorty argues against both the very idea of ‘redemptive truth’ and a claim to redemption without truth (Rorty 2007a, 73-88, 89-104). But could someone immersed in a literary culture abandon the very idea of ‘redemptive truth’ and any redemption once and for all while still reasonably retaining some culturally determinate idea of redemption? That very much depends on what that idea is. But until such a conceptualization is sorted out it remains problematic what if anything could be redemptive, even if we forget about redemptive truth. But how could—or

could—a literary culture be redemptive or any part of it be redemptive as Rorty characterizes ‘redemptive’? How can a ‘once and for all’ which just goes with, for Rorty, the idea of redemptive, be a real option in a world which has abandoned the very idea of an escape from contingency, a culture which has fallibilism deeply ingrained in it? We should ask if redemption as Rorty characterized could come to anything coherent in such a world. And is there for us any reasonable or even coherent alternative to such a world? Redemption for us, as Rorty characterized it, is not something that squares with a literary culture or indeed a thoroughly modernizing culture or, if you will, a postmodernizing culture. We are, or at least I am, at sea about what redemption so characterized is supposed to be in a literary culture and in our disenchanted, thoroughly secular world. And we have no compelling or even reasonably sustainable idea of how to re-enchant it or, for many of us, even the desire to do so. Would it not be better to say that when we have morphed first out of religion and then out of philosophy and gone to literary culture then we have abandoned the very idea of redemption, at least as Rorty characterized it? And, as we have seen, while it is not the only way, and perhaps not the only reasonable way, it is an attractive way for people caught up in our modern world. From a literary culture perspective there is neither a need for, nor the possibility of, an escape from contingency: to gain a view of reality *sub specie aeternatis*. We will gain this neither in Aquinas’s theistic world nor Spinoza’s naturalistic one. Literary intellectuals, where they do not have much of a trace of the previous *philosophical* culture, have given up such concerns and live, happily or unhappily, in a wonderful variety of literature, art and music and with that an enrichment of their imaginations and a deepening of their sensitivities. We can, and should, such intellectuals would say, ignore claims about what reality just *must* be and even, unlike philosophers, ignore attempts to refute such metaphysical claims. They are best just ignored or, if we go Cavellish, treated as just cultural artifacts and with that we turn from Rorty’s robust and *perhaps* persuasive idea of redemption. It doesn’t square, if you will, with that kind of sophistication. And we cannot go back to the desperate imaginings and a claiming to a grasp of

some 'saving ineffable ultimate truths' that reason cannot know. That, whatever, if at all, its emotional appeal, is to immerse oneself in incoherency (Berlin 1999; 2007). Contemporary literary intellectuals just do not play such redemptive language-games, live in such practices, except *sometimes just*, for some, as imaginative fun. Being part of such a literary culture, it might contestedly be said, is redemption or emancipation enough, if you insist on calling it either. But that shouldn't be insisted on. Indeed, that is reductive and misleading. Moreover, to do so just comes to an arbitrary and misleading persuasive redefinition of 'redemption'. But is this too rationalistic and too focused on intellectual elitism?

People so attuned to and immersed in a literary culture do not take seriously and do not concern themselves with the belief "that the life that cannot be successfully argued for is not worth living or the belief that persistent argument will lead inquirers to the same set of beliefs" (Rorty 2007a, 92). They are not caught up, as Kierkegaard put it, in such Socratism. Literature (literary culture), insofar as it is not still contaminated by philosophy or by religious enthusiasm (think of Georg Hamann), will have neither of these beliefs. Rorty at least seems to be saying we have no need for such beliefs or to be concerned with them, except, perhaps, if we are concerned to characterize them (as Berlin was) as are historians of such ideas. After all, an atheist could be steeped in the history of Catholic, Calvinist or Islamic culture as Tariq Ali exemplifies for Islamic culture (Ali 2002). But the crucial point here is that people can be immersed, without mixed trailings of a philosophical or religious culture, but still knowledgeable about them. They have no need for trying to ascertain the cogency of that idea of redemption, except perhaps to understand it as a historical phenomenon. They have no need for a redemptive relation to the world. Wittgenstein will not even accept that. He would say that there can have no such understanding of it. Where the Romantics thought they had a grasp of ineffable truth, Wittgenstein thought we could only have an inarticulate desire. We are sometimes forced, he has it, to in effect just emit a groan, though he respected some of those groanings. But that interest of Wittgenstein's is very distant

from any cognitive interest, including a historian's interest in it, as long as she sticks to her vocation. But Wittgenstein has no need to make religion reasonable or for that matter unreasonable. And he thinks it is utter folly to try, as John Wisdom did, to bring such discussions up against 'the bar of reason' (Wisdom 1965, 1-22).

Literary intellectuals do not believe in anything like 'cognitive redemption' or, more realistically and more cautiously, self-aware literary intellectuals do not. Novels and films have an important role in such a culture (a literary culture) which, Rorty claims, has become with us the dominant culture of intellectuals (something that Antonio Gramsci said was a growing species). The novel and the film, not the treatise on ethics or a sociological or anthropological account, "has become the central vehicle of moral instruction" (Rorty 2007a, 94).<sup>6</sup> Human beings, particularly when viewed over space and time, are very diverse; their common core is thin and insufficiently instructive to give us much of a guide as to how we ought to live or structure our social world. So much for natural law or any of its hermeneutical children (Nielsen 1991, 40-99).<sup>7</sup>

Rorty's ideal of a literary intellectual, and mine as well, is someone who "thinks the more books you read, the more ways of being human you have considered, the more you reflect on such things, the more human you will become—the less tempted by dreams of an escape from time and chance, the more convinced you will become that we humans have nothing to rely on save one another" (Rorty 2007a, 94). The great virtue of the literary culture, Rorty has it, is that it tells young intellectuals that the only source of redemption (what, I think, he should call instead 'emancipatory enlightenment') is the human imagination, and that this fact should occasion pride rather than despair" (Rorty 2007a, 94-95).<sup>8</sup> I would say, rather, that should involve action and engagement, not Rorty's self-described *quietism* (Rorty 2006b, 374). But here perhaps we both are becoming rather too decisionist.

Without philosophy, in spite of what I have said, is it the case that *perhaps* we can reasonably speak of redemption without redemptive truth? We cannot speak plausibly, or even

coherently, of redemptive truth. But in speaking of redemption without redemptive truth, it should come to a kind of orientation to life, a finding of a robust and finely attuned sense of life, without religion or philosophy. It might even come to finding *a* (not *the*) truth about life. Why could that not be redemptive? Perhaps to say so involves an implicit *persuasive* definition? But so what? Rather, we—so the account goes—gain an enhanced understanding and sensitivity and come to affectively relate to other human beings with what is often taken to be an empathetic understanding of very different ways of living and very different attunements to life in different conditions, in different times and climes, with people of different convictions. Either by sustained contact with these different people and/or by soaking ourselves in their literature, art, film and music, we can gain something of this. To gain these kinds of understanding—what has sometimes been called an empathetic understanding—requires no knowledge of redemptive truth or of many (indeed any) philosophical texts, moral treatises, though some of them—Spinoza or Nietzsche, for example—may sometimes be important to put in our repertoire, but not so centrally as the great novels or films of the world. We can, however, in gaining such an understanding, have lost the very idea of redemptive *truth* or never have had it. We can get on—and get on here well—without religion or philosophy. We can also without them give meaning to life; give, that is, sense to our lives. We can by our actions, our ways of living, give an ethical meaning to life (Dworkin 2011). But we must, to adequately gain enlightenment, come to have an empathetic understanding of ourselves, of people and of peoples. This requires in almost all cases an appreciation of the sometimes inchoate and typically desperate struggles people sometimes have to engage in, or think they have to, to make sense of their lives and their world. Here understanding the Romantics, obscure and sometimes obscurantist as they are, may be important (Berlin 1999). In gaining such an understanding (of Romantics, including why we might revise them), we may with luck also gain a clear or clearer understanding of our own situation and the struggle it involves and how it relates to the struggle of very different others and of in what ways, if at all, it becomes a common struggle.



When we become immersed in these matters and when we reflect clearheadedly and realistically on what we are doing, we should come to recognize, or put less moralistically will come to realize, that philosophy—big P Philosophy, that is—is becoming increasingly marginal and now it should be seen as a transitional genre to something else. For Rorty, as we have seen, it is to a literary culture. For me, it is that too, *but it is also and very importantly transitional to an emancipatory social theory and social science*—something that Rorty abjures (Rorty 2007c; Nielsen 2007).

### III

In this section I want to set out, comment on and develop certain characteristics of Rorty's conception of how philosophy is a transitional genre and bring to the fore its meta-philosophical import. Rorty remarks that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century those who took metaphysics seriously were either idealists (espousing what our philosophy textbooks call 'objective idealism', not 'subjective idealism'; Hegel, not Berkeley) or materialists of various kinds (now routinely called physicalists). Philosophers then were in a situation where Hegel, pretty much for the first time in philosophy, taught us to attend closely to history: philosophy, for him, was our time held in thought. There is, for him, no overleaping history (historicism) and philosophy paints its gray on gray only when its form of life has grown old. Philosophy, that is, if Hegel is on the mark, is always too late to show us the way forward. *In that way* it can never be liberating; it can never be, at least *in that way*, redemptive. Hegel also erected a grand though obscure metaphysical system that soon collapsed and was ridiculed as buffoonery by figures as different as Kierkegaard and Russell. Hegel created a grand speculative system that was just that. The historicist side of it is to Marx's historical materialism—neither a metaphysical theory nor any kind of philosophical one—much as Herodotus was to Thucydides. (See here G. A. Cohen, 2008.) Marx and Thucydides gave us bits of historical science rather than a speculative mythology. As things played out, for those who would

do metaphysics, materialism (physicalism) won out. It became the only metaphysical game in town.

However, by contrast Nietzsche and Kierkegaard prominently in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the logical positivists, Wittgenstein, Waismann (less clearly and consistently so than Wittgenstein) and Rorty (though in different ways than Wittgenstein) in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, reject metaphysics as having no redemptive power, as yielding no insight of any kind and, Rorty has it, at best as being a waste of time (Rorty 2007b, 32-45).

Matters do not end there. There may be something, even after the demise of metaphysics, in Hegel's way of looking at things, with his stress on historicism. Against that Rorty, historicist that he is, rephrases Kierkegaard's point strikingly.

[I]f Hegel had been able to stop thinking that he had given us redemptive truth, and had claimed instead to have given us something *better* than redemptive truth—namely a way of holding all the previous products of the human imagination together in a single vision—he would have been the first philosopher to admit that a better cultural product than philosophy had come on the market. He would have been the first self-consciously to replace religion with philosophy. But instead Hegel presented himself (at least part of the time) as having discovered Absolute Truth, and men like Royce took his idealism with a seriousness which now strikes us as both endearing and ludicrous (Rorty 2007a, 97).

The redemptive ideal did not die with the demise of idealism; even with some materialists or naturalists (physicalists, if you will) the redemptive ideal did not die. These materialist metaphysicians thought that their metaphysics would tell us what the world was really like and provide a thoroughly naturalistic morality as well that will tell us how we should live. Some naturalists (Quine, for example) not going that way concluded that the philosophy of natural science was all the philosophy that philosophy would ever need. But contrariwise, for these materialist metaphysicians, they stuck with the Philosophical tradition. Philosophy had almost always taught that an account that bound everything together into a coherent whole would thereby

also give us a redemptive whole. Going with the flow, most materialist metaphysics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and some of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century thought that. In that vein, even materialist metaphysicians, though in a disguised and unacknowledged way, retained the idea of redemptive truth. It just went, so it was often thought, but not by Quine, with the very idea of philosophy. (20<sup>th</sup> Century classical pragmatist naturalism, e.g., Sidney Hook and Ernest Nagel, though again in an unacknowledged way, went that way too. They were not scientistic, Quineian or otherwise.)

Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Waismann and Rorty in various ways put this in question. Indeed, it might be said that they put such redemptive truthism as well as scientism to bed for an eternal rest. For them, natural science did not—and did not try to—tell us how to live our lives or what would be a good or just society, let alone a good world. But that is not to deny, what surely is so, that without natural science our lives would be much worse than they need be. Natural science in various obvious ways is of great instrumental value. But with the creation of nuclear weapons, among other things, it also sometimes has great instrumental disvalue. Think of its relation to global warming and other elements of our ecological situation. Without natural science we would never have these problems, though this is not to deny that we could have natural science and be without them. However, the way natural science has been applied, it is an instrument, even a source, of evil as well as of good. How we should balance these things is not clear. Yet, as Rorty has put it, “the free play of the imagination is possible only because of the substructure literal minded people have built. No artisans, no poets” (Rorty 2007a, 98). Natural scientists and their offshoots—engineers, plumbers, surgeons, pilots, well diggers, pipefitters, carpenters, dentists, etc.—can be and usually are of enormous value to us. Imagine what it was like to have an operation before the invention of anesthesia. Think of amputations, for example. But however useful science is, it will not tell us how we, either as individuals or collectively in societies, should live, though sometimes it is helpful in determining this. Redemption and ‘redemptive truth’,

even assuming there is or even could be such a thing, is not in natural science's sights, though this is not to deny that instrumentally it has often been of value.

However, is social science any better or indeed any different than natural science in this respect? Perhaps it has even been worse. To come at this first indirectly, recall that I, like Rorty, think that philosophy is a transitional genre, though I think it is a transition—or at least should be—to social science and social theory more generally as well as to a literary culture. Rorty thinks that is a mistake and stands his ground about it only being transitional instead to a literary culture (Rorty 2007c; Nielsen 2007). I now have come to think it is, and importantly so, *transitional to both* literary culture and social science. The literary culture side would be inadequate on its own for our coming to grips with the world as well as would the social science side without literary culture be lacking for coming to grips with our world. Literary culture gives us narratives, sometimes splendid, perplexing, compelling, thought provoking and challenging narratives. Even some obscurantist Romantics did this well (Berlin 1999; 2007). But we must be wary of what anthropologists have called *just so stories*: stories that are sometimes compellingly narrated but sometimes empirically in extensive error. To ascertain that takes empirical research and observation, but such observation is not necessarily something to be utilized in imaginative literature or in other Romantic thought. It is sometimes valuable as it was used by naturalistic novelists such as Zola or Sinclair. But imaginative literature need not be off the mark when it is not so used. Zola and Sinclair were indeed famous examples of writers who carefully researched and relied on research concerning the social situations of which they wrote. But not Joyce, Maugham, Roy, Proust or even George Elliot. They wrote out of their own experience without social science checks. Such checks are not a requirement of novelists or dramatists or of a literary culture. Still, it would be useful if we could know whether, for example, Chaucer accurately reflected his time and place, or Turgenev or Dumas theirs. It is not that literary artists are on trial, but we would like to

know if Zola's picture of the miners' situation in *Germinal* was the way miners at that time were situated and lived.

Some novelists have a backup of social science (most particularly of historical) knowledge and indeed often historical accuracy is essential to their work. A striking contemporary novel is Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (though even there, manifestly not all parts of it are realistic or seek to be). Moreover, history cannot be just speculation or narrative with only verisimilitude. It must have a contextually sensitive warranted assertability. But again literature, even naturalistic literature, is not history; though for many of us it is our principal source of our historical knowledge.<sup>9</sup> (But here we should be wary. Don't identify that with truth, though sometimes for some of us it is the nearest thing we can get by way of understanding and justification of historical truth claims.)

Something can be warrantably assertable and false and something can be true and not (at least at the time) be warrantably assertable. But in philosophy, as well as in social science and social theory more generally, there is a desire to get our narratives right—having them say something that is true or probably true rather than what is false or probably false or so incoherent that it could not be ascertained whether it is either true or false. Rorty is right that there is no history and context independent notion of something being so. There is *pace* Thomas Nagel no perspectiveless way of construing things anymore than there is a last word. But even these very claims cannot be set out as beyond question. But we can and should aspire to get something as right as we can. Leave 'eternal truths' to the religious. We often, but not always, want verisimilitude in literature—particularly in novels, novellas, short stories, and plays. However, even if a realistic or naturalistic novelist (Zola, Dreiser, Sinclair, Flaubert, Roy, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Harkness, or Littell) got some factual detail about the world they were writing about wrong, it would not be a serious flaw, or perhaps not be a flaw at all, in their writing. But it must generally be the case, for someone writing in that genre, that she be responsible to the facts of the situation of

which she is writing, but not necessarily to every detail. They can and do have, of course, characters who are not actual historical agents and they will as well quite properly portray events which did not actually occur as long as they have verisimilitude, are faithful to the situation. If Tolstoy's characterization of the armies of Napoleon occupying Moscow was generally inaccurate, *War and Peace* would, to put it mildly, be flawed. If Melville's depiction of whaling life coming out of Nantucket was unrealistic, *Moby Dick* would be flawed. Some of its characters and elements, such as the great white whale itself or Captain Ahab, are larger than life and that can still be artistically fine, but it would not be fine if the general facts of whaling life were distant from what *Moby Dick* portrays. Zola, Sinclair, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Roy, and Harkness are paradigm realistic (naturalistic) novelists, and of these at least Zola and Sinclair made meticulous investigations concerning what they were planning to write about. That notwithstanding, if many things were off the mark, not factual or reflected ignorance of important matters, then a naturalistic work would be importantly flawed. Take, for example, Jonathan Little's massive novel *The Kindly Ones*. If its account of the Third Reich and of what went on at the Eastern Front and in Berlin had serious historical errors, his novel, given the type of novel that it is, would be worthless. If his account of the battle around Stalingrad or the murder of Jews and Communists was not on the whole historically accurate, the novel would be deeply flawed. As it is, there are many deliberately fantastic, bizarre things not meant to be at all realistic in the novel. I am not confident that they add anything. But the author surely intends them to do so. They are things that could not have happened and that is plainly so in the narrative and in keeping with the author's intentions. Whether they add or subtract from the novel's power is arguable. But, to repeat, if the main body of the novel—given the kind of novel that it is—was not generally historically accurate, then it would be worthless. The same thing is true of Tolstoy, Melville, and Zola.

Social science accounts themselves (including history), to be genuinely scientific, have to be metaphysics-free and fantasy-free. No just-so stories are allowable. Moreover, they cannot be

dependent in their structure and content on meta-ethics, normative ethical theories, normative political theories, or epistemology. A social scientist, as long as she sticks to her vocation, will neither be a redemptionist nor a robust moralizer—not even in a subtle sense—or perhaps no moralizer at all. But she need not be a quietist either. She will typically (but not always) have a vision of what the society she is writing about can and should be or could and should have been. But that should swing free from, stand independently of, her actual social science. It cannot be a strict part of it. However, it, as well as her political and economic beliefs and convictions, can guide her investigations and determine which hypothesis she will choose to investigate or what she is trying by interpretive empirical descriptions to throw light upon. But she can't, to be faithful to her vocation, just make up things, no matter how realistically, as she goes along. She must, as well, consider hypotheses which, if verified, would falsify her claims (Passmore 1966). Here she differs from a novelist, even a realist or naturalistic novelist, who has the license to make up things as long as they have verisimilitude. Her hypotheses, to be genuine hypotheses, must be testable and sometimes her hypotheses and claims may be shown to be false. The testability claim is always relevant. We philosophers, if we are serious about our deliberations and ruminations, will also want our narratives not to be just-so stories or *just* sentimental or gripping tales; not to be just speculative products, even if products of powerful imaginings. We will want truth as well as vivid imaginings, though, respecting fallibilistic constraints, what we *take* to be true is what is taken to be the most warrantably assertable of the relevant claims.

However, now consider historians. Such magisterial historians as Eric Hobsbawm, Perry Anderson and Tony Judt draw moral conclusions from their historical narratives, but they are backed up by historical facts. Their narratives are not just-so stories. But they are, of course, fallibilistic (Hobsbawm 1995; Anderson 2009; Judt 2005)). Realistic fictional writings, as we have seen, are not so bound by that or centrally concerned with warranted assertability, but they must be respectful of the world they are characterizing. Philosophy, by contrast, is typically concerned

not just with verisimilitude as realistic literature is, but with truth. Where that concern is strong, as in pragmatism, for example, it will morph into what in fact is social science, whatever it calls itself. But where it is less fixated on that, it may morph, as it does for Rorty, into literary culture. But it can morph into both and we do not have to decide which is the more important morphing. For me, literature and film mean a lot, but social science, from history to social anthropology, social geography and sociology, mean still more as my aim is to get things as close to being right as possible. My concern most centrally is with warranted assertability.

#### IV

I turn now to Wittgenstein and to what he is saying in what I will call his meta-philosophy. He does not place, as does Rorty, his remarks in a historical context, though, of course, they have such a context, as does every philosopher's. His own philosophy or, if you will, his anti-philosophy Philosophy (Philosophical rejectionism), may in reality be as historicist as Rorty's. Wittgenstein's meta-philosophy, or indeed his philosophy in general, is so situated in a time and place that we could well call it historicist, though Wittgenstein himself would not call it so. Yet Wittgenstein's reaction to the work of Frege, Russell and the logical positivists and his hostility to scientism (something that, as we have noted, Quine proudly champions) indirectly reflects his Viennese culture, though this is most pronouncedly so in much of his latter work. Yet Wittgenstein writes as if his philosophy and philosophy in general was ageless, as if he were in there discussing with Plato, Augustine or Descartes (though explicitly he does little of that). But some of his examples reflect that. (Think, for example, of Augustine on language learning, time or memory.) But, of course, that is not the way it is. With his utilization of the notions of practices and forms of life, his work is in fact historicist.

I came across Wittgenstein's work late in my PhD studies—the *Tractatus* never had any influence on me—when I was working, after an undergraduate tour of Marx (on my own and not



from my teachers) and the classical pragmatists (principally Dewey, and again largely on my own). In my graduate work, I studied philosophers such as Rudolf Carnap and Hans Reichenbach and, even more extensively, the maverick pragmatist C. I. Lewis, who thought of himself, in contrast to all the other pragmatists, as a 'conceptual pragmatist'. Late in the day for me, a professor of mine showed me a manuscript copy of Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* (it hadn't been published yet nor had his *Philosophical Investigations*). I read it in one sitting, utterly absorbed and as if the scales were falling from my eyes. This led me in my last years of graduate study to doing philosophy in a different way and affected the writing of my dissertation, part of which remains in my *Why Be Moral?*

I never became a Wittgenstein scholar though, in the work I did concerning religion I studied him closely and was deeply influenced by him and by some Wittgensteinians, particularly Peter Winch and Norman Malcolm. In respect to political and social philosophy, Wittgenstein led me to be more contextualist, historicist, holist, perspectivist and suspicious of 'grand theory' of any kind, Marxian though I am. And this plainly is no small influence (see *my* work in Nielsen and Phillips 2005). But, vis-à-vis what I call his meta-philosophy, I was great influenced by him. Along with in effect his setting aside metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, normative ethical and normative political theory, I have taken on his therapeutic attitude toward philosophy. I see (following Wittgenstein) philosophy as analogous to a disease which we need to cure ourselves of by defogging ourselves of what are, in a broad sense, metaphysical views caused by our entanglements in our language when we try to generalize about it. The cure is to come around to clearly seeing how we actually use our language and, in doing so, we will come to see how in philosophizing we, again and again, misunderstand the actual use of our language and, with that, our thought gets fogged. This leads us astray when we try to philosophize, generating various disquietudes.

Georg von Wright and Anthony Kenney, who have forgotten more about Wittgenstein than I know, have convinced me that this is, though, the dominant motif in Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy—what I call his anti-Philosophy philosophy (Nielsen 1994). There are other jarring, perhaps even conflicting, motifs as well. A reading again of sections 89-133 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, his *The Bigtypiscript* (pp. 300-18), and selections from his texts made by Anthony Kenney for *The Wittgenstein Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pp.46-69 and 245-56) will confirm this. However, this therapeutic side is the dominant side of his conception of philosophy and something I have appropriated for myself. I am, as far as conceptualizing philosophy is concerned, a Wittgensteinian therapist. I shall set this account against what Rorty calls and defends as pragmatic Wittgensteinianism (Rorty 2007a, 161). Pragmatist that I am (not a Wittgensteinian pragmatist), I am, with *some* ambivalence, a Wittgensteinian therapist.

I will first set out some pithy, brilliant, often metaphorical characterizations of what Wittgenstein means in seeing his philosophical work as therapeutic.

1. "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness" (*PI*, 255).
2. "A main cause of philosophical disease—a one-sided diet: one nourishes one's thinking with only one kind of example" (*PI*, 593).
3. "What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (*PI*, 309).<sup>10</sup>
4. "...it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; as if this were the real goal of our investigations" (*PI*, 91).
5. "...our forms of expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras" (*PI*, 94).
6. "Here it is difficult as it were to keep our heads up, to see that we must stick to the subjects of our everyday thinking, and not go astray and imagine we have to describe extreme subtleties, which in turn we are after all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal. We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers" (*PI*, 106).

7. "It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'—whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium.) And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its power of illumination—i.e., its purpose—from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*PI*, 109).
8. "The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language. Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be *deep*? (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.)" (*PI*, 111).
9. "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is" (*PI*, 124).
10. "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us" (*PI*, 126). [This is behind the claim of Norman Malcolm and others stressing that for Wittgenstein nothing is hidden.]
11. "The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (*PI*, 132).
12. "For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this means that philosophical problems should *completely* disappear. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by example; and the series of examples can be broken off. Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem. There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies" (*PI*, 133).

There are some further relevant quotations from Wittgenstein given by Anthony Kenny in his *The Wittgenstein Reader* (Kenny 2006).

13. "A philosophical problem is a consciousness of the disorder in our concepts which can be removed by an ordering" (*WR*, 54).
14. "The way I do philosophy, its whole job is to frame an expression in such a way that certain worries disappear" (*WR*, 54).
15. "The problems are, in the strict sense, dissolved: like a piece of sugar in water" (*WR*, 54).
16. "Human beings are profoundly enmeshed in philosophical, i.e., grammatical confusions. They cannot be freed without first being extracted from the extraordinary variety of associations which hold them prisoner" (*WR*, 55).<sup>11</sup>

I want to attempt to get a reflective grip on these strange and somehow both penetrating and perplexing remarks through returning rather paradoxically to Rorty and to his reaction to this radically therapeutic Wittgenstein. Rorty makes clear that he does not accept Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a form of therapy: a view that *dissolves* philosophical problems, by showing their nonsensicality and thereby eliminating or at least lessening the hold that they have on philosophers. (Wittgenstein, however, believes that we can never be freed from the hold they have on us. At most we can get temporary defogging, a quieting for a time of our disquietude.)<sup>12</sup>

Wittgenstein on this view is not putting forth any substantive philosophical views, any theory of telling or trying to tell us what is really real or what we must believe to make sense of ourselves and our world. He is not even trying to give us a theory or a conception of language that will finally free us from our philosophical disquietudes. Rather than saying anything like that or offering any theory, Wittgenstein, or so he thinks, leaves everything as it is and reminds us of what we have in our ordinary languages and in our practices (they come together) and shows us how they suffice without a need for any philosophical theory. On a Wittgensteinian therapist reading, Rorty says, "Wittgenstein was not telling us anything substantive, but rather conducting, as we have

seen, what he called ‘a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’” (Rorty 2007a, 162).

Wittgensteinian therapists think that to abandon that way of looking at things “amounts to repudiating Wittgenstein’s most important contribution to philosophy” (Rorty 2007, 163). By contrast, pragmatic Wittgensteinians such as Rorty—he only names one other (Edward Minar)—regard Wittgenstein’s “observations on philosophy as expressions of a very particular and idiosyncratic view of its nature, a position detachable from his treatment of specific problems” (Rorty 2007a, 163 quoting Edward Minar 1995, 413).

Rorty goes on to say that the pragmatic Wittgensteinian view of Wittgenstein’s achievement is that “he did not show metaphysics to be nonsense. He simply showed it to be a waste of time” (Rorty 2007a, 163). And, Wittgenstein aside, this is Rorty’s own view of metaphysics, as he makes clear in his debate with Pascal Angel (Angel and Rorty 2007b, 34). Pragmatic Wittgensteinians have no use for Wittgenstein’s claim made in *Philosophical Investigations* that “the results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense” (Wittgenstein 1953, §129).

Both Wittgensteinian therapists and pragmatic Wittgensteinians have legitimate anchors in Wittgenstein’s thought. Wittgensteinian therapists are right about what was his dominant view of philosophy and that much, but not all, of his practice of philosophy was in accordance with that. But pragmatic Wittgensteinians are also right that Wittgenstein, perhaps in spite of himself, made important positive contributions to philosophy (for example) with his critique of ostensive definition, his contra private-language argument and his rule-following argument. Various things that he said have turned out to be in reality positive contributions that anticipate, complement and reinforce Quine’s and Davidson’s considerations concerning the language-fact distinction and Sellars’s and Brandon’s criticisms of the idea of knowledge by acquaintance. (It seems to me bizarre to regard him as an anticipator of philosophers, for example Rawls, who made more

substantial contributions. I wonder what the verdict of history will be.) Be that as it may, these ‘contributions’ mesh very well with the work of Quine, Sellars, Davidson and Brandon. (Again I wonder if Wittgenstein thought of them as ‘contributions’. That sounds very un-Wittgensteinian.) Yet, none of them—the above mentioned philosophers—has much time of day for Wittgenstein’s therapeutic conception of philosophy. Moreover, Quine, and *perhaps* Sellars, wants to set philosophy on the sure road of science. In that way, Quine and (arguably) Sellars are *very* distant from Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein was, as I have remarked, very anti-scientistic and, more importantly, he did not think of what he was doing as science or scientific or as making the way for science. (He did say or suggest that his view of philosophy was anti-scientistic.) Would Quine and Sellars, if they were to abjure a scientistic turn, then by contrast be doing metaphysics in their systematic work? The *status* of what they would be doing is not clear, but they certainly would not be doing transcendental or quasi-transcendental philosophy, whatever those things are, if they are anything coherent. There is for them no transcendental turn.

All of that aside, taken together, these non-atomistic philosophers present a powerful and, in *certain respects*, unified movement in contemporary analytical philosophy and Wittgenstein has, whatever his intentions, made his own positive contribution to this task. But, as we have seen, they do not go along with his conception of philosophy—what I have called his meta-philosophy. This conception is displayed in the numerous quotations I have collected from him.

The crucial contrast concerning philosophy between the Wittgensteinian therapists and the pragmatic Wittgensteinians is perceptively put by Rorty (2007a). Let us look a little more in detail at what Rorty calls the pragmatic Wittgensteinians’ view. They think that there is not such a big difference between philosophy and science as Wittgenstein and the other therapists think. The problems that Aristotelians or Descartes, for example, discussed were not in the pragmatic Wittgensteinian view pseudo problems. Instead, they were just problems to be set aside, benignly neglected (except by historians of ideas), after the accounts of Galileo, Newton and Darwin were

developed and seen to be more scientifically advantageous than those of the Aristotelians or Descartes or even Leibnitz. Cartesian dualism, epistemological foundationalism and the fact-value dichotomy were not the results of conceptual confusions. They, Rorty tells us, “incorporated ideas that played an important part at one time in intellectual progress. By now, however, it is time to replace them with better ideas” (Rorty 2007a, 166). According to pragmatic Wittgensteinians, it would have been better for Wittgenstein to have criticized metaphysics, epistemology and meta-ethics as *useless* rather than *nonsensical* and as something we need not bother our heads about anymore. Their time has passed. Pragmatic Wittgensteinians thus interpret Wittgenstein in historicist terms. This comes out in his social practice views. But, as we will see, his therapeutic view, though Wittgenstein does not see it this way, is also consistently historicist.

With Wittgenstein’s late post-Tractarian views, particularly his increasingly social practice oriented views, what in effect became evident was his unacknowledged *historicism*. But this fits badly with his ahistorical conception of how philosophers, where they have come to have a clear conception of what their aims should be, will conceive of themselves and conduct themselves. On Wittgenstein’s view, they will become therapists of philosophy, defoggers of the conceptual confusions that bewitch some people, including themselves, when they, as they inevitably will be, if they are reflective, driven into philosophy. When they, that is, have caught its disease or, if you will, are suckered into philosophy. The aim, Wittgenstein has it, is to cure those conceptual maladies that disquiet us or at least contain them. We will be cured when we come to see that they are rooted in our misuse of our language when we try to philosophize. This, however, is surely not what most philosophers think they are doing. But Wittgenstein can well say they are mistaken—in fact, deluded.

However, Wittgenstein claims, in a very ahistorical manner, this therapeutic defogging is what we should be doing when we philosophize. It is not, he emphasizes, a question of reform of our language, but of coming to see that we have in philosophizing come to have misused our

language: unwittingly befogged ourselves. Our natural language stands in no need of reform. It is alright as it is. What needs to be done, if possible, is to eradicate our misunderstandings of our use of language, misunderstandings that arise when we are driven to philosophize and that we must resist. There, as Wittgenstein says, the engine is idling. But these perplexities—these disquietudes, as Wittgenstein characteristically refers to them—are not there in our ordinary life but only when our language is not functioning as smoothly as it usually and routinely does. How, for example, can we ever grasp the present—the sheer now of things—when, by the time we grasp it, it is already past? Here in our philosophical puzzlement we fail to retain a good understanding of the way ‘present’, ‘past’ and ‘future’ are actually used quite unproblematically in everyday life, as when we say ‘Our present situation is intolerable’ or ‘The present moment with the sunset and the birds singing is really wonderful’. We understand these utterances even if we think the claims they make are mistaken or exaggerated. But there is no philosophical puzzlement. We don’t need to determine how the present is present or whether there is only ‘the specious present’, let alone whether time is really real. We recognize readily enough that the engine is idling there, while it is not with the two prior ordinary sentences. The philosophical therapeutic task is to show ‘specious present-talk’ and ‘time is unreal-talk’ like ‘sleeps faster talk’ is just plain nonsense, not disguised nonsense about some unfathomable hidden truth—such truth that, as McTaggart thought, only philosophy will enable us to understand. Wittgenstein, unlike Waismann, does not think that there are hidden things in philosophy (Waismann 1968, 32).<sup>13</sup>

However, just as ‘Obama sleeps faster than Bush’ can be *given* a use by stipulation, so ‘The present time is specious’ or ‘Time is unreal’ can be *given* a use. But that will be without undermining the ordinary uses and is there any point in such stipulations? Someone who has (say, McTaggart) *given* a use to ‘time is unreal’ will not dispute the intelligibility and perhaps even the truth of ‘The life span is longer in Japan now than it is in Russia now’. But *stipulations*, as Wittgenstein saw, will not solve or dissolve our philosophical problems concerning time or any



other philosophical problem. This raises the question of whether there is *any* place where time is unreal-talk, even if it, given a use by adroit stipulation, can come to have a point. Rather than say it is unintelligible, we should say it is just plain rubbish or pointless. But isn't this to side with the pragmatist Wittgensteinians? This strengthens Rorty's pragmatic point that such talk is, except for playing philosophical games, the pointless worrying about, for example, whether its alleged intrinsic nonsensicality makes such talk and conceptualization something to be avoided. All we can be confident about, says Rorty in good pragmatic fashion, is that such talk is pointless and a waste of time.

The social practice conception of philosophy attributed by some (including Rorty) to the later Wittgenstein fits badly with the therapeutic conception of philosophy for the social practice conception shows—or at least seems to show—how there is in Wittgenstein's thought a positive conception of philosophy as well as a negative one. The social practice conception in Wittgenstein's thought stresses that these various social practices are just there like our lives and that there are no *ur-practices* or for that matter some *super-practice* or *cluster of super-practices* governing everything. There are, that is, no super-practices with super-concepts or super-conceptions which do or should govern our lives and show how things should be ordered. Such notions are philosophical illusions which arise when we try to stand free of or somehow above these diverse social practices and look at things, Spinoza like, from 'the aspect of eternity'. There are just these diverse practices rooted in a particular time and place (historicism again). There are scientific practices (including social scientific ones), mathematical practices, moral practices, political practices, and religious practices, practices often interacting with each other and still having a distinctive non-Balkanized life of their own (Nielsen and Phillips 2005). They each in their own domains help give life its sense. The thing is just to see them for what they are. This seems at least to be very different from the deployment of a therapeutic conception of philosophy. Yet they are both in Wittgenstein. And both emphasize that we cannot gain a defogging perch where we have

command of a complete clarity and, with that perch, can rid ourselves of historicism gaining something like what Spinoza, for example, sought. Such a metaphysical grasp of things has been tried without success by Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Descartes and Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, down to Henry Sidgwick, Thomas Nagel and G. A. Cohen. Nobody anymore with the least bit of historical realism (I am not speaking of philosophical realism) puts much stock in these notions.<sup>14</sup>

But, again, should the central issue be concerning whether these central claims fail because of their being nonsensical or through their being seen, as time went on, as useless or pointless? On neither view did they contribute to our knowledge or do much to enrich our lives: to show us what a better world would come to. Should not philosophers—I mean as we philosophers are situated now—instead with a sense of historicity non-evasively describe our situation and reflectively try to assess, without philosophy, where we stand and try to figure out where we should go? Come to grips, as John Dewey put it, with the problems of men, particularly concerning where we should try to go, how we should try to live, how our societies should be, and how they should be related to each other? We should do this as forcefully and as clearly and determinedly as we can; we should benignly neglect the issue between him and Wittgenstein over uselessness versus nonsense. We should not try to resolve it, but just ignore it. Good pragmatists will say what makes no practical difference is no difference.

Should we not seek to become instead what Edward Said characterized as public intellectuals doing, in our own small way, what Dewey, Russell, Chomsky, Sartre and Fanon did? I say ‘in our own small way’ because if we are not delusional we will recognize that we (the vast majority of us) are not world historical individuals. Yet we too will wish to do our bit in changing the hell our world is, even when our own part of it is not so bad. Indeed, perhaps particularly, when that is not our situation. Those making the equivalent of one dollar a day have little time for trying to change it. They just have to try somehow to survive. That is, we who are better placed want to

agitate—shake up—our world, though not, of course, without understanding it. But we do not need or indeed cannot have some Absolute perspective enabling us. Moreover, we should not think that is the way to solve or dissolve or cure our *philosophical* disquietudes.<sup>15</sup> We should become anti-Philosophy philosophers (*rejectionists, not quietists*) focusing with all our might on the actual problems of human beings as Russell did particularly in his old age, though we philosophers in doing this should use our philosophically nurtured capabilities including our capacities for clarity. But we should not fetishize this in a search for ‘complete clarity’—there is, as Wittgenstein came to realize, no such thing—but there can be clarity, properly contextualized. We should, that is, make it reasonably clear what we are saying and why. (‘Reasonably’ will be contextualized.)

Wittgenstein, though he gave birth to it, surely would have no truck with that. That will not relieve our own deep philosophical disquietude. But shouldn’t he? He surely would say that is not what would satisfy or answer to his and to our, if we are genuinely philosophically driven, philosophical disquietudes and compulsions, let alone solve, dissolve, or cure them. Dewey, he would think, is on the wrong track *here*. What I have said at the end of the last paragraph is, after all, not philosophy at all, but in a broad sense a defense of social agitation and political commitment. It is about what the aspiration or task of philosophy should be where philosophers have the sense of historicity and an awareness of its inescapability that Hegel distinctively among modern philosophers started reasoning in accordance with, only to cop out, and of the political and social aims that Marx and Dewey aspired to.

With that, should we not switch disciplines and for *some* of us, as Isaiah Berlin did, become historians of ideas? We should, if we do the latter, seek to gain a thorough and deep historical understanding and knowledge and with that put ourselves in the shoes of the great, usually dead philosophers along with, and equally importantly, those of other intellectuals (someone like Said or Chomsky) and take careful note of how these various figures have responded to the intellectual, social, political, racial, and ethnic exigencies of their times. Take note of how some of them engaged

in the struggles of their time and to help others to learn from them. And, as *non-quietist*, seek, where we can, to apply what we have learned from them. Should we not, that is, not just for others but for ourselves also do this intelligent and informed agitation for our own particular time and place? In short, should we not become more political? Indeed, much more political? But we should not claim that that is a way to solve or cure our *philosophical* disquietudes? I think we will not do this political thing if we are really hooked on philosophy. But perhaps with luck we can become unhooked.

That aside, an individual philosopher (including Wittgenstein himself), if he proceeds with things as Wittgenstein does, may overcome his philosophical disquietudes for a time or be able to set them aside for a time (as Hume also did) and gain for a time philosophical peace. But, if he has a penchant for (or an obsession with) philosophical questions—questions that always bring themselves into question—he will soon be back in the stew without philosophical peace. His activity will not bring permanent peace and enable him to free himself from philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Philosophical disquietude is not (*perhaps pace* Wittgenstein) *the* human condition, but it is *a* human condition (a condition of some people). And freedom—to whatever degree—from this condition may be a form of liberation. This has in fact been so for some people. But the important thing, as I have said above, is not that, but to become, as did Russell in his old age, as near as we possibly can to be public intellectuals struggling for humanity. Don't go philosophical here and ask what that is. We well know what it is. Skepticism here is out of place.

The history of ideas, no matter how perspicuously done, will not yield such a liberation; will not so reorient us. That is not what it sets out to do. After all, its objective is a historical matter and fundamentally an empirical task. Notwithstanding its unavoidable interpretiveness, someone working in the history of ideas wants, as much as she can, to get some of the historical record straight. The historian of ideas wants to decipher some part of the history of thought; get its great figures as nearly right as can be achieved. Catch, as well as she can, the philosophical and other

intellectual currents of a time. There *may* be no fundamentally right answers in philosophy and philosophers *may* take this just to be the way things go in philosophy. But perhaps not so for history and historians. They will, if they can be realistic, be fallibilists as will many present-day philosophers, but they may still accept the idea that, more and more, it will be possible to get the historical record right—not non-fallibilistically right, but right all the same. For philosophers, most particularly Wittgensteinian ones and Rortian ones, the very idea of a philosophical record moving toward the truth (increased comprehensive warranted assertability, if you will) is at least a fundamentally contestable matter as it is for Vattimo as well. They do not think anything like that is viable. But they would not deny that we could get Maimonides' or Descartes' ideas right or nearly right, for example. But Wittgenstein and philosophers philosophizing in his wake do not have John Dewey's sense of progress in philosophy. For Rorty, Deweyian that he proclaims himself to be, it is a more complicated matter. There *may* be progress in philosophy without there being progress in Philosophy.

Philosophers such as the logical empiricists, and sometimes Wittgensteinians and sometimes pragmatists, thought philosophers went down the garden path when they failed to understand the conditions of linguistic significance or scientific reasoning or both. With a good grasp of those matters philosophers will be able to recognize, if they can be steadfastly rational, that philosophical problems will dissolve, as Wittgenstein says, like sugar in water. The logical empiricists sought to do this in terms of the verifiability (testability) theory of meaning, but they never worked that out, at least on the scope and with the precision they wanted. They also saw, or thought they did, philosophers going astray in getting metaphysical or ontological when they failed to understand the logical syntax of language—an understanding without which one, they thought, could not grasp the conditions of linguistic significance. Later we came to see that there was no such thing as the logical syntax of language.

However, Wittgenstein relied (in his later thought) on no such thing. He neither wanted a theory of meaning nor a theory of anything. He told us ‘to look for the use and not for the meaning’. He didn’t tell us that meaning was use. He didn’t have a theory or an account of meaning. We should, instead, attend to our linguistic behavior (though we have no need of a *theory* about it and any theory would have no philosophical significance) and take note instead, where we have philosophical troubles, how we use the troubling terms involved when our language is not idling—as he took it to be when we are doing philosophy. What we philosophers need, whether we recognize it or not, is accurate descriptions of the use of our language in the area where it troubles us—where, for example, we speak of our intentions. We will, where we are caught here, want more. But there is nothing more *philosophical* we can have. If we can come to acknowledge this firmly and to take it to heart, we will free ourselves from what in reality are philosophical disquietudes. This will enable us to say goodbye to Philosophy (what Rorty, following Wilfrid Sellars, calls big P Philosophy, namely, metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, normative ethical theory, and normative political theory) and get on with our lives *and* with what Sen (following Rawls) called the use of public reasoning about actual public affairs. (What Wittgenstein, and Austin as well, would say as expressed in the paragraph prior to this one is not in conflict with what Rawls and Sen have been saying. Remember Rawls on travelling philosophically light (Rawls 1999, 388-12).)

For Rorty, along with his fellow pragmatic Wittgensteinians, this pragmatic conception of Wittgensteinian philosophy is a more fertile one than the therapeutic conception. It does not try to dissolve all philosophical problems but to solve *some* of them. The pragmatic Wittgensteinians argue that “any utterance can be *given* significance—given a use—by being batted around long enough in more or less predictable ways” (Rorty 2007a, 172). The sentence ‘Obama runs faster than Bush’—true or false—has an obvious use. ‘Obama sleeps faster than Bush’ does not. Perhaps we should say ‘runs faster’ has a use ‘sleeps faster’ does not. The obvious nonsense of the second

sentence taken literally is plain. Moreover, if we try to take it non-literally, it takes a bit of fancy footwork to do so. But 'sleeps faster' can be *given* a use by stipulation. But it has no literal use just taken as it is. *Giving a use is one thing; having a use is another.* Moreover, we can only give something a use when we have a background of established linguistic practices. This seems, at least, to vindicate Wittgenstein's and Austin's claims.

To translate into the concrete, 'Obama sleeps faster than Bush' can readily be *given* a use, for example, 'Obama gets up earlier than Bush does after sleep, more refreshed and ready to go'. Again, that statement may be false, but it could also be true and it is certainly not nonsense. Moreover, it is plainly verifiable.<sup>17</sup> But why put ourselves in contortions by starting out saying 'Obama sleeps faster than Bush'? That's the way, exemplified with a crude example, how philosophy goes or mis-goes. 'The Absolute develops through history' is a disguised—though only thinly so—bit of metaphysical nonsense. 'Being not beings is the fundamental reality' is another. Any such conceptualization here that is taken without some stipulation is nonsense. They can be *given* a use. Perhaps it can be shown that it has been given a use in some Hegelian system or some Hegelian-like system. But it is not embedded in our language, our linguistic practices, as is 'Crises develop with over-accumulation' or 'Languages tend to simplify as they develop'.

Perhaps the obscure talk of Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, Adorno, Derrida, Jamenson or Althusser can be usefully deciphered with hard work. Perhaps their obscure talk can be shown to have uses in their systems or to have been given plausible uses by some sympathetic interpreter and commentator on their work, trying honestly to fathom their intent and, by utilizing stipulations, do something to show how their key points make some linkage with our natural languages—our ordinary understanding as embedded in our ordinary linguistic practices. Since this is always a possibility and sometimes it may be an actuality, should we label their talk nonsense? Moreover, or so I am told, being able with such fancy footwork to grasp the nettle of their obscure thought *may* give us some deep insight otherwise not available. Perhaps? But I remain skeptical.

However, matters are not that simple. Stipulations may, of course, be employed, *persuasive* definitions used, and uses given to words or noises. But this could be done only if in our practices, where language becomes alive and where it centrally remains so, words and other expressions have a use: where great masses of them, without stipulation, have a use, indeed interlocked, stable, but not unchangeable, uses. Only with this background could words or expressions be given a use. *Stipulations and persuasive definitions* piggy-back on our practices which are linguistic but are not *just* our linguistic practices unless the very notion of 'linguistic' gets inflated. (Perhaps it is better to say that our practices are all linguistically structured.)

What I have said about practices and stipulations is importantly related to Peirce's and Davidson's claim that *most* of our beliefs must be held to be true, though *any* one of them, though not all or even most of them, could at one time be held to be false (Davidson 1984, 183-98). In the case of uses of words, we must, Wittgenstein and Austin have it, come back to ordinary use: to our everyday use of language embedded in our actual practices. Otherwise, we would have no understanding at all, even of scientific matters, and therefore no ability to make stipulations to give puzzling expressions a use or, where they have something of a use, a clearer use.

A thinking through of this makes for a bad day for metaphysics and the like, though perhaps not a showing of its impossibility. Explicitly, à la Rorty, and setting more securely, *pace* Wittgenstein, on their pointlessness or uselessness but not on their nonsensicality. Still, until *given* a use, such philosophical remarks remain not just pointless but unintelligible, nonsensical.

Wittgensteinian therapists, including the New Wittgensteinians, all of whom call themselves *resolute* Wittgensteinians, take it as part of our very human condition that we will, if we are reflective, become entangled in philosophical perplexity (Crary and Read 2009). We, they believe, will repeatedly be in need of philosophical therapy, as Wittgenstein himself was (the therapist in need himself of therapy—something that not infrequently obtains in psychoanalysis).<sup>18</sup> We are caught, the New Wittgensteinians believe, in endless asking of questions about questions, *perhaps*



always of pseudo-questions as the logical empiricists used to say, but at any rate somehow of questions that endlessly provoke still further questions, pseudo or not, that in turn give rise to still further questions that compulsively provoke new questions (or superficially new questions) without end, where philosophers will find no peace as Wittgenstein hoped for. This treadmill of questions is what made John Gray, like his mentor, Isaiah Berlin, give up philosophy, though not the intellectual life (Gray 2007a; 2007b; 2009).

As Rorty puts it in characterizing such a conception, “On this view, philosophy is not just one area of culture among others, an area some people find of interest and many others do not, but rather a trap into which anyone who begins to reflect is bound to fall. The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language ... are deep disquietudes” (Rorty 2007a, 174, quoting Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, section 111).

Rorty sensibly, and I think rightly, remarks that this disposition is not widespread even among philosophers. Indeed, less and less so as philosophy goes on, becoming more plainly a transitional genre and at the same ever more professionalized. It is certainly not something that is just fixed in the human condition, even among intellectuals, even among public intellectuals. Still, it is something that leads many people into philosophy and often, after a bit, leads many of them back out. (Perhaps this is why many that start out as philosophy majors end up as religious studies majors.) I think it, in part, at least, led me into philosophy and generated what was once my fascination with Wittgenstein. Still, Rorty says, and I agree, the Wittgensteinian therapists are on to something (Rorty 2007a, 174). Rorty remarks:

That is the fact that many, though hardly all, people who find philosophy intriguing are in search of the ineffable—something that cannot be put into words. Sometimes this is a vision of the Good or of God. In recent times, however, partially as a cause and partially as an effect of the linguistic turn in philosophy, it has expressed itself as a desire for contact with “the World” that is not mediated through language. I think Wittgenstein felt this desire very deeply but recognized, early and late, that it could not possibly be fulfilled. So I think that Conant is on the right track when he says that “the aim of

[the *Tractatus*] is to show us that beyond ‘the limits of language’ lies—not ineffable truth, but rather... *einfach Unsinn*, simply nonsense (Rorty 2007a, 174).

It is impossible (logically impossible), except deceptively, to satisfy this need to—putting it metaphorically—shove language aside and *grasp reality ‘directly’*. This is not only impossible to satisfy, it is not even coherently characterizable or thinkable (Nielsen 1994). We have no understanding, the Romantics to the contrary notwithstanding, of what it would be to come to grasp the ineffable, the unthinkable, the unsayable (Berlin 1999). If something is unsayable, we shouldn’t try to say it; if it is literally unthinkable, we shouldn’t try to think it; and if it is really ineffable, we shouldn’t try to make it effable or to try to articulate it or grasp it. As Wittgenstein famously said, ‘Whereof one cannot speak we must remain silent’ and Frank Ramsey to the point added, ‘And we should not try to whistle it either’. We should not try to do any of these things because they are logically impossible (Nielsen 1994; Nielsen and Phillips 2005).

Still, that some people have—and very intensely—that impossible-to-satisfy desire, that incoherent desire, certainly does not mean that everyone—not even every reflective person, intellectual, or philosopher—has such a desire. Democritus, Montaigne, Hobbes, Bacon, Bentham, Condorcet, Hume, Nietzsche, Marx and Dewey were not so afflicted, to name just a few luminaries. And it would certainly be false to say—and even arrogantly so—that none of them were deeply probing philosophers, not really philosophically knowledgeable, and not deeply reflective. It is not evident that the philosophers listed above were more superficial than the ones with the deep disquietudes. If that is secularism, so be it (Nielsen 1994; Nielsen and Phillips 2005).

James Conant, a very resolute Wittgensteinian therapist of some considerable ability, thinks that this impossible-to-satisfy desire is a manifestation of our “confusions of soul” (Conant 2000, 196). Rorty remarks, and again I think rightly:

Wittgenstein was certainly convinced that this was so. But this conviction may tell us more about Wittgenstein than about

philosophy or the human condition more generally. The more one reflects on the relation between Wittgenstein's technical use of "philosophy" and its everyday use, the more he appears to have defined "philosophy" to mean "all those bad things I feel tempted to do" (Rorty 2007a, 175).

However, at least since the Enlightenment, fewer and fewer people, even religious people, are so tied to, are so enchanted by, the ineffable. The increasing secularization of intellectuals has put a damper on that. We can't justifiably read that into the human condition or, except by an unjustifiable *persuasive* definition, say that those religiously attuned philosophers or other religiously attuned intellectuals who are really deep will have such a longing for the ineffable (Note that 'really' here tokens a *persuasive* definition. See Charles Stevenson 1945, 206-26.) It is no longer plausible to have such a philosophical penchant or feel that we must in some way break away from 'the mist of words' and grasp reality as it really is, come to know 'the really real', 'the truer truth'. (Some might say such phrases are not intelligible or at best not even respectable.) There are plenty of reflective and non-reflective believers and there are plenty of reflective and non-reflective non-believers. But there is no good reason to think that non-believers are generally less reflective and more superficial than believers or that it is only among believers that you really find 'the deep ones'. That is just a religious prejudice. There is no good reason to believe—though that is often thought—that a Dostoevsky-type, or indeed Dostoevsky himself, is deeper than a Turgenev-type or Turgenev himself.

Rorty, Wittgenstein, pragmatic Wittgensteinians, and pragmatists generally, as well as Wittgensteinian therapists, reject metaphysics, epistemology, natural theology, meta-ethics, normative ethical theory, normative political theory, and the great speculative systems of the past as viable ways of thinking, as something that is *now*, acceptable—something that we, if we can be well informed, rigorous in our thinking and non-evasive, should accept.<sup>19</sup> These matters, they all believe, are not sources of truth. But they do it for what they take to be quite different reasons. For Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinian therapists, such a mode of thinking conceptually entangles us. It

is a conceptual disease from which, if that is possible, we must be cured. We have with Philosophical beliefs something that is in reality nonsensical and a nonsense from which we can free ourselves only with great difficulty. On the best reading of ‘nonsense’ here, what Wittgenstein and these resolute Wittgensteinians mean by ‘nonsense’, is *not* something with a sophisticated philosophical meaning, but they mean by it *einfach Unsen*, simply nonsense. This does not tie their use of ‘nonsense’ to some philosophical technical account of ‘nonsense’ that a philosophically untutored person might not understand: something like a violation of our ‘logical syntax of language’, but to something that G. E. Moore would call ‘nonsense’, like the claim to be able to levitate. Perhaps we should call it instead gobblygook or gibberish.<sup>20</sup>

For Rorty, these philosophical notions—whatever nonsense is taken to be—have simply come to be for us *passé*, dead ends, useless, no longer worth the trouble to try to give them a coherent articulation, even if we have some vague idea of how to do so. It is time, Rorty claims, that we go on to better things—a better understanding of how to view the world or of how to be more imaginative, more aware of alternatives in deciding how to live our lives and how the world should be ordered. We should give up on what he calls big p Philosophy, i.e., metaphysics, epistemology, meta-ethics, normative ethical theory, and normative political theory, all Philosophical theory (Rorty 1982, xiv-xv). “It would have been better,” Rorty remarks, “for Wittgenstein to have criticized the kind of philosophy he disliked on grounds of its uselessness than on its alleged ‘nonsense’” (Rorty 2007a, 173).

Seeing philosophy as Rorty does will lead us to seeing philosophy as a *transitional genre*—seeing that in its traditional sense it, like theology, has had its day and is being replaced, Rorty has it, by a literary culture or for me *also*, and perhaps more importantly, by being transitional to social science, namely, a blend of history, political economy, sociology, social geography and social anthropology (Harvey 2000). This is a different way for it to morph. But it is compatible with philosophy also morphing into a literary culture. We need both in moving from philosophy to an

activity—perhaps a cluster of disciplines—where there is a felicitous blend of these activities. We centrally, but not exclusively, come to see Philosophy as useless in seeing it as being marginal and as having become for its technical sense (as Philosophy) something that is usually nonsensical in a plain sense as well as useless—useless in the straightforward sense and sometimes useless because it is nonsensical. We should all now become historicists and anti-Philosophy philosophers (Nielsen 1994). The Enlightenment has room for both Flaubert and Condorcet. But what of Rawls and Sen? What are they doing when they do what they take, quite unexceptionally, to be philosophy? They don't seem to be vulnerable to either Wittgenstein's or Rorty's critiques. Are they doing Philosophy or philosophy, as characterized by Sellars and Rorty? That they are doing either seems doubtful. Are they, that is, doing something very different? How is it to be characterized? In any case, they at least seem to stand as glaring adversaries to what I have been saying. I must sometime return to that.<sup>21</sup> Right now I do not know what to say. But some things suggest themselves. I do not think it is a momentous problem.

## V

There is one final point I want to make. It will lead me to some remarks about the diversity of what philosophy is and what, if anything, is its importance, transitional genre or not. This will in turn lead me to some comments about Isaiah Berlin and of what he called his departure from philosophy for intellectual history (Berlin 1980, vii-viii). But as a prolegomena to that, I want to note what at first blush is a puzzling remark by Rorty. I shall depuzzle it. It is relevant to what needs to be said about Berlin.

Rorty speaks of the everyday use of 'philosophy' and contrasts it with its technical use, the use that philosophers give it or, more accurately, with what philosophers (people whose *disciplinary* orientation is philosophy) do and believe they should do (Rorty 1982, xvi-xvii; 2006, 369-80). But what does Rorty contrastingly to Philosophy mean by '*the everyday use of*

*'philosophy'*? I understand the everyday use of language and its more technical uses. But the everyday use of philosophy or *'philosophy'*—what is that? Is there something like the everyday use of *'chemistry'* as distinct from the use of *'chemistry'*? Plainly not, though most non-chemists, unless they are in a science close to chemistry, probably have a rather mistaken understanding or inadequate understandings of what chemistry is. But that is a different matter. Why should the so-called everyday use of *'philosophy'* be less untoward than the everyday use of *'chemistry'*? It doesn't sound quite as bad, but it still is opaque. There is, however, a somewhat common use that Philosophers employ, as when a Philosopher might say, usually with irony and sometimes with scorn, of someone utterly untutored in philosophy that *'He waxed philosophical'* (think of Polonius in *Hamlet*). Is it something like this that Rorty means?

Philosophy—since Plato and Aristotle, and down to Aquinas, Maimonides, Avicenna and Scotus, to Descartes, Leibnitz and Spinoza, to Kant and, some say, Hegel, to Russell and Husserl—has always been what is more or less a recognizable cluster of activities that are *roughly* (very roughly) common to its practitioners along with a lot of other different things that some but not all philosophers have, e.g. knowledge of politics, of a moral point of view, of physics, biology, psychology, cognitive science, linguistics, modal logic and aesthetics. This somewhat—mysteriously somewhat—common activity has come to be regarded as some sort of expert culture that has been called philosophy, though it is hard, perhaps impossible, to say what makes it *'expert'* and, particularly with respect to its practitioners (all of them) what (if anything) counts as *'expert'* here or what is in common, if anything, between them. (This would be exacerbated if we add Romantics such as Hamann and Schelling.) What, for example, is there in common between Frege, Dewey and Derrida?

Rorty tells us in the introduction to his 1982 book, *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, that we should distinguish between Philosophy and philosophy: Philosophy big P and philosophy little p. Philosophy is what academic philosophers do, namely, to ask “questions about the nature of certain

normative notions (e.g., 'truth', 'rationality' and 'goodness') in the hope of better obeying such norms. The idea is to believe more truths or do more good or be more rational by knowing more about truth or goodness or rationality" (Rorty 1982, xv). Rorty thinks, as we have seen, this is a very dubious business. It, Rorty has it, will "not help to say something true to think about truth, nor will it help to act well to think about goodness, nor will it help to be rational to think about rationality" (Rorty 1982, xv). But, by contrast, there is something as old as the hills that is unproblematic, Rorty claims, and practiced by everyone, or at least all reflective people, that is not the property of any expert culture (either a Philosophical one or not) and it is something that will never be passé or transitional to something else. It is what we mean by philosophy. Here, we mean simply "the attempt to see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term... no one would be dubious about philosophy taken in this sense" (Rorty 1982, xiv-xv).

This is what *I think* he means by 'the everyday use of philosophy' in contrast to Philosophy, an activity represented by the professional discipline of an expert culture. The latter is a technical use of the term, though I think, considering all the people whom we call philosophers that we would be hard pressed to point to anything common to and distinctive of them except the name 'philosophy' itself. But philosophy, as construed above, is not that. It is not even dependent on Philosophy, the academic discipline which, I have argued, following Rorty, is a transitional genre and not a very clearly demarcated genre at that and one becoming increasingly so

So how does this, if at all, touch the deservedly admired and respected Oxford scholar and intellectual, Isaiah Berlin? He started out in Philosophy (big P Philosophy, of course; what else?) during the period in the United Kingdom of the hey-day of a kind of analytical philosophy called ordinary language philosophy (Berlin 1980). Oxford was the center and Cornell was its American subsidiary. Berlin's colleagues (birds of a feather) were Ryle, Hart, Austin, Strawson and Grice, and on a *somewhat* different track Hampshire and, on an even more different track, Murdoch and

Waismann (but still birds of a feather). Berlin warmly interacted with them, was respected by them and was at home in the philosophical atmosphere at Oxford. He started out doing philosophy in what was a more or less standard way for that time at Oxford. But he gave it up, as I already have noted, for intellectual history which he pursued brilliantly for the rest of his life, saying of his turn away from philosophy to intellectual history, that he wanted to know something more at the end of his career than he did at its beginning. (See his Preface to the 1980 edition of his *Concepts and Categories*, viii-xii.) He attributed this change to a life altering conversation he had with the famous, though eccentric, Harvard logician, H. M. Sheffer, the author of a path-breaking contribution to logic dubbed “the Sheffer stroke”. Sheffer argued “that philosophers bat around the same ideas for millennia and don’t actually add much to the sum of human knowledge” (Kristof 2010, 26). This argument rang true for Berlin and he took it to heart and left philosophy. He became, as Nicholas Kristof puts it, “a masterful historian and critic” (Kristof 2010, 26). His studies of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Machiavelli, Vico, Herder, de Maistre, Hamann, and Herzen are perceptive. But his work was quite different, in both content and style, from the work of his Oxford colleagues in philosophy for whom to do philosophy was to deal analytically with abstract questions. Again, as Kristof well puts it, Berlin “was too absorbed by politics and humanities tribulations to spend his life in a corner of academia. So he abandoned philosophy as it was then practiced for the question of how we should reach moral judgments and make policy” (Kristof 2010, 26). This leads Kristof, following the Oxford philosopher Bernard Williams, to believe that Berlin never did leave philosophy. He merely left what he took to be philosophy. Berlin’s disquietudes were not simply, and sometimes not at all, Wittgenstein’s philosophical disquietudes, but disquietudes concerning society and our political condition. Williams, Kristof and not a few others took Berlin’s disquietudes to be philosophical disquietudes hence the remark that he never left philosophy. But these disquietudes were not what Wittgenstein, and James Conant following him, would call *philosophical* disquietudes. They were not, as we have seen Conant putting it, disquietudes of the soul, though with Romantics, whom



Berlin has discussed in detail, there was some mixing of ‘soul matters’ and ‘political matters’ and some attention to their interaction. Berlin’s concerns were more deeply about how and whether a better world is possible or whether we are limited repeatedly to a partial cleaning up of the mess that one horror after another has left us with. He lived in what Eric Hobsbawm characterized as “the Age of Extremes”—the massive and brutal upheavals and changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But even there, Berlin was confronted with these problems through doing intellectual history, e.g., studying Tolstoy, Herder and Hamann. However, Marx, liberalism and rightwing movements were also on his agenda.

Berlin, like Wittgenstein and Rorty, though perhaps not for the same reasons, remained deeply skeptical that there “must somewhere be a true answer to the deepest questions that preoccupy mankind” (Kristof 2010, 26 quoting Berlin). Here we have a skepticism that is common to Wittgenstein, Berlin and Rorty and a skepticism I share. It is a skepticism that—or so I believe—we just need to live with for we are in a TINA here—there is no alternative. But, to be non-evasive, one must acknowledge, says Berlin, in a memorable phrase, “the relative validity of one’s convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly... [that is] what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian” (Berlin 1958, 57). Then Berlin adds that to demand more than this is to want the one true answer to life’s problems. Berlin remarks that that “is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one’s practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity” (Berlin 1958, 57).

I want, in winding this final section up, to consider two things: (1) Does what might be taken as Berlin’s unacknowledged philosophical stance just come to adopting the so-called everyday conception of philosophy and avoiding Philosophy in a technical sense (as being a contribution to a putative Philosophical expert culture); and (2) Is Rorty’s conception of the everyday conception of philosophy as unproblematic and ubiquitous, as he takes it to be, something that all reasonable and civilized persons must seek to act in accordance with?

For the first consideration, note that Berlin does, in fact, adopt the everyday conception of philosophy. He wants to see, and to perspicuously show, how things hang together and in this way to make sense of our lives and of our social and political world. (How the mathematicians and natural scientists make sense of their part of the world can be safely left up to them. Physics, for example, can and does take care of itself without the need of philosophy. Ditto for mathematics, but not, Berlin believes, for politics and political thought.) Moreover, Berlin wants to do more than just Augean stable cleaning. He seeks to enter and to contribute to what he takes to be the conversation of humankind, or at least to a crucial part of it. He takes cognizance of, and indeed in a keen way, what a range of the intelligentsia (principally historians, novelists, philosophers and religious thinkers) have brought to that conversation and how they have pushed it along in certain ways. Along with that depiction, he also steps back, though *not* through attaining, or even attempting to attain, some ahistorical perch, as by contrast does Henry Sidgwick, where Sidgwick seeks to adopt the 'point of view of the universe,' or Thomas Nagel, with his 'view from nowhere' or his notion of the last word. Berlin's perch is historical and contextually rooted in his moral reflection without trying, à la Wittgenstein, just to perspicuously describe (something which, as *Philosophical Investigations* shows, he did not strictly adhere to). Berlin quite overtly makes moral judgments concerning what he has interpretively described and perceptively characterized; and he tries to assess what he has described and interpreted. He makes in such an account moral and other normative evaluations concerning what is hopefully being perspicuously described. (Where interpretation just goes with such descriptions it tends to have a normative element.) With that in hand, though always fallibilistically and with an awareness of one's inescapable historicity, Berlin makes moral and other normative judgments. He, in a quite typical and unavoidable way, uses thick descriptions, but these descriptions will not be what they cannot be, namely, normatively untangled descriptions.<sup>22</sup> 'Pure descriptive ones' that are utterly neutral are impossible to give if an account is to be rich enough to adequately describe most actual situations (Berlin 1980, 103-41; Putnam

2002). Think of the Nazi concentration camps as being described as places where people were harmed and sometimes killed. That is true enough, but it is not how someone entering those camps at their liberation would and should describe what she saw. It is no more adequate as a description than to describe a doctor as someone who can practice first aid.

Berlin's 'conversation of humankind' is principally with other intellectuals (past and present) while the everyday conversation for everyday philosophy could be between persons no matter how untutored as well as between intellectuals and university students (some potential intellectuals). Proceeding as Berlin does may unavoidably and unintentionally skew things in a certain way—ideology is difficult (perhaps impossible) to stand free from. And for an adequate worldview, we must find some way to nullify that ideology where it is, as it frequently but neither invariably nor definitionally is, distorting. But Berlin's approach was to converse not with all human beings, or any human being, period—something that may well be impossible—but, more in the realm of possibility, with intellectuals as different and as culturally diverse as possible. And as he entered into the conversation, he strove to travel as Philosophically light as possible vis-à-vis metaphysical, epistemological and the like orientations. That is, he sought to avoid resting his critical case on what John Rawls calls metaphysical conceptions—namely, any controversial philosophical views in the technical sense of 'Philosophy' (Rawls 1999, 388-414). (Note that this in some way takes us back to Wittgenstein.) So Berlin's philosophizing in the mode of what Rorty would call 'conversational philosophy' is compatible with but additive to so-called everyday philosophy, or what Rorty has so labeled. Berlin's use of 'philosophy' does not contradict or even hold as problematic anything in the Sellarsian-Rortian conception of little p philosophy.<sup>23</sup> But Berlin also does a bit—a considerable bit—of critical intellectual history, where some of those whom he studies did (sometimes in extravagant ways) big p Philosophy. But that need not put Berlin in conflict with what has been called 'everyday philosophy' or lead him to do Philosophy himself. But it does mean when he does little p philosophy he does it in a way different from

'everyday philosophy' in being philosophy of a distinctively history oriented, scholarly and normative kind.

Now for the second issue, namely, the acceptance and ubiquitous unproblematicity of what Rorty called little p philosophy. Is Rorty's account sound? Is it as ubiquitous and as unproblematic as Rorty takes it to be? I think Michael Williams—a sympathetic, informed and fair-minded commentator on Rorty as well as a philosopher in his own right—is on the mark in taking it not to be as unproblematic as Rorty takes it to be. Williams is in this way on the mark when he says:

It seems to me that Rorty is just wrong to claim that no one would be dubious about 'philosophy' but only about 'Philosophy'. Sextus was dubious about both and so, in our own time, was Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's recurrent emphasis on the diversity of our practices should be read not as endorsing a pluralistic metaphysics but as expressing a willingness to do without a sense of how things hang together, to live without a synthesis as well as without a foundation. Strawson's 'catholic naturalism' is a closely related outlook. In Wittgenstein, the turn away from both syntheses and foundations finds expression in the theme of acceptance and acknowledgement: 'My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.' And his consistently deflationary approach to philosophical problems co-exists, as his notes reveal, with a marked contempt for 'scientism' (Williams 1986, 22).

Not uninformed and not unreflective, humans can be, as they have at very different times been, skeptics, as Sextus and Wittgenstein were and Kierkegaard and Beckett were as well. They in effect were skeptics concerning not only big P Philosophy but of the Sellarsian-Rortian conception of little p philosophy as well. This is something that Rorty says no one would doubt. Rorty is simply mistaken here. Perhaps it is the case that most, even perhaps almost all, would take what Rorty claims to be unproblematic. But the skeptics, few that there are, have included intellectuals over the ages and of not inconsiderable depth. And it very likely includes—though not so well articulated—many of what Moore would call 'plain people', not intellectuals at all.

There is another way in which Rorty's conception of the everyday use of philosophy should be put into question. Little p philosophy should not be taken to mean "an attempt to see how things

in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term” (Rorty 1982, xiv). The term ‘possible’ should be deleted in both parts of the preceding sentence and perhaps ‘broadest’ as well. The desire for things to hang together and to be seen to hang together is what it is necessary to keep. Many a reasonable person will settle for that and regard going for the broadest possible sense as a slip into ‘the metaphysical’ (e.g., à la ‘possible worlds’) and not something that reasonable persons, or at least all reasonable people, must or should seek. An everyday conception of philosophy should stick with this weaker characterization.<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This characterization, or perhaps it should be called a definition, of 'redemptive' and 'redemption' might be thought to be what C. L. Stevenson called a *persuasive* definition and thus one that often, but not always, we should be wary of. However, it is something that sometimes should be accepted as being useful or enlightening.

<sup>2</sup> Here Rorty has unwittingly changed the way he is using 'redemption'. He earlier talked of redemption for the religious and the philosophically oriented in terms of seeking redemptive truth that is, as he put it, seeking "a set of beliefs which would end once and for all the processes of reflection on what to do with ourselves" (Rorty 2007a, 90). This is very different from redemption as making acquaintance with and becoming attuned to as great a variety of human beings as possible with their cultural creations, novels, films, poems, songs, paintings, essays. Here "true belief may be of little importance but redemption is" (Rorty 2007a, 91). We have two different conceptions of 'redemption' here. And they reflect two very different attitudes and stances to life. The latter seems to me very different from how 'redemption' is usually understood.

<sup>3</sup> For Rorty's rejection of this view of Wittgenstein, see his 2007a, 160-74 and 2007b, 32-35.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5 of my forthcoming book, *Metaphilosophy: A Farewell to Philosophy*.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to John Kerkhoven here. See also Dworkin 2011, 42-45.

<sup>6</sup> John Kerkhoven has well remarked that the age of the novel has arguably waned. Both Rorty and I are mistaken in giving so much weight to the novel in contemporary literary culture. That was true for times past—the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Now, at least arguably, the art film has replaced the novel. (By 'art film' I mean the sort of film that gets played at film festivals and in centers throughout the world like the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.)

<sup>7</sup> Empirical yes, but also interpretive. Some will say that this also makes them philosophical, perhaps even Philosophical but not necessarily or even usually either big P or little p philosophical. There are plenty of interpretive claims, e.g., "The soup is too hot" or "The Canadian Olympic ski track was too fast; it was dangerous". These sentences, if used to make statements, are empirical, interpretive and normative. And they, like millions of claims like them, are empirically testable. The crucial thing here is to recognize that being interpretive does not make a claim philosophical (Putnam 2002).

<sup>8</sup> John Kerkhoven perceptively asks of my above remark, "Is nothing at stake in cultural enterprises of whatever kind? What is the itch—think of Peircian doubt—that drives inquiry, participation and practice in literary culture?" Surely he is on the mark. Many, *pace* Rorty, who are involved in literary culture are not just looking for something new.

<sup>9</sup> John Kerkhoven responds, "Maybe redemptive truth is impossible, but not redemption." And he goes on to argue that I am not clear enough about how 'redemption' is best understood. I have accepted, at least for the sake of argument, Rorty's conception of 'redemption' and 'redemptive truth' for the role it plays in his conception of how culture has gone from religious to philosophical to literary. Moreover, I have been concerned with this conception of his and its usefulness in discussing, amplifying and defending his idea of *philosophy as a transitional genre*, and for that sticking with his conception of redemption is appropriate. But Rorty's way of understanding redemption is not the only way. Indeed, it may very well not be the best way. But that is irrelevant for his and my purposes, though surely not for all purposes.

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<sup>10</sup> This is something to which Friederich Waismann takes particular and forceful exception. Obliquely commenting on Wittgenstein, he says in a very dismissive way, “To ask, ‘What is your aim in philosophy?’ and to reply, ‘To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle’ is... well, honour where it is due, I suppress what I was going to say; except perhaps this. There is something deeply exciting about philosophy, a fact not intelligible on such a negative account. It is not a matter of ‘clarifying thought’ nor of ‘the correct use of language’ nor of any other of these damned things. What is it? Philosophy is many things and there is no formula to cover them all. But if I were asked to express in one single word what is its most essential feature I would unhesitatingly say: vision.... What is characteristic of philosophy is the piercing of that dead crust of tradition and convention, the breaking of those fetters which bind us to inherited preconceptions, so as to attain a new and broader way of looking at things” (Waismann 1968, 32).

<sup>11</sup> There are some remarks in his papers of 1930, collected together under the title *Philosophical Remarks*, which suggest a *somewhat* different conception of philosophy. It should be noted that there we generally have a view that is between the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* and influenced by the Vienna Circle. Note, for example, his remark: “It isn’t possible to believe something for which you cannot imagine some kind of verification” (p. 89). A key remark he makes about philosophy there is the following: “Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought, after all, to be *completely* simple. —Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking which we have tangled up in an absurd way; but to do that, it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots. Although the *result* of philosophy is simple, its methods for arriving there cannot be so. The complexity of philosophy is not in its matter but in our tangled understanding” (52; see also 81 and 90). This fits well with both his therapeutic philosophy and with what Rorty calls a pragmatic Wittgensteinian view, but it *requires* neither. However, on pp. 52-53, 23 get a view that has disappeared by the time we get to the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, namely that (i) it “is possible and necessary to separate which is essential from what is inessential in our language” (52), and (ii) “the chief trouble with our grammar is that we don’t have a bird’s eye view of it” (53). Later he came to see that neither (i) nor (ii) is possible or necessary. All that remains of (i) and (ii) is *an illusory longing for such things*, things which need to be therapized away.

<sup>12</sup> For Rorty’s rejection of this view of Wittgenstein, see his 2007a, 160-74 and 2007b, 32-35.

<sup>13</sup> I do not want to suggest or imply that after this defogging anything will be left that is still philosophy. That we may still have disquietudes indicates the therapy has not been complete. But we understand what is left is still a disease for which we have not yet found a cure. We know, if Wittgenstein is right, that it is a disease. But see Wittgenstein 1953, 106.

<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to say that these remarks of Wittgenstein’s do not themselves generate disquietudes. For example, sometimes Wittgenstein says that philosophical problems are *solved*. (See 7 from Wittgenstein in my text.) But sometimes—and I think more properly—he speaks of them as being *dissolved*. (See 15 in my text of quotations from Wittgenstein.) It is important to determine what he wants to say and what we should say. Following up on that, he says, “The problems are solved not by giving new information, but arranging what we have always known” (*PI*, 109). (It is evident that he means by ‘the problems’ philosophical problems.) But this sounds like by this arranging we give, *pace* the therapy notion, a bit of philosophy that is not a disease. There is a non-therapy view conveyed “by the disorder in our concepts [that is being] removed by ordering.” Or so it seems. Also what are the particular purposes for which the philosophers assemble reminders? Does this not go (again *pace* Wittgenstein) beyond mere description? I take it that, for Wittgenstein, particular purposes are all therapeutic ones aiming to dissolve philosophical disquietudes that inhibit our ability to “stick to the subjects of our everyday thinking.” But what he says here seems at least not always to fit together with that.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Absolute’ or ‘weak thought’ (terms used by some philosophers), like ‘space-time’, ‘cyberspace’, ‘Facebook’, can be and sometimes are *given* a use. It is not a good argument to say that since a term is not used in ordinary language that we should not use it. Words are introduced all the time and sometimes to good effect. But to do so they have in the justification of their stipulation to be explained by what Moorean-

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Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Alice Ambrose and Norman Malcolm have called translation into the concrete, the showing by concrete examples or by the use of ordinary language what is meant by such strange words. But typically with terms like 'Absolute' or 'Being' this is not done while it is with 'natural selection', 'space-time' or 'Facebook'. See my discussion of Waismann in Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein makes this very clear, at least for him. But it hardly seems to be true of most philosophers. Is this for them to be in a state of denial?

<sup>17</sup> Something Wittgenstein stressed in his *Philosophical Remarks*. See pp. 44, 51-55, 61, 89-90. We see here in 1930 the strong influence of logical positivism, something he later distanced himself from.

<sup>18</sup> To be a psychoanalyst, she or he must not only have the regular therapy but also afterwards a training therapy. Moreover, not infrequently psychoanalysts return for more therapy though this is not a requirement for being a psychoanalyst.

<sup>19</sup> I am, as my italicized 'now' signals, not saying that in his time Kant's critical philosophy was unacceptable. He indeed was a watershed in the history of thought even if philosophical thinking soon went beyond him. But I am saying that now taken just as Kant took it, his philosophy is unacceptable. Important philosophers, John Rawls and Christine Korsgaard for example, regard themselves, and properly so, as Kantians. But they make it clear that they do not accept Kant hook, line and sinker and to do so would be to do something that was flawed and of poor service to Kant. We may have some Archimedean points that for some of us now are orientating and reasonable but they do not give us something that must be true of all possible worlds. They do not give us something substantive which is *a priori* true or something that must guide reasonable thought that takes us beyond all contingency.

<sup>20</sup> Wittgenstein contends that once we get for a particular purpose a perspicuous description or again for a particular purpose a clear non-theory encumbered view of our conceptual terrain nothing more is needed or should be wanted. Philosophy would come—or so Wittgenstein had it—to an end here or at least should. There is nothing to discover. If we have such a clear view—I didn't say a 'completely clear view'—of the conceptual terrain, our conceptual illnesses will be cured. It will wither away. Our philosophical language must be brought back to our everyday language. John Austin was on to something when he said that, rooted in our practices as it is, ordinary language was always the first word and the last word. All this is, I think, right on, but it yields clarity, though not as sometimes Wittgenstein remarks, 'complete clarity'. There is no such thing. The quest for this is just one more illusory quest. But things are all right without it. Without it there is no threat of chaos.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 5 of my forthcoming book, *Meta-philosophy: A Farewell to Philosophy*.

<sup>22</sup> It might be said that this claim is as easily refuted as it is defended. But that depends on a fuller account of what you are defending or refuting. R. M. Hare's defense of the thin and P. Foot's defense of the thick may lead to a bit of a standoff. But for nuanced and more developed discussions of this, perhaps putting an end to such a standoff, see Allan Gibbard, "Reasons Think and Thick," *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. C, no. 6 (June 2003), 288-304 and T. M. Scanlon, "Thickesses and Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. C, no. 6 (June 2003), 275-87,

<sup>23</sup> Note that we have here two variants of little p philosophy, namely a tutored and an untutored kind. And here we have between the two kinds differences of degree and not a sharp cut.

<sup>24</sup> John Kerkhoven's help has been invaluable. He has smoothed away the roughness of my prose, saved me many a slip and challenged me at crucial points. I am grateful to him. I would also like to call attention to an important book by Béla Szabados entitled *Ludwig Wittgenstein on Race, Gender, and Cultural Identity: Philosophy as a Personal Endeavor* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen-Press, 2010). It's off-putting title for a book on Wittgenstein first put me off reading it. But having read it I find it a book of considerable merit. It makes a link in Wittgenstein's writings between philosophy and autobiography, with particular attention to Wittgenstein's understanding of the practice of philosophy as a working on oneself: a struggling to rid



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ourselves of false images as philosophers. Here Wittgenstein's notebooks are, Szabados has it, of crucial importance. In these notebooks and diaries Wittgenstein often writes directly and passionately and, in doing so, frequently religiously. These remarks should not be seen, Szabados maintains, as merely of psychological relevance but as philosophical remarks as well. He puts this to good use in his discussion of me on Wittgenstein on religion in his last chapter (211-43). If I ever return to what I have called Wittgensteinian Fideism, I would need to come to grips with what Szabados perceptively and cogently writes there.

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# Metaphilosophy, Once Again

## Chapter 2

### A Wittgenstein Inspired Un-Wittgensteinianism

#### I

In the previous chapter I examined two powerful and cogent forms of what I have called anti-Philosophy philosophy: metaphilosophical stances that reject Philosophy as, on the one hand, nonsensical, as Wittgenstein does, or on the other hand as *passé* and useless, as Rorty does (Engel, Rorty and McCuaig 2007, 44-45, 58-59). These two conceptions might be thought to be incompatible because they contend, or they appear at least to, both that *all* Philosophical claims are nonsensical and that *all* Philosophical claims are *passé* or useless. It might be thought that we cannot have it both ways. If they are *passé* and useless then they cannot be unintelligible, and thus *nonsensical*, for then we could not ascertain that they are *passé* or useless—though *au contraire* we might say (though Rorty didn't) that we *now* see what we didn't before: that they are both *passé* and useless and that also they, if we try to take them literally and do not succeed, are *passé* and useless because they are at least for all appearance nonsensical. That is the way that I would construe them, namely, as the claim that *all* Philosophical claims are either *passé* and/or useless, period, or also nonsensical and that when they are seen to be nonsensical, then they are also recognized to be *passé* and useless because they are seen to be nonsensical (though that is not the only way they can be *passé* and useless). Something that is literally nonsensical cannot be useful, though something (say, a metaphysical view) that is felt to be incomprehensible or to be nearly so might—even in this seemingly incoherent form—be very much desired to give life 'some sense' and thus could be useful

to people who are driven by that desire and could not otherwise make sense (give meaning) to their lives. That is, in their case, useful for them, given their beliefs and attitudes, to be a useful illusion, for by this abracadabra they have found, or think they have found, such a sense to life—something that is felt by them to be vital to them and to orient them while still being barely, if at all, comprehensible. They, of course, do not believe it to be an illusion. But that is what it is. It is something they must hang on to to make sense of their lives—or so they passionately believe. (Think here of the Romantics. See Berlin 1993, 93-150). Though I do not say that this felt need or desire is rational or reasonable, indeed it seems to me to be irrational. But we have here a way of construing Wittgenstein's claims concerning what I have labeled anti-Philosophy philosophy in a way that is compatible with Rorty's passé view.

## II

Wittgenstein, while still extensively studied seriously, is no longer thought by many philosophers to be someone to make music with as he was believed to be from around 1953 to 1973. I do not mean that he is buried in the past as are, say, Meinong, Brentano, Bradley or McTaggart. But he no longer grabs the attention that he did at an earlier time and this applies in spades to what I have called his meta-philosophy. He is no longer generally regarded as the philosophically revolutionary figure, the author of a powerfully and strikingly new view and indeed a probingly devastatingly view vis-à-vis Philosophy—a view that might be called a *philosophically nihilistic* view and that was liberating for me and many others in our graduate school days in the 1950s and for others for sometime afterwards. On reading what I have said about Wittgenstein in Chapter 1, some people may well respond, 'So, what else is new?' Well, fashions change in philosophy as they do almost everywhere else. But is there a sufficient rationale for such a dropping away in this case? This requires noting a little of our still near philosophical history and some skeptical probing of its rationale or better rationales. I continue to think, perhaps caught in

the past, that Wittgenstein's therapeutic view of philosophy and with it his setting aside of metaphysics is broadly speaking on the mark. But is it? And can we ascertain whether it is or not?

I will begin here with this in mind by reporting a little of the history of philosophy, mainly of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian philosophy between approximately 1940 and 1975. These dates are approximate and could instead be from the 1920s to the 1980s without any great distortion. However, 1950-75 may be more revealing, particularly in North America and Britain, when the process of the takeover in philosophy departments in their universities by analytic philosophy occurred. This was especially so starting in the 1950s in the most prestigious universities in North America, particularly in the United States, and was consolidated in the 1970s. Yale University and the University of Chicago were the main prestigious holdouts, though each had their token analytic philosophers: Wilfred Sellars and Carl Hempel at Yale for a time and Rudolf Carnap and Charles Morris at Chicago. But the thrust of philosophy at Yale and Chicago was toward articulating and defending the great historical metaphysical tradition (or, depending on how you see things, what was once thought to be the Great Tradition). For good or for ill, this tradition is now a pale shadow of what it once was. The takeover by analytic philosophy was and still is pervasive in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures. And it by now has some relatively small but well-entrenched islands in the rest of the continent. No leading figures now do anything like what Whitehead, Weiss, Blanshard, Harshorne, Copleston, Paton or Findlay did. Not that they were by any means carbon copies of each other, but all of them (especially Copleston and Blanshard) fought a rearguard action against analytic philosophy and on the analytic side philosophers came to modify or abandon much that was once distinctive about it. As it developed, first shedding logical positivism (a long and strong struggle for Carnap and Hempel) and then the takeover (particularly in the United Kingdom) triggered by informalists like the later Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians and by ordinary language philosophers and other analytic informalists. Besides Wittgenstein, the central figures were Ryle, Austin, Wisdom, Strawson, Grice, Winch, Ambrose, and Malcolm. All of these orientations, for good

or for ill, are by now part of the recent philosophical past. What followed was a kind of ‘analytic metaphysics’ as practiced by Kripke and David Lewis which was very different from the old metaphysics. This ‘analytic metaphysics’ went in a very different way from Blanshard, Hartshorne, Whitehead or Weiss, but it shared Quine’s and Waismann’s skepticism concerning a criterion that can sharply distinguish the analytic from the synthetic (Quine 1953, 20-46; Waismann 1968, 122-207). Transformed and made more rigorous (reflecting in influence the varied work of Quine, Austin, Sellars, Wittgenstein, and Davidson), metaphysics was back and in good standing in most analytic circles. This was so not only so with Kripke and Lewis but also rather more conventionally with the Australian materialists Armstrong and Smart who were both deeply influenced by John Anderson as well as by their astute but still metaphysical critic, C. B. Martin.

I do not intend to follow this history but simply to note (as I just in a nutshell have) its effects in opening up philosophy, rightly or wrongly, to more and more ways of going about things than were deemed relevant by logical positivism, Wittgenstein, or ordinary language philosophy. This was done with analytical commitment. John Passmore has done a yeoman’s service for us on this in the history of contemporary philosophy (Passmore 1957; 1967; 1969; 1985). He is remarkable for keeping his own developed and distinctive philosophical views apart from his meticulous detailed work on the history of contemporary philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

What I shall do instead is start from an examination of Frederick Waismann’s much neglected “How I See Philosophy” and the other essays in his book of the same title (Waismann 1968).<sup>2</sup> On a quick reading, I first took much of it as a powerful but surely controversial volume written much in the manner and spirit of Wittgenstein. Later, when carefully rereading it, I was puzzled by his very un-Wittgensteinian remarks about vision, philosophy’s grandeur, metaphysics, and the history of philosophy. With a close study particularly of his lead article and some of the other essays related to it in *How I See Philosophy*, I have come to have considerable reservations concerning these writings, some of which I will bring out here. That notwithstanding, I want to



record my view that they are penetrating, brilliant and probing and well worth careful study. Sometimes they have a probative metaphilosophy.

It is important to note that Waismann's articles were written during the high tide of Wittgenstein's influence as well as reflecting, though mostly negatively, the influence of Oxford ordinary language philosophy. Even though he was teaching at Oxford at the time, Waismann ran against the current at Oxford. He gave us a forceful, insightful and deep critique of Oxford's and Cambridge's somewhat different ways of doing philosophy. Notwithstanding that, Waismann was close to Wittgenstein and worked with Wittgenstein's then unpublished papers on mathematics while at the same time working on his own first book, *An Introduction to Mathematical Thinking* (first published in German and later translated into English). Though a philosopher of science and mathematics, he was, as was Wittgenstein, unlike Carnap and Quine, *anti-scientistic*. All that notwithstanding, his lead article "How I See Philosophy" in his book with the same title is in many ways deeply un-Wittgensteinian—even in some respects anti-Wittgensteinian—and turned, as well, against the work of his Oxford colleagues Gilbert Ryle, J. L. Austin, Paul Grice and Peter Strawson, though not without an appreciation of their philosophical virtues. He was, as is apparent, deeply opposed to ordinary language philosophy at the time of his writing a deeply popular way of doing philosophy in the U.K. and in some universities in the U.S. and Scandinavia.

### III

The first ten pages of "How I See Philosophy" is, a few asides apart, pure Wittgenstein forcefully presented. It closes with the last full paragraph on page 10 where Waismann says:

Now it begins to look a bit less paradoxical to say that when a philosopher wants to dispose of a question the one thing he must not do is: to give an answer. A philosophic question is not solved: it *dissolves*. And in what does the 'dissolving' consist? In making the meaning of the words used in putting the question so clear to ourselves that we are released from the spell it causes on us. Confusion was removed by calling to mind the use of language or, so

far as the use *can* be distilled into rules, the rules: it therefore *was* a confusion about the use of language, or a confusion about rules. It is here that philosophy and grammar meet (Waismann 1968, 10).

It is not the case, as some have thought, that Waismann, trained in Vienna as a mathematician, was synthesizing or attempting to synthesize existing trends in linguistic philosophy at Oxford. He was, as I shall show, more of a critic of such linguistic analysis. I shall argue that he often was a mistaken critic but still a challenging one. Stuart Hampshire, himself an Oxford philosopher, rightly says that Waismann “always held that the nature of metaphysical problems was not understood by linguistic analysis, and that without that understanding would be beside the point” (Hampshire 1966, 164). However, on the last paragraph of Waismann’s page 12 we begin to sense a change away from Wittgenstein. We sense, as Ron Harré puts it, “a view of philosophy that, while sibling to that of Wittgenstein, is Waismann’s own” (Harré 1968, vii). While in some ways it is very Wittgensteinian, in other ways it is very distant from Wittgenstein. Waismann remarks:

But isn’t the result of this that philosophy itself ‘dissolved’? Philosophy eliminates those questions which *can* be eliminated by such a treatment. Not all of them, though: the metaphysician’s craving that a ray of light may fall on the mystery of the existence of this world, or on the incomprehensible fact that it is comprehensible, or on the ‘meaning of life’—even if such questions *could* be shown to lack a clear meaning or to be devoid of meaning altogether, they are *not silenced*. It does nothing to lessen the dismay they arouse in us. There is something cheap in ‘debunking’ them. The heart’s unrest is not to be stilled by logic. Yet philosophy is not dissolved. It derives its weight, its grandeur, from the significance of the questions it destroys. It overthrows idols, and it is the importance of these idols which gives philosophy its importance (Waismann 1968, 12-13).

Waismann goes on to say, “Philosophy so construed is one of the great liberating forces” (Waismann 1968, 13). It frees us, he has it, from “the tyranny of words” by exposing delusions which arise from misunderstanding our use of language. Then, going a long way from Wittgenstein, he remarks:

What, only criticism and no meat? The philosopher a fog dispeller? If that were all he was capable of I would be sorry for him and leave him to his devices. Fortunately, this is not so. For one thing, a philosophic question, if pursued far enough, may lead to something positive—for instance, to a more profound understanding of language. Take the skeptical doubts as to material objects, other minds, etc. The first reaction is perhaps to say: these doubts are idle. Ordinarily, when I doubt whether I shall finish this article, after a time my doubt comes to an end. I cannot go on doubting for ever. It's the destiny of doubt to die. But the doubts raised by the sceptic never die. Are they doubts? Are they pseudo-questions? They appear so only when judged by the twin standards of common sense and common speech. The real trouble lies deeper: it arises from the sceptic casting doubt on the very facts which underlie the use of language, those permanent features of experience which make concept formation possible, which in fact are precipitated in the use of our most common words (Waismann 1968, 13).

Waismann makes it clear as he continues that he is very anti-Moorean. These metaphysical questions are not, *pace* logical positivism, pseudo-questions; they are not *pace* Moore nonsensical or resting on plainly false views. We cannot, when we push matters far enough, *pace* Moore and ordinary language philosophers (e.g., Normal Malcolm or Alice Ambrose), rely on the standards of common sense and our common language.

However, if taken straightforwardly—literally—are not these 'doubts' idle doubts? Has not Moore shown this conclusively? Consider first his view of common sense and his use of it in a critique of metaphysics, a metaphysics which denied things that common sense regards as certainly true. Here Moore provided the classic though still controversial defense of common sense. There are metaphysicians who deny that time is real or that there is an external world. Moore provided the classic defense of common sense both against their metaphysical deniers and their non-metaphysical deniers (Moore 1953, 1-27; 1959, 32-59). Moore, as A. J. Ayer well put it, "looked at metaphysics with the devastating simplicity and candor of the child in the Hans Anderson story of the emperor's new clothes" (Ayer 1966, 318). He took the metaphysician's assertions literally and took literally the implications of them. If time is unreal then the time-is-real deniers (e.g., Bradley and McTaggart) could not have put on their socks before they put on their shoes or have had

breakfast this morning. But that is absurd. Whether *logically* absurd or not, it is absurd and plainly so. It may well be an empirical absurdity like the claim that I am fifty feet tall. We are just as certain of their falsity and absurdity as we are of 'two plus two equals five'. If there were no external world, then we would not exist, we would not have bodies and it would be the case that we were never born. If no memory beliefs are reliable, then no one could have been confident that they had posted their tax payment on the day required or were justified in their memory that their child's birthday was on May 15<sup>th</sup> or that the world was not just our idea or that it came into existence five minutes ago together with false memory beliefs or that there are no facts of the matter since it was never the case that it snowed last night or that the roof leaked or that people die or that people are never justified in believing they are awake and not dreaming. These are just trivially obviously true happenings. We are more certain that such things are true than we are of any metaphysical or other philosophical theory or for that matter any scientific theory that would deny them. Moore, translating into concrete with his cultivated naiveté brings us firmly down to earth.

Metaphysicians who would deny—try to deny—these things, such as Bradley or McTaggart will respond that they are real as appearances but that they are not *really real* (whatever that means). But this is a sham. If such things are not real, what is? Nothing? Are we given any sense of 'the really real' such that such things as I mentioned in the previous paragraph are not 'really real'? Have we any understanding that the reality of time and matter is an illusion? *Perhaps* we are never *absolutely* certain of anything but we can be more certain of the truth of these common sense beliefs—or, if you will, common beliefs—than we can be of any metaphysical beliefs or other philosophical beliefs that would deny them or question them or beliefs that would try to put them in doubt. A philosophy that tries to deny such things simply makes itself ridiculous. They simply are denying what is plainly true and is accepted to be so by skeptics, at least in their actions.

However, Waismann, in his defense of metaphysics at least as a coherent endeavor, need not and should not reject this Moorean turn or take what Moore is claiming to be in the least bit in doubt. Waismann says metaphysics can have other fish to fry. He thinks both with respect to our natural languages and formal languages that in reflecting about them, there are puzzles and paradoxes that we are naturally led to when we reflect on our languages, formal or natural. Concerning their deep substructure—or so he claims—that underlies our practices, rules and conventions which, as it were, is a subsoil of language. Without a recognition of that reality we cannot, Waismann has it, resolve our perplexities and paradoxes about these everyday practices revealed in our use of language.

We must remember, he claims, that we should not *just* be, à la Wittgenstein and Ryle, dissolvers and fog dispellers. Waismann contends that a philosopher who is determinedly skeptical when he denies, or thinks he does, “such and such *facts*: his doubts cut so deep that they affect the fabric of language itself. For what he doubts is already embodied in the forms of speech... the moment he tries to penetrate these deep-sunken layers, he undermines the language in which he ventilates his qualms—with the result that he seems to be talking nonsense” (Waismann 1968, 14). But unlike Wittgenstein, Waismann emphatically affirms that he is not (Waismann 1968, 14). But Waismann immediately adds, “But in order to make his doubts fully expressible, language would first have to go into the melting pot” (Waismann 1968, 14). Literally, a melting pot is a vessel in which metals are melted or fused. The phrase is often used figuratively for the remolding of institutions or again figuratively for a place where immigrants of different cultures, languages, nations or races form an integrated society. Waismann seems to be using it figuratively to signify where long established categories in languages have to be revolutionized (again a metaphor), as in physics where “thinghood, causality, position had to be revolutionized” (Waismann 1968, 14). But *pace* Waismann, that is not the construction of a new language but the construction of an extension of a part of a natural language for certain purposes, in this case scientific ones making such

extensions. But these are extensions of natural languages. They are parasitic on natural languages (ordinary or common languages, if you will), not something that stands utterly independently of them. It is not something properly characterizable as casting “a new and searching light on the subsoil language [what, by the way, is that?] showing what possibilities are open to our thought (though not to ordinary language) and what paths might have been pursued if the texture of experience were different from what it is” (Waismann 1968, 14). But to be required by our thought requires as a precondition a reasonable mastery of a natural language, though, as well, it requires something more, namely the having of a different particular experience through science with its partly artificial language expressive of distinctive experiences and understandings, characterizing things in new ways. However, without the having of and relying upon an ordinary (common) language we would not be able to do the new and insightful characterizing: seeing things in partially though also sometimes in one way or another revolutionary ways. There is, however, a vast background of ordinary language necessary for these special matters for a particular purpose to be expressible. It is sometimes necessary, but not sufficient, to articulate those new ways of characterizing things in partially distinctive ways. But that requires on the whole and unquestioned background of a natural language. Parts of it, as the occasion arises, may, of course, be rightly questioned but *holus bolus* it cannot intelligibly be questioned. In that way *pace* Waismann ordinary language sets a crucial standard for coherence. (This is as true for Donald Davison as it is for J. L. Austin.)

However, that is not to deny that fresh elements will come into natural languages and that natural languages change. Particularly with revolutionary scientific advances, there will be a recasting of some parts of it or a creating *for special purposes* of an artificial and formal mathematical or logical language, *partially* distinct from, though remaining dependent on, what Frege, Carnap and Waismann rather strangely call a ‘word language’. We cannot, however, escape what E. W. Hall called the lingua-centric predicament of ordinary languages, though having it we

can go on in striking ways to do some remarkable things that often require extensions of our ordinary language, e.g., quantum mechanics, Darwinian biology, psychoanalysis, Marxian conceptions of the critique of political economy and cognitive science (Hall 1952; Hall 1961, 64).<sup>3</sup> They are all ways that will require making changes or extensions in a natural language or languages for certain theoretical or practical purposes. We will with such matters sometimes get remarkable shifts in perspective but certainly not a shift of *total* perspective, as if we had much of a sense of what that is or of how to shift it. We do not escape a pervasive lingua-centric perspective. This lingua-centric perspective is that of a natural language, some ordinary (common) language or languages, spoken by a people or peoples somewhere. It is plainly not the ‘ideal languages’ of mathematics or logic. It is not a Carnapian scientific or empiricist language either. Such a ‘language’ could not be created or even be intelligible without a natural language. The highest meta-language is and must be an ordinary (common or natural) language. It is, as J. L. Austin stressed, both the first and the last word.

I suspect Waismann would find this pedestrian. He remarks that “a philosopher, instead of preaching the righteousness of ordinary speech, should learn to be on guard against pitfalls ever present in its forms” (Waismann 1968, 19). What should be said instead is that they (Ryle and Austin, for example), as philosophers’ philosophers, should not preach, particularly as philosophers, the hegemony of ordinary language or, for that matter, anything—*perhaps* not even a penchant for clarity. In that respect, they and their followers should be *quietists*, not Waismannian *philosophical* revolutionaries. But it is important also to stress both the philosophical importance of an appeal to ordinary language and the importance of recognizing, in reflecting on it, how we can be led astray. But we should resist Waismann’s recommendation that “the philosopher should master the unspeakably difficult art of thinking up speech against the current of clichés” (Waismann 1968, 19). Aside from the obvious inaccuracy—indeed, downright unfairness—of claiming for ordinary language philosophers, say Austin or Ryle, a dependence on clichés, we should also realize that the

utilization of 'thinking up speech' is not the way to practice Wittgensteinian philosophical therapy or, for that matter, Austinian linguistic philosophy. That is, in both cases, Waismann's way is no way to break the spell that a wrong way of thinking that is unconsciously rooted in misunderstandings of the use of our language can have on us. It is not the wrong way that language is—we have no clear understanding of what that could be, if it could be anything—but the wrong way of thinking about certain bits of it that causes the trouble. It is through our failure to grasp the use—the style of functioning—of a bit of a natural language or some ideal language.

If we go in for setting out a worldview by 'reforming our language or the use of our language' is not the way to do it unless we mean by that excising the jargon that many metaphysicians and some other mostly Continental philosophers utilize. But that surely is not a natural language or some ideal language. Moreover, ordinary language isn't just a bunch of clichés, though Hegelian, Heideggerian, Gadamerian or Vattimoian new speak—often the result of thinking up speech—is surely a home for creating clichés, *supposed* new uses of ordinary language, but in reality incoherent slogans, alleged 'deep sayings' supposedly generating deep insights. Moreover, it could not even do that, any more than its analytic critics could, without having a stock of ordinary language—ordinary linguistic practices—in place. However, ordinary language philosophers, unlike Waismann, feel no need to reform our languages relying instead on our deeply embedded linguistic practices.

Why would I conjecture that Waismann would believe that ordinary language philosophy and the argument I made two paragraphs back is pedestrian? Why does Waismann think that resisting the appeal to the correctness—the standard setting—of ordinary language is so essential and that it is often important to think up speech—newspeak—to express what he thinks cannot be expressed in ordinary language? Why does he think that that is so essential for good philosophy to have a *vision* (Waismann 1968, 32-38)? That is utterly contrary to the spirit and practice of ordinary language philosophy. Think here of Austin or Ryle (though their practice and conception



of philosophy is anything but identical). Indeed, ordinary language philosophy—philosophers’ philosophy—is ironical about philosophy in that mode, i.e., philosophy with a vision. It probably would be happy with Max Weber’s quip that if you want vision go to the movies.

I will grant that Wittgenstein, with his taking the fly out of the fly bottle and with his therapeutic philosophy, was sometimes in some ways ambivalent here. (He and Austin were in that way very different (Furberg 1971, 5055).) But Waismann flatly and indeed passionately ironized about ordinary language philosophy. Wittgenstein, *even if* it is proper to say he had a vision of sorts vis-à-vis philosophy, had a negative vision. His thought, though passionate and quite unlike Ryle’s or Austin’s, was dis-utopic. He *may* have had a worldview, as some of his work may reveal, but the last thing he would have wanted is to create some great *philosophical* worldview. It is difficult to know what to say about Waismann here. But Wittgenstein, by contrast, had dominantly a negative philosophy. He thought of philosophy as like a disease from which we need to be cured, though the chances of such curing, as he saw it, were very poor. Like a psychoanalyst who himself needs therapy, as they sometimes do, Wittgenstein needed, and saw that he did, to practice the therapy on himself. He tried to discourage his students from going on in philosophy. Waismann, by contrast, rejects the idea that ordinary language—common language—provides us with the standard of correctness. He rejects that it even presents us with a desirable standard of correctness. Ordinary language is not fixed; it changes over time and deviations from linguistic regularities can often be understood and are not infrequently insightful not only in poetry and science but in philosophy as well.

An ordinary language philosopher does not, as Waismann says he does, make the battle cry ‘ordinary use only’ (Waismann 1968, 173). He well realizes there are situations where there is no direct place for this. Sometimes this is so in science and literature and *perhaps* there is a use for this even in philosophy. Austin, *pace* Wittgenstein, certainly thought so. But for philosophy, ordinary language is both probative and a crucial purgative, freeing us from the spell of paradoxes

that come with metaphysical and epistemological claims, places where language goes on a holiday and, as Waismann put it himself, where “people get strangely intoxicated with all sorts of metaphysical nonsense” (Waismann 1968, 172). (He doesn’t, unlike Wittgenstein and the logical positivists, say that metaphysics is nonsense but that there is a lot of metaphysical nonsense—something which is indeed true.) Such nonsense, whether endemic to the species or not, needs to be brought down to earth with a Moorean or Wittgensteinian or a Rortyan purgative. Here an appeal to ordinary language is crucial, though Moore did not think he was appealing only to ordinary language when he brought Bradley and McTaggart down to earth when they claimed, for example, that time was unreal. Moore, with a cultivated naiveté, asked whether they had breakfast that morning. The point being that if they did, as usually they did, then they are implicitly acknowledging that time is real. (This very way of talking implicitly acknowledges the reality of time.) We use without difficulty or paradox ‘Did you have your breakfast yet?’ and if sometimes you did then time must be real. That is, if it makes sense to say that you did or did not have breakfast in the morning and if sometimes you have and as both the first is true and the second sometimes also is true then time is plainly real. Indeed it must be real. Time deniers speak nonsense, or you can call them absurdities if you prefer.

No difficulty in measuring time in outer space is going to undermine this and no claim that time is unreal or not ‘really real’ (whatever that means) has any warrant. No metaphysical theory, however cogently argued, can undermine that, though reflections about determining time in outer space can enhance, after being initially puzzling, our understanding of time. That notwithstanding, it is always more plausible—more reasonable—to believe some plain everyday empirical claims such as ‘the film starts at 8:00 pm’ than to believe a theory that denies the reality of time or believe the truth that somebody is sitting in a chair than any account that maintains we could never reasonably believe in such a thing. If we have an appeal to the paradigm case argument here or to translate into the concrete, then so be it. It is more reasonable to believe such common sense

beliefs than to believe some metaphysical claim or epistemological claim (such as a carefully crafted phenomenalist one) or an allegedly scientific theory that would deny the truth of such things. And Waismann acknowledges that. So where is the puzzle that led him to think that there might be a question that time may be unreal or not 'really unreal'?

Sometimes in poetry or in science, as in Sigmund Freud's talk of 'unconscious thought' or talk of 'frozen music', by contrast with 'frozen milk', there is at a given time or perhaps always is an occasion for a linguistically deviant use of language. *Sometimes* it is a useful seeing through a glass darkly. Sometimes they convey something to us that is insightful, thinking just of the last example, hearing it or reading it concerning some music we know, we recognize, though not clearly, something, unnoticed before, distinctive about the music that is neither absurd nor nonsensical or without insight. That same is true for Freud's remark. Perhaps there are *philosophic* ones as well? But to give one that that is perhaps a philosophical example: 'Being has a history, not just beings' which *some* of us *may* in some way get something of a handle on. But it is not unreasonable to be very skeptical about that. Can we get something *philosophical* that is expressed in both a deviant utterance and has some plausibility? What seems to me to be a candidate is, 'Being has a history, not just beings'. But has it any reasonable intelligibility, not to mention plausibility? If 'Being has a history, not just beings' is said to convey 'weak thought', we should be very skeptical of both the warrantability and indeed of the intelligibility of both the utterance and of the very idea of 'weak thought'. Some hermeneuticists use it. But in attending to their use do we understand what it means? Hardly. We need to *give* it a sense or get a plausible sentence from philosophy or from science or from literature that exemplifies it; something that is not as obscure as 'weak thought' itself which explicates 'weak thought'. We need that or it will be a matter of the blind leading the blind.

Metaphysics (*pace* Carnap) is not poetry, even 'weak poetry' or bad poetry. Moreover, a metaphysician needs, if he can, to give intelligibility (by stipulation or otherwise) to such deviant

utterances that is not scientific (including formal science) or requires a scientist to turn it into science or something that is just a plain plausible claim for its resolution or dissolution. Some 'translation into the concrete' that is perspicuous. Some way of empirically testing it is needed. You do not have to be a positivist to believe that to be a scientific claim the deviant utterance allegedly making a truth claim must, at least indirectly (sometimes very indirectly) have some empirical test. Eric Hobsbawm, who resists positivism, insists on this (Hobsbawm 1997, 271-74). Otherwise, we will get mere speculation.

Waismann tells us (*pace* Ryle) that "whatever a philosopher does he is first and foremost an agent of ferment" (Waismann 1968, 173). Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Freud and Marx were that, but since philosophy got separated from science and theology the ferment that philosophers have caused has been tempests in a teapot. Is my claim here too strong? Think of John Dewey, John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Ronald Dworkin, Joshua Cohen or Michel Foucault. Don't they show the plain falsity of that? Well, yes, it at least seems to be so. But they did achieve the important things they did by setting aside traditional philosophical questions—metaphysical, epistemological, normative ethical and theoretical. (A part, for example, that is, of a systematic philosophical ethical theory such as Spinoza's, Kant's, J. S. Mill's, Sidgwick's or W. D. Ross's.) But then ask about the accomplishment in *moral theory* of G. A. Cohen and Derek Parfit and the answer becomes less clear. Things remain problematic.

Waismann asks, "If a philosopher 'goes wild' should we recall him to ordinary language with its alleged subsoil of correctness" (Waismann 1968, 173)? Waismann grants that *sometimes* this is a good thing to do. But he denies that we should "always and on principle do so" (Waismann 1968, 173). He objects to taking the uses of words or sentences in our ordinary (common) language as a criterion of sense for utterances as a standard of intelligibility or warrant. To show, he claims, that a word has a use, a function, a style of functioning in a natural language is neither necessary nor sufficient for showing that it has sense.

Native speakers of a language can usually, perhaps always, determine when an utterance is a deviant one—an irregularity in the use of language, e.g., ‘trees faint gracefully’. Language, of course, changes, though it is an exaggeration to say with Richard Rorty or Robert Brandon that it is constantly changing. We once could speak non-deviantly of ‘all the fishes in the sea’. That is now a mildly deviant utterance. We say instead ‘all the fish in the sea’, though we still understand someone who deviantly so uses ‘fishes’. But sometimes a deviant utterance is so deviant that we do not understand what is being said. ‘Time goes fast here’ is a dead metaphor but we understand it and can say, though with a certain indeterminacy, when it is true or false. But if someone says ‘time talks fast here’, we do not understand it without some considerable elucidation and stipulation. Without some explanations utilizing what are at least in effect stipulative definitions or elucidations we do not understand ‘time talks fast here’. We can, of course, as Wittgenstein stressed, *give* that sentence a meaning. But without that it doesn’t have one. To gain an understanding, and perhaps not even then, we would have to go back to at least ordinary uses of language for the relevant explication or in making the stipulation and that requires to a certain extent the use of some ordinary language. And this is true of a lot of Heidegger’s, Jasper’s, Marcel’s, Sartre’s or Vattimo’s philosophical talk. (It is a good thing that Sartre also wrote plays and novels.)

Indeed, natural languages are not fixed or always exact. But there are rules of language, linguistic practices that we cannot help but rely on, though again over time they may change. Though *some* of us cannot state them, yet we cannot help but rely on—we have there a knowledge by wont—when we forge new uses which *sometimes* can become useful. Moreover, relying on this does not, as Waismann thinks, commit us to conservatism, linguistic or otherwise.

There are matters simply rooted in our natural languages, matters which we seldom if ever articulate. But when we do, we find some of them rather odd. However, unlike ‘time talked rapidly’, we understand and recognize them to be meaningful and often true. I have in mind Waismann’s examples ‘I see with my eyes’ and ‘I hear with my ears’. We have a lot of these things

which we very likely will never utter. Moreover, there is no need to. If they are uttered, they are immediately recognized as meaningful (though usually pointless unless we are doing philosophy) by native speakers and by practiced non-native speakers. But they are not analytic and it is *logically* possible that they could be false. There are, of course, uses which are not linguistically deviant but all the same puzzling such as ‘My eyes are closed but I see an after image’. We are all, if we are not blind and perhaps not even then, aware of this kind of phenomenon. We all sometimes have after images and we *may* wonder if it is proper to say we see them. Ryle thinks that this is perfectly proper. Waismann is more dubious. But whatever we say here, we have them or have had them and we sometimes wonder how best to describe them or (if we are philosophers) we *may* wonder—I think pointlessly—how to analyze sentences expressing such phenomena. And we may otherwise be puzzled about them, as I was as a child, but we have no doubt about the phenomena occurring and we would understand someone when he said (as both Moore and Ryle do), ‘I see an after image’. That would not arouse puzzlement about the meaning (use) of the utterance, though we might think that it was a rather puzzling way to speak—that it was, that is, in some way misleading, unlike ‘I see with my eyes’. ‘See,’ we might think, was not quite the right word to use. But would ‘apprehend’, ‘somehow notice’, or ‘have’ an after image be better? It is unclear whether they would be. So we might be somewhat puzzled about how best to describe such a phenomenon that nonetheless was plainly occurring. None of these verbs seem quite right. What is happening is close to seeing but of a strange kind. (I remember as a child with my eyes closed trying to grasp with my hands the after image when I was having one. Something, of course, with a little more age and experience, I learned to be impossible. But do we mean logically or empirically impossible or somehow—how?—neither?) Nevertheless, there is no doubt that after images occur though *what* they are is another matter. Something was there right before us that was not quite miniscule but was not graspable and whether we should put ‘seeing’ in scare quotes vis-à-vis them is still another matter. But we would not be puzzled, or at least not so deeply puzzled, that we would be at a loss

about our having them as we would be about whether I could ‘think with my toes’ or about the intelligibility of ‘You are thinking with your toes’, whether it had any use except to illustrate something that was not intelligibility.

Sometimes we have no trouble with deviant utterances. They are think-up ways, to use Waismann’s phrase, of speaking that we understand as sometimes with Freud, for example, where it was an initially controversial source of insight. Waismann is right about this. But where the deviance cuts too deep we are puzzled—indeed typically at a loss—about what is meant by ‘I think with my toes’ or ‘You are thinking with your toes’. (It is not like ‘I can wiggle my ears’.) At the very least, you would need some considerable context here for the first two sentences. But sometimes we have no trouble with deviant utterances. It can be a think-up way of speaking, as at some earlier time it was with Freud, who Waismann tells us had good German when he spoke in German of the equivalents of ‘unconscious thoughts’ or ‘unconscious desires’ (though at the time when Freud first spoke some with a fine fit of Cartesianism thought he was talking nonsense). Waismann is right; deviant utterances, even radical ones, can be graspable and insightful given an appropriate context. But where the deviance cuts too deep and lacks any context or a plausible context, we are at a loss to understand and rightly expect nonsense, as in ‘Procrastination drinks melancholy’, ‘Plasticity runs amok’, ‘Football contemplates probingly’ or ‘I think with my toes’. But there is no sharp cut between where it is too deep for understanding and where it isn’t. That would to a degree at least vary from person to person or from group to group or context to context or over historical time.

Two things immediately about the above: (1) Someone with an explanation using stock uses we can *give* such sentences a sense, but they do not have sense without that. (2) There being no sharp line between what makes sense and what does not, ‘deviance’ admits of degrees. Think of ‘Even clear insight is blindfolded’ or ‘Articulation creates chance’.

Metaphysical talk such as ‘Being as such is the only really real’ or ‘As we approach reality we come to the incomprehensible and there true reality reveals itself’. With these things we are at a

loss. We are—at least I very much am—inclined to think that there we get absurdity and what Moore—rightly, I believe—took to be just plain nonsense. Sometimes with work we can make sense of Hegel, Heidegger, Jaspers, Derrida or Vattimo but it takes work and much of this work takes transcribing much of their jargon into plain English, German, French, Italian or into some natural language. And we are unsure that our ‘rational reconstruction’ of their thought matches with the original. Sometimes weakly deviant sentences such as ‘The tear was in her eye’ or ‘He was hopping mad’ are or were so mildly deviant that a native speaker or practiced speaker will understand them. Often, as we have seen, weak deviances can be deeply insightful, though they are not always. But for that to be so, there must obtain in the background a typically unarticulated but readily articulateable understanding of stock uses of some natural language—in this case, English. But notice I say ‘articulateable’, not ‘articulated’.

Surely Waismann is right in saying “there is something unsettled about language; it is a living growing thing, adapting itself to new sorts of situations, discoveries, groping after new means of expression” (Waismann 1968, 174). (Though, after all, ‘language does not grow’. But we understand the metaphor.) Sometimes for certain purposes we should look at language diachronically; at other times and for other purposes, synchronically. Most of the time, ordinary language philosophers, and indeed philosophers more generally, look at language synchronically. But this is not always the thing to be done. We have, Waismann contends, a world picture embedded in our natural languages and changing slowly over the ages. But during a given age, the language will have a certain structure and *may* suggest a somewhat distinctive world picture where a language will mold our apprehension of qualities, processes, practices, human actions, etc. Still, philosophers with the same native language and writing and thinking with it will sometimes have radically different world pictures. Think of Heidegger and Jaspers on the one hand and of Carnap and Reichenbach on the other, and of Wittgenstein with a world picture still different from all four. Yet for all of them their native language is the same and their deviant and specialized uses depend



on the stock uses of the German language—the language in which they could most readily converse with each other while having sometimes very different specialized uses sometimes blocking an understanding of each other. And across languages Russell and Carnap had more in common with each other than Russell had with Bradley or Carnap with Heidegger. In Denmark during the height of Austin's influence, graduate philosophy students practiced ordinary language philosophy sometimes in Danish and sometimes in English and dreamt of going to Oxford to study with Austin. (Such dreams sometimes came true, if not for those in Denmark, then in Sweden with Mats Furberg who rather quietly studied in Oxford with Austin and Grice and then back in Sweden wrote his important *Saying and Meaning: A Main Theme in J. L. Austin's Philosophy*.) Does Waismann take an anthropologist's view of language and regard all—or almost all—European languages as dialects of the same language? I don't think whether he does or not makes much of a philosophical point or difference. Some Dane, for example, with only a rudimentary grasp of English is not going to understand, let alone practice, ordinary language philosophy in English. But with the help of good translations into Danish of Austin and Ryle, she could do it in Danish. The same goes, of course, for French, German, Italian, Finnish and the like. (Even for Finnish, which is not even an Indo-European language.)

The changeability of language is evident over long periods of time. Think of the differences between Old English, Middle English (as in Chaucer) and Modern English. And think of more current changes in English. Think of the relatively new and widely adopted additional use of 'cool', at least among certain strata, and of the introduction into the language of 'nerd', 'facebook', and 'cyberspace' or the shift in the use of 'war' as something that no longer neither normally is nor needs to be declared.

Ordinary language philosophers have no problem at all with such changes nor do they wish, as Waismann thinks they do, to shut language changes down or impede such changes. They do not have an old fashioned school teacher's normative conception of grammar, e.g., proper English,

French, etc. For example, 'It is "shall" that is to be used here, not "will".' Waismann is way off base in saying that ordinary language philosophers, in "clamoring for 'the ordinary use of language' [are] quite prepared, it seems, to damn everything out of hand—in philosophy—if it fails to conform to its [ordinary language] standards" (Waismann 1968, 175).

Ordinary language philosophy only claims that if one says 'Russell sleeps faster than Heidegger' or 'Two songs gave birth to twins', they will not be understood unless these sentences are explained in plain English or some other natural language. Where there are similar deviations from ordinary language in philosophy, where philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida or Vattimo come up with some of their monsters, a paraphrasing into ordinary language is necessary if these monsters of theirs are to be intelligible. We do not have here—and indeed should not have—a cult of ordinary language philosophers. Moreover, there never was such a cat.

Waismann thinks ordinary language "tends to instill in the faithful, and in the not-so-faithful alike, a belief, indeed a complacent one, in the invariable adequacy of natural language, a belief that there are no intrinsic inadequacies in natural languages that cannot be cured by the reform of the natural language in question" (Waismann 1968, 174). Nor do they think there is any need for such a reform. In actual fact, Waismann claims, natural languages are deficient instruments and "treacherous in many ways" (Waismann 1968, 175). Following "the clues of speech we are likely to interpret the world one-sidedly" (Waismann 1968, 176). But Waismann's examples are not convincing. When I say, to take a key one from Waismann, 'I kill him' or 'I shoot the arrow', the Greenlander speaking Greenlandic would say as the equivalent 'He dies to me' or 'The arrow is flying from me'. It is with the Greenlander, Waismann claims, as if his actions were something without an active element. But however we describe it, it is still something the Greenlander does and the two sentences have the same truth-conditions or assertability-conditions as the English utterances. Suppose he learned English and comes to speak English regularly and not Greenlandic. He will not think of his action differently nor will anyone else. He doesn't come to have a different

world picture. When he shifts to English or Danish, he does not thereby become “barred against certain other possibilities of world interaction” (Waismann 1968, 176). If a video gets shown of his shooting an arrow, it will be understood in the same way by English speakers, Danish speakers and Greenlandic speakers. For all of them the truth-conditions and the assertability-conditions are the same for the two statements, whether spoken or written in English or Danish or Greenlandic.

Waismann might respond that two people with their different languages could agree about all truth-conditions and still differ in world interpretation and in world picture or world view. However, they would just use different verbal signs. But this will be a purely verbal, empty difference. It does not follow or in any way justify Waismann’s belief that if we spoke a different language we would perceive a different world (Waismann 1968, 176). A Greenlander and an English-speaking person would, of course, share some beliefs, but they would very likely differ about many others. But that would be because of their habits, customs, cultures, conditions of life and technological awareness and development. Language would play only a small part, if any, in their differing views of the world. It is not language which gives us a different outlook on the world and the different accoutrements in which it is embedded. An English speaking philosopher and a Greenlandic speaking philosopher could both practice ordinary language philosophy. Suppose the Greenlander was just back from Oxford. The Greenlander in Greenlandic and the English philosopher in English could give the same or a very similar analysis of and come to the same conclusions about classical philosophical problems: realism, materialism, truth, rationality, the logical status of moral sentences, and the like. They might disagree about many other things, e.g., political orientations, regional customs, feminism, same-sex marriage and the like while not over what has been regarded by the philosophical tradition as the Philosophical problems: metaphysics, epistemology, logical or meta-ethical analysis, etc. They, of course, might differ extensively philosophically, particularly if they had very different religions or no religion at all, but not necessarily and not because they had and used different natural languages. Italian Catholics and

Indonesian Catholics very extensively have the same religious beliefs while having very different native languages.

Waismann goes on to say what is the very opposite of what Austin or Ryle would say, namely, that “philosophy *begins* with distrusting language” (Waismann 1968, 176). We can wisecrack that by saying ‘Even if it begins there, it need not end there or spend most of its time there’. But that aside, it was not so for the pre-Socratics where we have the beginning of Western philosophy and it was not so for Aristotle, Lucretius, Aquinas or Ockham. These philosophers were either at the very beginning of Western philosophy or at the beginning of a new way of doing philosophy. But they didn’t begin or end by distrusting language. I would say Waismann had in mind Bertrand Russell—the early and most *philosophically* influential Russell—and some logical positivists, most notably Carnap. But certainly not Moore, Wittgenstein (after the *Tractatus*), Ryle, Austin or Davidson.

However, again that aside, what does Waismann mean by ‘distrusting language’? He does not mean that “language falsifies experience” (Waismann 1968, 176). Instead, what it does do is supply us “with certain categorial forms without which the formation of a coherent system of experience, a world-picture, would be impossible” (Waismann 1968, 176-77). But, Waismann has it, we should, all the same, distrust those categorial forms and the world-view they generate. All peoples, no matter how undeveloped, in having a language will have categorial forms and most will have some categorial forms which will to some degree hang together but usually it is only intellectuals—I did not say *all* intellectuals or no non-intellectuals—who have in a reasonably developed form a world picture, some kind of *Weltanschauung*. Most people rather unthinkingly rely on religion or, a substitute for religion, like an officially atheistic culture. It is indeed true, Waismann claims, that “different languages achieve that [a world-view] in different ways” (Waismann 1968, 177). But they also achieve this in some ways that are similar. A philosopher should be sensitive to at least some of these things. But this does not generally warrant a distrust of

language, let alone thinking of it as dangerous, as it would be in a Brave New World situation if one were to exist or could exist or be approximated. But they have had approximations in the Soviet Union (particularly in Stalin's time), Mao's China and in the present extreme fundamentalist American right. But even there, for any kind of communication to be possible it would require a massive and taken for granted as a whole unquestioned cluster of linguistic practices without which we could not think at all and we must use some such language (cluster of linguistic practices) not only to think but to be able to do so coherently, perceptively and penetratingly. (I, of course, do not think all people do so.) Wittgenstein was right in thinking we should not distrust language but that is what many philosophers and other people do in trying to philosophize; they try to do that when they make philosophical generalizations about language, e.g., about what many call universals. They make a mistake in trying to theorize when they would not go astray if they simply took note and described—accurately described—how language functions in distinct work-a-day contexts, including manifold and varied contexts. That is, we should take careful note of our varied ordinary uses (employments) of language; we should describe our linguistic practices in their living contexts. In a very important way, *pace* Waismann, this is a basic “standard in philosophical controversy” (Waismann 1968, 177). Philosophers as different as Wittgenstein, Austin and Davidson are useful here. Together they keep our feet on the ground.

Waismann has in mind cases where ordinary language—or so he thinks—leads us down the garden path. He sets out what he takes to be examples which show the inadequacy of ordinary language. But his examples illustrate the exact opposite. They show what no ordinary language philosopher denies or, for that matter, generally any other informed person, namely that ordinary languages changes over time but the intelligibility of the changes do not show the inadequacy of ordinary language but its flexibility and the inadequacy of some old fashioned grammarians' thinking—thinking that tries both normatively and descriptively to treat language as a static thing. This is doing just the opposite of Austin's and Ryle's thinking as well as Waismann's himself.

New idioms, as Waismann acknowledges himself, become “completely naturalized—as with ‘distance’ for near and far, ‘age’ for young and old, ‘size’ for big and small, ‘density’ for thick and thin” (Waismann 1968, 184). Yet the language in question in making these changes is not thrown into turmoil, let alone into a melting pot, and we do not get or need to get a new world picture with these changes. Sometimes such grammarians, trying to be linguists, draw a *cordon sanitaire* against rebellious ideas that dare crop up. But that should not be done for language that is repeatedly changing and when such reactionary things happen, as some people try to make them happen, it is normally, directly or indirectly, over political, cultural, moral or religious issues rather than anything that has to do just with language. Usually these changes happen without conflict and when the change goes smoothly, as they usually do, it shows how languages normally change and do so without conflict. I remember years ago a student, indeed a good student, who was going on after her M.A. in philosophy to study law, asking me if she could write her thesis with me on same-sex marriage. I said I really didn’t know anything about it. It sounded to me, I said out of my ignorance, like a contradiction in terms, but I said, “Go ahead. I will learn.” Later, it came to be generally understood and accepted by many of us. Even most of those who oppose same-sex marriage came to see that it was not a contradictory notion and that ordinary English could easily accommodate it. It was the ideology of some religious people, but by no means all religious people, that stood in the way. Ordinary language philosophy, though sometimes practiced by conservative people, is not threatened by that. Sometimes radical people do so as well. G. A. Cohen is an illustrious example.

Waismann remarks, partly correctly and insightfully, though it misses his philosophical targets (Wittgenstein, Ryle, Strawson, Grice, Malcolm, Ambrose, Austin), “What those sticklers for correctness prefer not to see is that we are living in a changing world, and that language is always lagging behind these changes” (Waismann 1968, 182). He uses an example which is telling in support of his view about ordinary language’s fluidity and the desirability that this is so (unlike the

Australian use of 'veggie and 'Cab Sav'). But in reality, it does not count against ordinary language philosophy properly understood. His example is:

We all dislike new words. And yet there is another and perfectly proper urge to give expression to meanings so far unexpressed, or, in the present language, indeed inexpressible. When Freud, for instance, says *der Patient erinnert den Vorfall* he is using the verb *erinnern* in a novel manner; in the ordinary way, the verb is used reflexively, *sich an etwas erinnern*. Why has Freud (who wrote a very good style) diverged at this point? There is a queer way in which a neurotic person who is under treatment may suddenly remember long-forgotten scenes of his early life which, as Freud puts it, have been 'repressed' and are now being re-lived. What has been inaccessible to the patient, however hard he may have tried, breaks, in a violent storm of emotion, through to consciousness. In order to set apart this kind of remembrance from the ordinary one where we remember at will, Freud uses the verb transitively, in a way no one has done before; and with this syntactical innovation goes a semantic change. By this use Freud has enriched the German language (Waismann 1968, 181).

Waismann rightly says, "Language is an instrument that must, as the occasion requires, be bent to one's purpose. To stick to language as it is can only lead to a sort of Philistinism..." (Waismann 1968, 181). But ordinary language philosophers need not be and should not be—and usually are not—such conservatives about language. In fact, they won't be such linguistic conservatives if they do their ordinary language philosophy insightfully and with even a minimal understanding of language.

Waismann remarks, "new situations unforeseen arise, and with them the need of describing them; it can only be met by adjusting language—either by coining new words or, as word-creating faculty is scanty, by pressing old ones into new services, in this way cutting through the dead mass of convention" (Waismann 1968, 182-83). A scientist is "bound to do so if he is to convey a new insight not in conformity with ideas dominant of the time, with ideas precipitated in language" (Waismann 1968, 183). Einstein is a classic example. As Einstein describes the matter himself, he was groping with a feeling of direction, going toward something he didn't know quite what. It was

“more of a suspicion that all was not well with the idea of simultaneity.” Waismann remarks, unfairly I believe, that had Einstein “been brought up as a pupil of G. E. Moore, imbued with a belief in the infallibility of ordinary modes of expression, he could never have made his discovery, clogged as he would have been by the dead weight of usage. As it was, he paid no respect to common sense, let alone the common speech (Waismann 1968, 183).

Waismann believes “that such copious examples [he gives others] show that ordinary language philosophy, linguistic analysis, construed in that way, is a mistaken philosophy. It is in vain to use a language police or thought policy (shades of Orwell’s *1984*) with such an utterly unrealistic as well as pernicious ideal of correctness. But Waismann sets up a straw man here. Ordinary language philosophers contend that if someone—usually some metaphysician—says that ‘Time is unreal’, ‘There is no external world’, ‘There is no motion’, ‘Facts are fictions’, ‘Evil does not exist’, ‘All memory beliefs are unreliable’, ‘Nothing is ever certain’ and says these things, full stop, with no qualifications, she ends up in absurdity. Plain examples, translating into the concrete, can be adduced using ordinary language to express their absurdity. I know that I have a body as you know that you have a body. Whether it is a logical absurdity or empirical absurdity or sometimes one and sometimes the other, or still something other, we need not here decide, though Moore’s examples are usually of empirical absurdities. Moreover, we can be more confident of the truth of Moore’s truisms to counter such metaphysical claims than we can be of any philosophical claim or theory that denies or questions that these commonplaces are so. We can be more confident of them than any philosophical or even scientific theory that would deny or question them. Einstein would not have for a moment denied the report that “Two car bombs went off in Karachi simultaneously” *could* be true and unproblematically so. His theory was plainly not concerned to deny things like that, and if someone says that time is unreal, full stop, she can be refuted by the simple remark, ‘Didn’t you have your breakfast this morning?’ Whatever she answers, she shows her tacit



acceptance that time is real. Here with such *translations into the concrete*, we are brought down to earth, as Waismann himself acknowledges.

An ordinary language philosopher is also not so foolish as to deny or question that language changes and that sometimes people, usually scientists or poets or novelists, make for certain purposes creative alterations in it. Think here of the first two novels of Günter Grass. But they leave the stock uses of our languages intact along with their creative additions. Einstein's conceptions give us another context and with this a different use of 'simultaneously', giving us something with a new use of 'simultaneously' that the ordinary use of 'simultaneously' could not account for. But, for all of that, the ordinary use of 'simultaneously' is perfectly in place for two car bombs went off in Karachi simultaneously. Ordinary language philosophers do not reject the intelligibility of odd idioms "which say what cannot quite be said by anything else" (Waismann 1968, 182) or where it is not clear that it could *otherwise* clearly be said. But they are suspicious of much of the jargon that philosophers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Jaspers, Derrida, Vattimo, the neo-Hegelians, or the Romantics employed. They do not need to claim that *all* deviations of linguistic regularities that these philosophers routinely engage in are nonsense. Hegel, for example, has (or at least some of his commentators have) given a reasonably clear sense and indeed an important sense to his oddity that "The rational is the real and the real is the rational." However, they need to do so for on the face of it it appears incoherent or at least extremely puzzling—quasi-incoherent—jargon. But a careful reading of Hegel or his commentators reveals it not to be. What Einstein did for 'simultaneously', Rilke did for 'frozen music' and logical positivists (*pace* Waismann) did for 'pseudo-questions', e.g., 'Is there an external world?' All were intelligible and of value. Waismann rejects that "*All* the philosopher needs to know is the *stock* use of a word or phrase, as it is employed at present, in contrast with its non-stock uses" (Waismann 1968, 186; first italics mine). Surely that is not *all* an ordinary language philosopher needs to know, but it is something he needs to know and sometimes ordinary language and its employment in the face of some strange talk of

Hegel's or Heidegger's or Derrida's is to be used to very good effect in philosophy as well as elsewhere. It functions as an important defogger. Defogging may not be the only important thing in philosophy, but it is important. Austin was on the mark in remarking that we will not know if clarity is enough in philosophy until we have more clarity than we have now.

Einstein usefully insisted, repeatedly asking himself, "Do I *really* understand what I mean when I say that two events are simultaneous?" Sharpening up the question, he came gradually to see there was a gap in his initial understanding. It is one thing to speak of two events happening at the same time when they are in the same place or nearly so, but not when events occur at very distant places, say, on Mars and on Earth. 'Simultaneous' had for certain contexts to be redefined "and defined in such a way that the definition supplies us experimentally with whether two events are simultaneous" (Waismann 1968, 183). Einstein gave us a new use of 'simultaneous' and one of great scientific importance. We came to see that in many situations our ordinary use of 'simultaneous' did not work and that we need to think through again our understanding of simultaneity as Freud taught us to rethink our conceptions of thought, of wish and of desire.

Waismann goes on rightly to say that such creative stretching of language goes on in literature as well, most obviously in poetry but also in prose. Flaubert, for example, as Proust calls our attention to, gives us a vision where "everything, including human action, is resolved into a perpetual monotonous flux, revealing the melancholy essence of human existence. Describing people in the forms appropriate to things produces a peculiar effect indeed..." (Waismann 1968, 185). Flaubert achieves this by his use of the imperfect. Waismann tells us that the "contrast between the uniformity of nature and the uniqueness of the human world is in French, expressed by the use of two tenses—the imperfect for things and processes and the perfect for men and actions" (Waismann 1968, 184). But Flaubert, as Proust points out, relentlessly uses the imperfect even for human action. Distorting syntax, as Flaubert did by this use of the imperfect, gave us a "unique Flaubertian vision of things"; it helped "give shape to a world picture in which life is seen as

smooth change of one state passing into another without persons taking any active part in the action—a picture that reminds one of some huge escalator which goes on and on, never stopping, never ending” (Waismann 1968, 185).

There are, of course, ambiguities in ordinary language, but they are or can be cleared up ordinarily by attending to ordinary language. For example, ‘knock up’ means in American English ‘to make pregnant’, in British English it means ‘to wake one up’. But American English and British English are, in spite of some stupid polemics, one language and the clarification of ‘knock up’ is made by utilizing ordinary English (something generally in common to American English and British English). For another example, consider ‘old’. We say of a two year child that she is two years old. We also say of someone in her one hundredth year that she is a very old person. ‘Old’ is used ambiguously. The two year old is certainly not an old person, yet we say she is two years old without in any way implying that. But when we say a one hundred year person is old, we do not mean the same thing by ‘old’ as we mean when we say ‘The child is two years old’. We need a context here to get the right way that we are using ‘old’. In both cases we have stock uses, but somewhat different stock uses, of ‘old’. To someone learning English (including a child), we explain the difference sometimes by other examples, again of stock uses, of language to clearly synchronize the usage. ‘The child has lived for two years’ and ‘Grandmother has lived for a hundred years’. So we say of the grandmother that she is very old, but we would say, when speaking to a two year old, ‘You are two years old, not two years young’. It would be mistaken to say to the child, ‘You are old’ or to speak of her as being very old. But we could say, though it would be a change of usage, ‘You are two years young’. We could say to her, ‘At two years, you are very young’. It would, in most circumstances, be untruthful and indeed absurd to say of the grandmother that she is a hundred years young though, if someone said it, we could perhaps guess what she might have meant, i.e., ‘You are a young one for a hundred year old’. It is not like ‘Procrastination drinks melancholy’ or ‘Electric goes transcendental’, where we are completely (or almost so) at a loss. However, some

metaphysical utterances such as 'There can be Being without beings' or 'Absolute knowledge is transcendental' or 'The incomprehensible has finally been comprehended' are almost as bad. When philosophers go wild and intoxicate themselves with such utterances, we need, as Waismann acknowledges, to get Moorean, Wittgensteinian or Malcolman and translate into the concrete and remind them of our ordinary use, our common language.

Even for Einstein's, Freud's or Flaubert's innovative use (employment) of language for their distinctive non-linguistic purposes, these distinctive uses do not stand on their own. Their innovative uses are linked in a coherent way with their ordinary (common stock) uses in a way my wild examples are not. Stock uses are not all we need, but they are very crucial in gaining understanding. Without a background of stock uses under our command, there would be no understanding at all. The innovative uses piggyback on them. We could not stipulate (give) uses without that background. This is something Wittgenstein teaches us.

Waismann excels in displaying examples of new uses of language which subsequently, and sometimes after a storm, become part of a natural language enriching it. But, as I have repeatedly illustrated, they do not conflict with what ordinary language philosophers or what Wittgenstein, Moore and J. L. Austin are saying and who may not want—surely do not want—to be called ordinary language philosophers. For all of Waismann's insights—and they are many—he has made a caricature of what ordinary language philosophers and of what Wittgenstein, Moore and Austin are about. He is indeed right in saying that philosophers are not bound in all ways by the use of ordinary language. But philosophers, including ordinary language philosophers, do not make a cult of ordinary use, though they should explain themselves and justify themselves when they depart from it, particularly when their break with it is extreme. Many philosophers, and not only standard Continental types, pay no or little attention to ordinary language and cough up their monsters and still think they will be understood, e.g., Heidegger and Vattimo, and are even be thought to be deep in some circles. Wittgenstein *mildly* did this with 'language games', 'form of life' and 'grammar'. But

there is no reason to say, as Waismann does, that for standard Continentals it would be a crime, something inconsistent with their way of doing philosophy, if they put their points in a much less flamboyant way. The legitimacy of such innovations depends on how they are done and why. The ordinary language philosopher will *not* say that she has come to recognize that sometimes in doing philosophy, if she wants to say something that will be properly understood, she must say something that will be linguistically deviant which cannot quite be said in the ordinary way. Philosophers, or so it at least seems to me, are not in the position of Einstein, Freud or Flaubert. At least Waismann needs to give us some cases where a philosopher is in such a situation. Perhaps there are some such in Heidegger's, Derrida's or Vattimo's work? I have never come across any. They deploy jargon at what for them are crucial points—what I have called their use of 'monsters' without any attempt to elucidate or explain them—as if we could read these jargon-riddled terms and sentences and be expected to understand them. (But I have used 'monsters' in a very extended way myself. To give sense to what I am saying there I must explain myself, returning to stock uses like jargon-riddled terms and sentences but also to suggest by 'monsters' that they are extreme cases of such use.) Waismann owes us for some convincing *philosophical* matters where going beyond our common speech is being done to good effect and where there is what he calls 'thinking up speech' by philosophers where this has been intelligibly and insightfully, or at least usefully, done. I do not mean to deny or put into question the sometimes usefulness of definitions of technical terms, including philosophical ones, such as 'material implication' or 'universalizability' is given in common language at least somewhere down the line; to explain what is meant by 'translation into the concrete'. But that is plainly not what is at issue. What is at issue is that what needs to be shown, to warrantably go in a Waismannian way, is that there are some philosophical cases where we need to depart from Wittgenstein's way of doing philosophy; what I would call therapeutic metaphilosophy. A Waismannian needs to say something of an intelligible metaphysical or epistemological sort that cannot be said in ordinary language. Waismann argues that the ordinary

language philosopher should become aware, indeed deeply aware, of other languages than his own, particularly radically different languages which yield other possibilities, radically other possibilities. This should yield possibilities which when examined carefully will (1) ground a belief that these are matters not expressible in a given ordinary language and (2) enable us to “see in a flash other ways of world interpretation of which we are unaware, and this drives home what is conventional in our own outlook”, rooted in our particular language.

Ordinary language philosophers believe, *pace* Waismann, that we will not get either (1) or (2). But ordinary language philosophers, Waismann in effect responds here in a last ditch response, are being not only lingua-centric—caught in *a*, not *the*, lingua-centric predicament—but ethnocentric as well. He claims that the technique or practice of a last ditch appeal to use (employment of words or sentences) in *our* ordinary language commits just the error Waismann has committed. They, he claims have restricted themselves to the “logic of one language” or family of languages. So restricting ourselves will blind us to the ubiquitous but still particular features of a given language but hardly something that is part of ‘the logic of all languages’ or particular “features of their own language on which their whole mode of thinking, indeed their world picture depends” (Waismann 1968, 188).

Well, perhaps? It is certainly important that we do not just make generalizations or debunking that only applies to one language or to one family of languages. And it is true that ordinary language philosophy has *largely* been an English language affair. But it travelled early to Scandinavia with its five languages, Finnish being a quite distinct one. Georg von Wright, a Finn living for the most part in Finland, close to Wittgenstein and for a while his successor at Cambridge, operates philosophically in five different languages. When he is not doing deontic logic, he sticks close to ordinary use and he has never issued Waismannian complaints about Wittgenstein’s technique or ordinary language philosophy. (It is important to remember that Wittgenstein wrote principally in German.) There are analytic philosophers forming groups, albeit minority ones, in

Germany, France, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Turkey, though most of them are not ordinary language philosophers (by now it has gone out of fashion, to my regret, everywhere) and Waismann-style complaints are rare. Pascal Engel, a French analytic philosopher, is not an ordinary language philosopher but, like Donald Davidson (whom he has translated into French), he takes our natural languages very seriously. Moreover, there are francophones in Québec, typically writing in both French and English, who do not issue such complaints. There are analytic philosophers in India, Pakistan and China who do not issue such complaints, philosophers whose native language is very different than the European languages.

The thing is that the classical philosophical problems in their different environments are such that they arose rather commonly though not entirely so. I am thinking that in these varied environments one is tempted to say the metaphysical problems, or *so-called metaphysical problems*, for all of these classical philosophers—and for Russell and Moore as well—are problems such as the ‘problem’ of the external world, of other minds, of is matter real, is time real, is motion possible, can we ascertain whether we are dreaming or awake or whether we are ever acquainted with reality as such. They are not preoccupations, except to dissolve or in some way to confute, of the leading ordinary language philosophers (J. L. Austin, for example). Nor does the question of what is alleged to be essences, such as the essence of being human, enabling us to say what it is to be ‘truly human’ arise for ordinary language philosophers. We can no doubt establish when an animal is *homo sapiens*, but do we have much of an idea of how it is to be ‘truly human’ or of whether such an idea has a coherent use? And is there ever something that can be rightly called the good such that any person can recognize it and recognize that it must rule their lives? Is there something properly called a transcendent truth that humans, if they are genuinely reflective, will recognize to be true for all times and climes? Ordinary language philosophers were not concerned with these problems, except to dispose of them, anymore than were the pragmatists.

These are the kind of ‘problems’, along with the problems of Divine Being or divine beings and the problem of immortality, that have been the perennial problems that ‘First Philosophy’, the so-called perennial philosophy, has been concerned with. They are the crucial philosophical problems primarily for some religious believers, e.g., Thomists, and Calvinist philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. First Philosophy seeks to provide in what is taken to be an objective and systematic way answers to them. These are ‘problems’ which philosophers that I have been discussing, whether religious or not, have been in one way or another concerned to set aside, though with the coming into existence of analytic metaphysicians, these ‘perennial’ questions come back on stage in what seems to me a philosophically retrograde way.

Logical positivists, by contrast, thought they were pseudo-problems, pragmatists thought that they were a waste of time and without a human point, and Wittgenstein and John Wisdom said these problems were nonsensical—often disguised nonsense—and up for dissolution by Wittgensteinian therapeutic procedures. Waismann said, seemingly in the same mode, that “...the rise of linguistic technique in our day has put an end to the great speculative systems of the past” (Waismann 1968, 34), though he ends his article “On How I See Philosophy” on a different note (Waismann 1968, 38). That notwithstanding, I think we should recognize the truth of the statement just quoted from Waismann. This setting aside of the traditional problems has become cumulatively obvious and lots of philosophers either tacitly or overtly recognize that. But, in a way that boggles my mind and sense of reality, some hold out for the Absolutism of perennial philosophy and do it with integrity, intelligence and a good knowledge of the history of thought (Blanshard 1966; Copleston 1991). Even Waismann, as we have just noted, in some sense remains ambivalent. Note what I have just quoted him saying, yet he remarks at the end of the same essay, “To say that metaphysics is nonsense *is* nonsense” (Waismann 1968, 38). I do not mean that there is no way of reading Waismann where he does not have two contradictory views, but that they, not unsurprisingly, do not fit easily together. He tells us that ordinary language philosophy “fails to



acknowledge the enormous part played at least in the past by these systems" (Waismann 1968, 38). But if linguistic analysis of our day has put an end to the great speculative systems of the past, as he said earlier in the article, it is hard to know how these systems can still have any import other than a purely historical one for us. Yet it is then hard to see how he can say what he says at the end of his essay. *Perhaps* we should say that metaphysics is not nonsense but absurd or unbelievable or an archaic fantasy, but nothing stronger. The whole final passage should be quoted in full:

The view advocated here is that at the living centre of every philosophy is a vision and that it should be judged accordingly. The really important questions to be discussed in the history of philosophy are not whether Leibniz or Kant were consistent in arguing as they did but rather what lies behind the systems they have built. And here I want to end with a few words on metaphysics.

To say that metaphysics is nonsense *is* nonsense. It fails to acknowledge the enormous part played at least in the past by those systems. Why this is so, why they should have such a hold over the human mind I shall not undertake here to discuss. Metaphysicians, like artists, are the antennae of their time: they have a flair for feeling which way the spirit is moving. (There is a Rilke poem about it.) There is something visionary about great metaphysicians as if they had the power to see beyond the horizons of their time. Take, for instance, Descartes's work. That it has given rise to endless metaphysical quibbles is certainly a thing to hold against it. Yet if we attend to the spirit rather than to the words I am greatly inclined to say that there is a certain grandeur in it, a prophetic aspect of the comprehensibility of nature, a bold anticipation of what has been achieved in science at a much later date. The true successors of Descartes were those who translated the spirit of this philosophy into deeds, not Spinoza or Malebranche but Newton and the mathematical description of nature. To go on with some hairsplitting as to what substance is and how it should be defined was to miss the message. It was a colossal mistake. A philosophy is there to be lived out. What goes into the word dies, what goes into the work lives (Waismann 1968, 38).

There is a lot of this that those who have been soaked in philosophy, particularly before the age of analysis, which inclines us to say things like this. But I think we should resist it. How exactly, or even inexactly, have the great, to say nothing of the lesser, metaphysicians been antennae of their time in the way Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Marx or Freud have or otherwise Homer,

Sophocles, Cervantes, Balzac, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Flaubert, Zola, Proust, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Schiller, Goethe, Holderin, Dostoevsky, or Brecht have. We are perhaps inclined to say Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant and Hegel (in spite of his obscurity) were such antennae. But how? This needs laying out and we, not unreasonably but perhaps wrongly, can be skeptical. We can readily say it for the scientists mentioned and relatively clearly for the writers, some more in this respect than others—Cervantes, Flaubert, Schiller, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Proust and Brecht principally. This is also true of some philosophers besides the great old figures mentioned above: Mill, Dewey, Rawls, and Wittgenstein, but then they were not metaphysicians (nor was Hume). Metaphysicians or not, how did they—or did they—have a flair for sensing which way the *Weltgeist* was moving? Examine the great metaphysicians and explain how there is something visionary about them, as if they had the power to see beyond the horizon of their time. Consider the classical metaphysical problems I have listed above. How did their in some sense understanding them and coming to grips with them enhance our ability to see beyond the horizon of our time or even to hold our time in thought? Perhaps some novelists or historians or someone like Freud, Marx, Durkheim or Weber have in some sense done something of that? *Perhaps* even Plato, Augustine, Maimonides, Spinoza, Hobbes or Hume have? But was it because (where they had any) of their metaphysics? How have they *qua* metaphysicians done so? Or have they done so?

Waismann castigates ordinary language philosophers for preaching the sanctity of ordinary language. But isn't this the pot calling the kettle black when we consider what he says about metaphysicians? Isn't Waismann preaching at least as much as the ordinary language philosophers? Indeed, isn't he preaching even more so? And indeed, back to a point made earlier, it is not fair to say the ordinary language philosophers were preaching or making a cult of ordinary language.

That aside, how can we attend to the spirit of the words except by attending to the words themselves? Attending to the use—the employment, the functioning—of the words is indeed crucial. There is no way of bypassing the words and the context of their use. Where is the anticipation of the comprehensibility of nature in all its grandeur in Descartes? Didn't we have to wait for Newton for that? And what, if anything, does it mean to say that "a philosophy is there to be lived out" or "what goes into the word dies, what goes into the work lives"? These are fine seeming phrases but do they have any sense? Isn't this both obscurantist and in effect preaching? Such a thing on first hearing them in a context like Waismann's is indeed moving. I was initially caught up by them. But is this feeling sustained against even a reasonably careful reading and reflection? We do not understand what Waismann is saying here. Through a cloud darkly, it seems that what he is saying here adds nothing to our understanding or to our gaining some philosopher's vision or any other kind of vision, if indeed it makes much sense to speak of vision at all here.

This takes us to my other issue with Waismann, namely, what he says about vision. For good or for ill, what he says about it is very un-Wittgensteinian as well as very un-logical positivist. (Remember that is where he started.) Waismann remarks that when we realize that a philosophy cannot be derived from any premises, how then has a philosophical stance been arrived at? How has a philosopher arrived at the views or values he has? There are, Waismann rightly claims, no proofs in philosophy, as have Wittgenstein and Ryle also said. There are, following from that, no theorems either. There is then, or so at least it would or better might seem, no establishing anything either. There are arguments, discussions and conversations of our course, but they, it at least is usually thought (*pace* Moore), never lead to anything decisive. What then, Waismann asks, is the good of philosophy? What is it good for? If this is the wrong sort of question, why is it? We end up with the questions 'What is philosophy, after all?' and 'Is philosophy worth pursuing?'

Waismann remarks:

To ask, 'What is your aim in philosophy?' and to reply, 'To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle' is... well, honour where it is due, I suppress what I was going to say; except perhaps this. There is something deeply exciting about philosophy, a fact not intelligible on such a negative account. It is not a matter of 'clarifying thoughts' nor of 'the correct use of language' nor of any other of these damned things. What is it? Philosophy is many things and there is no formula to cover them all. But if I were asked to express in one single word what is its most essential feature I would unhesitatingly say: vision. At the heart of any philosophy worth the name is vision, and it is from there it springs and takes its visible shape. When I say 'vision' I mean it: I do not want to romanticize. What is characteristic of philosophy is the piercing of that dead crust of tradition and convention, the breaking of those fetters which bind us to inherited preconceptions, so as to attain a new and broader way of looking at things. It has always been felt that philosophy should reveal to us what is hidden. (I am not quite insensitive to the dangers of such a view.) Yet from Plato to Moore and Wittgenstein every great philosophy was led by a sense of vision: without it no one could have given a new direction to human thought or opened windows into the not-yet-seen. Though he may be a good technician, he will not leave his marks on the history of ideas. What is decisive is a new way of seeing and, what goes with it, the will to transform the whole intellectual scene. This is the real thing and everything else is subservient to it (Waismann 1968, 32).

So if Waismann were asked what the most essential feature of philosophy was, he would, he tells us, unhesitatingly say, '*Vision*'. I think if you would ask many philosophers, major and innovative philosophers in our time, that same question they would deny this. I do not think Quine would say it nor Carnap, Reichenbach, Wittgenstein or Moore. And Austin would surely scornfully deny it. We are likely to suspect those who would say what Waismann did. We might not say as Max Weber sarcastically said that if you want vision go to the movies. But many would be reluctant to say that philosophy is essentially anything and certainly not vision or the search for it.

Well, what is vision? If we go to the *Oxford Dictionary* we are told in the first entry that vision is "something which is apparently seen otherwise than by ordinary sight, especially an appearance of a prophetic or mystical character or having the nature of revelation, supernaturally presented to the mind in sleep or in an abnormal state." This is plainly not what Waismann means, though parts of it may be reflected in his meaning. The secondary entries in the *Oxford Dictionary*

are even further from his meaning. The *American Dictionary of the English Language* has an entry which is somewhat closer to what Waismann presumably has in mind, namely, someone who has an “unusual competence”, the entry reads, “in discernment or perception; intelligent foresight: *a man of vision.*” This well squares with that dictionary’s first characterization of ‘a visionary’: someone who is “characterized by vision or foresight”. For Waismann, ‘vision’, is a way of looking at things, and for a philosophy worth of its name, it is “to attain a new and broader way of looking at things”. It is, *pace* Wittgenstein and Malcolm, a revealing “to us of what is hidden”. Having this vision, this distinctive way of seeing or apprehending things, enables us to pierce through “the dead crust of tradition and convention, the breaking of these fetters which bind us to inherited preconceptions, so as to attain a new and broader way of looking at things” (Waismann 1968, 32). Every great philosopher, Waismann tells us, from Plato to Wittgenstein, was “led by a sense of vision: without it no one could have given to human thought or opened windows into the not yet seen” (Waismann 1968, 32).

It is surely true, almost by definition true, that in some way or other what was given us—more accurately, given to some of us—was a new direction to human thought, though usually under the influence of great thinkers in very different ways. Plato and Wittgenstein did so themselves and for us often in very different ways. But must we not be careful with the metaphor of opened windows into the not-yet-seen? We should also recognize that the not-yet-seen is, of course, not to be taken literally. But then how is it to be understood? How is it to be taken? In talking of a philosopher’s vision, are we talking of a *Weltanschauung*: a worldview? Very likely, and we have some grip on that but not much (Copleston 1991, 69-73). To have a worldview is to have a distinctive view of how the world is and might become. (But isn’t that a matter—or at least principally a matter—of physics and chemistry, or as well a matter of geology and geography or of biology and psychology or sociology and anthropology? Is this too *scientific*? I do not think so.) But that is not what most philosophers want when they want a vision or that the great philosophers

thought that their distinctive visions came to or should come to. Vision, it has been thought, should be a key or the keys for the thinking of lesser philosophers. (But then how is this vision to be understood?) We are still not told what a philosophical vision is, let alone what a compelling or even a deep philosophic vision is. We are left asking what philosophers mean when they speak of a philosophic vision.

We should realize that they also typically, but not always—not Waismann, for example—have some religious or anti-religious view linked to their vision. Alternatively, a view of what a philosophic vision is or that of some distinctive view of what moral and political life should be and sometimes also a view with an aesthetic orientation. More generally, it is to have a view of how life should be lived and how society (including how ‘world society’, assuming optimistically that there is such a thing) should be ordered. This is supposed to carry with it deeper insight but what that is or could be is surely contested. This vision is, as Waismann has it, supposed to yield ultimate truths but it is unclear what they are, what they could be or whether there are any or any non-truistic ones. Moreover, many very contemporary and very analytic philosophers would simply ignore such matters as of no philosophic interest.

Philosophic vision, Waismann has it, is “the flashing of a new aspect which is *non-inferential*” (Waismann 1968, 37). (Brandon would surely not like that.) Waismann continues his next paragraph, “Whoever has pondered some time over some dark problem in philosophy will have noticed that the solution, when it comes, comes with a suddenness. It is [as if] he suddenly sees things in a new light...” (Waismann 1968, 37).

This is, according to him, what it is to have a vision in philosophy. It comes close to some things dictionaries tell us. Waismann speaks of Wittgenstein as a key example of someone having a vision in philosophy where he broke through and suddenly gained an understanding of the nature of such things as hoping, fearing, intending not as being discovered by introspection or by psychological experiment but by understanding how these words are used (employed). But this for

Wittgenstein was not a solution to a philosophical problem but a dissolution of it, like sugar dissolving in water. And even when he continues to sometimes talk of solution, as Waismann is at pains to stress himself, it is not of a proof for Waismann stresses, and quite correctly, there are no proofs in philosophy, though there are arguments, like that of a lawyer building a case. But in philosophy, arguments are never decisive. Instead of arguments we can speak of discussions or conversations. But these discussions or conversations are interminable. If they yield anything like vision, the vision is very subjective and obscure. If, as Waismann says, at the living center of everything there is a vision and that it should be *judged* accordingly (Waismann 1968, 38). But we have no even reasonably clear understanding of what this is or how it is to be judged, if it is to be judged at all. Whatever Waismann takes to be a philosophical vision, it isn't what dictionaries mean and from his texts it remains opaque. Even from what we can grasp it is not clear what, if anything, adds to our understanding.

I, as Wittgenstein came to, don't ask for 'perfect clarity'. I am not even confident that I know what that is. But I do not want something that is so unclear, that we are so at a lost about, that we do not understand what we are arguing for or discussing, conversing or trying to gain. Waismann leaves us utterly in the dark. Perhaps I should not put it so strongly, but to put the best face on it, he leaves us pretty much in the dark. His rhetoric first engenders hope and he is very good at telling us what vision is not and what philosophy cannot achieve. But when it comes to telling us what philosophy with its integral vision and grandeur is, he leaves us in the dark.

Waismann started out as a logical positivist and as an assistant to Schlich in Vienna and he became close to and a follower of Wittgenstein. But he continued to have a creative and independent mind. Still, at a crucial point he misses the import (different as they are) of what both Schlich and Wittgenstein or Austin and Ryle say. He wants to say something positive and something that cuts deeply, cuts at the philosophical joints as some analytic metaphysicians would say, but he ends up giving us a *via negativa* attached to what in effect are obscurantist claims of

something more. That is too bad, for when I first read him I thought he was making things exciting, breaking new grounds. He wants to show us how philosophy is a great liberating force and thoroughly exciting. But he fails. Wittgenstein's negativity is far stronger.

#### IV

I want to add a final section—a kind of addendum—concerning philosophy as conceived not simply as analysis Cambridge style, Oxford style, nor Carnapian ideal language style, but conceived as worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Many philosophers prior to the age of analysis, whether Wolfian sympathizers, Kantians, Hegelians, Romantics or some amalgam, thought this to be the central and drivingly important thing for philosophy to be. This was linked with having a vision or a world picture (another metaphor). There could not be a worldview that did not carry with it a vision of the world. A genuine philosophy that was thought to push things forward—whatever that comes to, if anything—was linked to having such vision and worldview.

Perhaps we can get a better sense of what vision comes to by getting a sense of how it was linked to what it is to have a worldview that is at least minimally philosophic, whether systematic or not (think of the Romantics, most particularly of Georg Hegel). *Perhaps* investigation or reflection here would give us some sense of what we are talking about when we speak of vision in philosophy?

Two contemporary philosophers of the not too distant past who philosophized in what once was thought to be the 'grand old style' but still by no means not utterly hostile to or ignorant of analytic philosophy, wrote in programmatic essays at a reasonably recent but very different times than ours. Both were in the U.K., one writing in 1937 when analysis had not yet won the day but was challenging the tradition and the other in 1991 when analytic philosophy had become consolidated as the dominant way of doing philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian worlds. The 1937 essay, "Fashion and Philosophy", was written by H. J. Paton and the 1991 essay,



“Ayer and World Views”, was written by Frederick Copleston. Paton, an eminent Kant scholar from Oxford, translator of Kant into English, wrote extensively and not only on Kant, and Copleston was a Jesuit and an eminent Thomist made famous by his debates on the BBC with A. J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell and for his many volumed history of philosophy. Both Paton and Copleston stood in the old metaphysical tradition and stood firmly in opposition to analytic philosophy. But both had a reasonable (some might say very good) understanding of analytic philosophy. Moreover, both wrote with reasonable clarity.

With Paton’s article, an inaugural lecture at Oxford, one can readily feel the difference in tone, manner and the claims and assumptions made by him from where we are now. In 1937, philosophy and the world Paton philosophized in was a very different place and philosophy was practiced very differently than in the world of 1991, to say nothing of the world of 2011, both in the analytic tradition and in the Continental tradition (to make an oversimplified and somewhat stereotypical distinction). Paton is concerned with what he calls “the defense of reason—not of reason as the power of making inferences... [but] as that power of general intelligence which distinguishes man from the brutes and can be displayed in action no less than in thought” (Paton 1951, vii). Paton sees “the business of philosophy... to be synoptic, to see things in this togetherness, to fit our different experiences and our different theories, as far as may be, into a consistent whole” (Paton 1951, 13). No philosophy which fails this, he claims, will be deemed satisfactory. If we set aside the traditional questions of philosophy we need to clearly and convincingly to explain why we have done so. Moreover, a moral philosophy, something central to philosophy, must be part of the project to gain “a systematic view of the universe, a *Weltanschauung*, in which all our different experiences, and our different theories of them, must find their place” (Paton 1951, 18). We do not know that we can achieve this, but it is, Paton claims, a reasonable bit of philosophical faith that we can and that with this philosophy can become a guide to life. Philosophy, Paton claims, should not have a cold Austinian detachment; philosophy, to be

good philosophy, should not be just analysis but face “the ultimate problems of man’s position in the universe... become a way of life” (Paton 1951, 28).

This inaugural lecture at Oxford by Paton is moving. When we are being hopeful about our vocation, we may be tempted by such notions. Ayer and Austin, as much as they were different and conflicted, were not. They rejected such notions as utterly muddled (Berlin 1973).

Copleston looked back at analytical philosophy and most particularly at the way A. J. Ayer’s views on metaphysics had changed since *Language, Truth and Logic* (Copleston 1991). Ayer remained faithful to empiricism and continued to leave little room for metaphysics (Ayer 1991). Ayer speculates that a metaphysician might construe metaphysics as “integrating the theories and hypotheses of the particular sciences into a unified world picture” (Copleston 1991, 65). This might be regarded as a scientific worldview. What could this come to? It might consist in the attempt at a reduction of all the other sciences to physics—taking physics to be the basic science. But isn’t this a job for scientists or encyclopaedists of science? *Perhaps* not? It might, as Copleston remarks, come to “the sort of idea of metaphysics proposed by Frederick Waismann”, namely, that some “metaphysical systems... have embodied visions of the world which have acted as a stimulus to scientists in their work of forming hypotheses and testing them” (Copleston 1991, 66). Waismann takes Descartes to be such a metaphysician. Metaphysics *so construed* is not meaningless, though it may, as science develops, become less and less something that philosophers can do or that scientists or anybody needs. Parts of physics may become more and more speculative but less and less tied to anything that is recognizable as metaphysics and, unlike metaphysics, and as science, even speculative science, tied, though sometimes very, very indirectly, to empirical testability. Moreover, as Paton stressed, such a view of the proper task of metaphysics is very one-sided for a worldview (a *Weltanschauung*). It will also, and very centrally, have a moral and political dimension forming—or so the claim goes—the basis for a way of life. People have moral, political, personal and sometimes even aesthetic conceptions of how life should be lived. Metaphysics,

besides doing Waismann's thing, also has attempted to put these matters together into a coherent and rationally sustainable whole. It may well be an illusion that, metaphysics or otherwise philosophy, can do anything like that. But through its long history, and indeed right down to the present time, some philosophers have tried to do it. But philosophy has become increasingly less metaphysical as time goes on, but some philosophers go on striving for a coherent view of life, a conception of how we should live our lives, individually and together, and of how society should be ordered. Think of the work—in some ways very different work—of John Rawls, Derek Parfit, G. A. Cohen, Amartya Sen, Raymond Geuss and Sheldon Wolin.

Copleston is clearly right in denying that all philosophers should go in for worldview—*Weltanschauung*—construction. Some have some very specialized tasks and they should stick with them. And it is surely also true that it is, to put it mildly, unclear what it would be like to have a *total* worldview. Moreover, it is not clear, even where we made no claims to totality, how, in seeing in a more limited way how various aspects of life—scientific, religious (anti-religious), ethical, moral and political—hang together, if indeed they do that we have achieved a vision. They presumably would not have a tight fit but rather would more or less cohere, coherence admitting of degrees. Why, if it is, is such a thing of value?

However, as our thought about the world has developed since the Enlightenment and in the distinctive ways there has been acceleration in changes in philosophy since Paton gave his inaugural lecture in 1937 (Paton 1951). Worldview construction has gone out of fashion and indeed has been thought by many philosophers as not a subject for serious philosophers. Even in the words of Frederick Copleston, a distinguished Thomist, it has been recognized that its “cognitive value is extremely questionable” (Copleston 1991, 70). How could we know or reasonably believe that the world is a logically coherent whole or for that matter is not a logically coherent whole? What is it to speak of the world (universe) as a whole? And to speak of it as a coherent whole? Any why care? Some physicists—and not cranky ones—seem to believe that

there are 'other universes' besides ours that are very different (Hawking 2011; Weinberg 2011). Even if we can get a grip on all of this and gain an understanding of the universe as a whole, what is it to say that a worldview is being offered as a picture of reality or of the universe or even just the world? Copleston asks, "Is there any guarantee that a logically coherent world picture is a faithful mirror of reality, unless perhaps we presuppose that the world must be a logically coherent system" (Copleston 1991, 70)? But on what grounds do we do that? Language is surely idling here. *Perhaps* to say that metaphysics is nonsense is nonsense? But we surely have a very weak understanding of metaphysics or more likely no understanding at all. Or does, what Hans Gadamer and Gianni Vattimo characterize as 'weak thought', just go with proper philosophy? This seems to me another obscurantism.

We who are trying to make sense of the moral horror of our world, and hopefully having gained some understanding of it, try to change it or to rectify it or at least make it a little more decent. We not infrequently think we need a worldview if we are coherently to go anywhere toward achieving these things. Take just one crucial thing: how are we to go anywhere toward making the world a better one? How do we go about doing it? And what should we do if we come to recognize that we cannot make sense of having a justifiable worldview (*Weltanschauung*) or even a coherent one, or even have a reasonable sense of the very idea of a worldview? I would say junk this kind of thinking—this worldview thinking—and instead throw ourselves, utilizing whatever kind of abilities we have, into achieving something like decency in our world while facing unflinchingly its horror (Davis 2006). Forget about metaphysics and *Weltanschauung* constructions or aligning ourselves with one, whatever that could come to. We will never get a philosophy or anything else that will give us 'the one true guide to life', but we can, with dogged effort, gain some guidance (but not from philosophy) as to how best to rebuild Haiti or to what now (2011) is to be done in Libya. What I am saying here is not nihilism but it is not rationalism either.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For Passmore's own philosophical views see Passmore 1960 and 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Waismann's "How I See Philosophy" was originally published in 1956 and reprinted with the same title as the lead article in a posthumous collection of his papers edited by R. Harré, *How I See Philosophy* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Being in a *lingua-centric predicament* is inescapable if we are to understand and think at all. It means that if we are to have any cognitive awareness at all we must have one or another or several natural languages, e.g., the home language of some peoples. Any artificial or ideal language that we will come to have will be parasitic as a natural language or natural languages. There is neither such an 'ideal language-way' of a bedrock appeal to a natural language nor one by having an understanding which is utterly non-linguistic. There is no such ideal language escape or a brutish empiricist escape. There are no such cognitive awarenesses. See Wilfrid Sellars (1977), *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandon.

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# Metaphilosophy, Once Again

## Chapter 3

### Ordinary Language Philosophy Reconsidered

How strange if logic were concerned with an 'ideal' language and not with *ours*. For what would this ideal language express? Presumably, what we now express in our ordinary language; in that case, this is the language logic must investigate.

– Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*

When philosophers use a word—'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name'—and they try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: Is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

– Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

## I

Neither ordinary language philosophers (broadly speaking) Moore, Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle, Grice, Strawson, Bousma, Ambrose, Toulmin, Wisdom or Malcolm nor ideal language philosophers Russell, Carnap, Bergmann, Reichenbach, Schlick, C. I. Lewis or Ayer have much presence anymore. The issues that they engaged in and that divided them may seem passé. By now it might be said both groups are part of the history of philosophy. Well, of course they are and even with their being such near contemporaries, they are for us part of the history of philosophy. We no longer make philosophical music with any of them or with the movements they inspired. I want here, extending what I argued in the previous two chapters and perhaps whipping a dead horse, to



make a renewed defense of both common sense and of ordinary language philosophy. (They are not and should not be taken to be the same. I want to stress for both of them their historic importance and even more their continued relevance and their role, perhaps paradoxically, in my own *not-quietist rejectionism*: what I have called my anti-Philosophy philosophy.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that any of those ordinary language philosophers listed above would have endorsed it. But they, unwittingly and unintentionally, as I shall try to show, led us down that path in certain ways and, my admiration for Friedrich Waismann to the contrary notwithstanding, far away from his path (Waismann 1968). For a glimpse into one important bit of ordinary language philosophy's import, reflect on how metaphysics was done by the English neo-Hegelians, some of whom Russell and Moore attacked, and how analytical metaphysics is done now.<sup>2</sup> I have in mind near contemporary old time metaphysicians such as Bradley, McTaggart, Bosanquet, Blanshard, and Weiss. This kind of metaphysics—a clearly recognizable sort—clearly has been devastated. It is all but vanished from the philosophical scene. But it is unclear whether this devastation has travelled to latter, more analytically attuned philosophers doing metaphysical work, namely Kripke, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, Armstrong, Brandon and van Inwagen.<sup>3</sup> Metaphysics, as some wish, may not be dead but metaphysics done in the way the former group did it is dead. (Blanshard's way a bit less so than McTaggart's.) Moore's and Wittgenstein's arguments, and roughly following them (though somewhat differently) Ambrose's, Ryle's, Malcolm's, Austin's, Toulmin's, were effective in bringing about that death. There was a historic turning that is not likely to be reversed. Moreover, we did not need Rorty for that. Indeed Rorty is not charmed by a Moorean common sense approach linked to ordinary language philosophy or just taken by itself. I will attempt in the next part of this chapter to show how the ordinary language philosophers' way of going about philosophy puts the stopper on some currently fashionable ways of going about philosophy.

## II

I will in this section try to show something of the Moorean-Wittgensteinian influenced way of philosophically doing things that finished off that old metaphysical way of doing philosophy, at least as it was done in the English speaking world. I am thinking here centrally of the English neo-Hegelians. I will stress here such analytical philosophy's Moorean side having given expression to the Wittgensteinian side in the previous two chapters. Moore and Wittgenstein are by no means the same.<sup>4</sup> But they, taken together, were very effective here. I have in mind in particular some ways they affected Alice Ambrose and Norman Malcolm who were students of both of them. Ryle and Austin both were important ordinary language philosophers as well as teaching at Oxford. But they importantly went on their own ways, though still in an ordinary language tradition. They all have a lot in common with Moore and Wittgenstein, but are themselves importantly different.<sup>5</sup>

Now for the Moorean attack—Malcolm called him the “Great Refuter—of classical metaphysics and epistemology (Malcolm 1952, 365). I start with Moore's famous *A Defense of Common Sense* and its relation to ordinary language philosophy (Moore 1959; originally published in 1925). I should first note that though Moore speaks of the common sense view of the world, his account, as both Ambrose and Malcolm realize, is actually very distant from common sense (Ambrose 1952; Malcolm 1952). What Moore called the plain man would be very puzzled about such statements as ‘There are material objects’, ‘We are conscious beings’, ‘We have bodies’, ‘People live for a number of years’, ‘Time is not unreal’, ‘Most of us have been on or near to the surface of the earth all our lives’, ‘Space is unreal’, ‘You cannot know for certain there are experiences other than your own’, ‘We do not know the truth about any material thing’, ‘It is the case that everything we see is really a part of our brains’, ‘No material thing exists unperceived’, and ‘The world is our idea’. Talk and argument about such matters would seem to be crazy-talk to someone, innocent of philosophy, rooted in common sense. (It will seem so to some philosophers as well.)

Plain people would find these sentences very puzzling. Malcolm even says that if you stop to think about such sentences, you will begin to see that “all of them are queer sentences” (Malcolm 1970, 41). What, to ask a Wittgensteinian question, if anything, do they mean? When, to go Wittgensteinian, would we employ them? Would we ever use them except in esoteric philosophical situations which would make little sense to plain people, let alone have any importance for them? And how are they, *or are they*, matters of common sense? They are not like beliefs of common sense, many of which come and go over time and place, and many are moralistic, e.g., ‘The earth is flat; the earth is round’, ‘Marriage must be monogamous; there cannot be legitimate polygamous marriages’, ‘Gay marriages are illegitimate’, ‘One must not eat meat on Friday; one can eat meat whenever one likes’, ‘One must eat kosher’, ‘Morality requires belief in God; morality does not require it’, ‘The father is the head of the family; the mother is’ or ‘Families are much happier without a single culturally determined head’, etc., etc. Different things over cultural space and historical time are regarded as common sense and often required at certain times and places. What is common sense in Kansas is not common sense in Helsinki, to say nothing of Kabala Catholicism and Protestantism and Judaism and most Moslems do not have blasphemy laws but in some places they exist and are enforced. What is just common sense varies over time and place.

However, while these various things are all true of what has been taken to be common sense at some times and places none of them are relevant to upsetting of Moore’s or to ordinary language philosophers’ work. Moore’s list of beliefs that he gives in his *A Defense of Common Sense* would be assented to if they were put to them by what Moore called ‘plain people’ when they saw what they were meant to affirm or deny by Moore when he was confronted with such strange and paradoxical metaphysical or epistemological views, views very different from anything plain people believed in or even thought about. Views Moore lists as common sense beliefs are views that they would consider crazy when confronted with them. They would in this context take these ‘common sense truisms’ that Moore used to contest these metaphysical or epistemological views as very odd

indeed. Still, what Moore calls these common sense views are something that are obviously true and are plainly incompatible with one or another of these metaphysical or epistemological views. This being so, these esoteric metaphysical views could not be true if these common sense views were true. And these common sense views certainly are true. That being so, those metaphysical views cannot be true. Indeed, we all would in our ordinary practical affairs simply and rightly assume them (Murphy 1952). There is no room for doubt here. Even philosophers who in their metaphysical moments claimed belief in such metaphysical views, who indeed then claimed reason required them, would still assent to these truisms when they were not in what Hume called their “philosopher’s closet”. They would show this in their behavior and what they would assent to. Moreover, they did not have the slightest doubt about the certainty of these truisms which contradicted these metaphysical and epistemological views. When they entertained such doubts, they were in a dream world.

I want now to show how Moore and in this respect Mooreans such as Ambrose, Murphy, Malcolm and Bousma make a sound case for that, though sometimes with some minor modifications of Moore’s views, but essentially in what Moore regarded as a common sense denial of esoteric metaphysics (if that isn’t pleonastic) with the English neo-Hegelians being paradigms of people with such absurd views. Moore and what I have called the Mooreans undermined these strange metaphysical views and successfully defended, as I have just characterized it, a common sense non-metaphysical view of the world. I shall utilize Moore’s articulation of it (Moore 1952, 667-777; 1953, 1-27; 1959, 32-39 and 127-50).

Moore begins with a list of truisms which he takes to be certainly true and as being wholly true. Moore is well aware that the propositions on his list are truisms that normally are not worth asserting. However, on certain *philosophical* occasions they are. They are propositions, Moore, as we have seen, asserts, that he knows with certainty to be true and wholly true. Moreover, he claims, these are propositions that people who can even rudimentarily think know with certainty to

be wholly true (Moore 1959, 34-35). These commonplaces—as will be seen to be such once stated and the point of asserting them grasped—are incompatible with the crucial statements that these esoteric metaphysicians make. If Moore's commonplace statements are true (wholly true) then those metaphysical statements (propositions) which contradict them are false and known with certainty to be false. Such metaphysical claims plainly are in contradiction with common knowledge as construed by Moore—bits of common sense that we know with certainty to be true. But since these contradicting truisms are certainly true and wholly true, these metaphysical propositions are false.

I shall now state some of Moore's list of common sense propositions—a list of propositions he claims to know with certainty to be true. Here is his list in part:

There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for some time afterwards, than it is now. Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things, having shape and size in three dimensions (in the same familiar sense in which it has), from which it has been *at various distances* (in the familiar sense in which it is now at a distance both from that mantelpiece and from that bookcase, and at a greater distance from the bookcase than it is from the mantelpiece); also there have (very often, at all events) existed some other things of this kind with which it was *in contact* (in the familiar sense in which it is now in contact with the pen I am holding in my right hand and with some of the clothes I am wearing). Among the things which have, in this sense, formed part of its environment (i.e. have been either in contact with it, or at *some* distance from it, however *great*) there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies, each of which has, like it, (*a*) at some time been born, (*b*) continued to exist from some time after birth, (*c*) been, at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist. But the earth had existed also for many years before my body was born; and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had, at every moment, been alive upon it; and many of these bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born. Finally (to come to a different class of propositions), I am a human being, and I have, at different times since my body was born,

had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds: e.g. I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment, including other human bodies; I have not only perceived things of this kind, but have also observed facts about them, such as, for instance, the fact which I am now observing, that that mantelpiece is at present nearer to my body than that bookcase; I have been aware of other facts, which I was not at the time observing, such as, for instance, the fact, of which I am now aware, that my body existed yesterday and was then also for some time nearer to that mantelpiece than to that bookcase; I have had expectations with regard to the future, and many beliefs of other kinds, both true and false; I have thought of imaginary things and persons and incidents, in the reality of which I did not believe; I have had dreams; and I have had feelings of many different kinds. And, just as my body has been the body of a human beings, namely myself, who has, during his lifetime, had many experiences of each of these (and other) different kinds; so, in the case of very many of the other human bodies which have lived upon the earth, each has been the body of a different human being, who has, during the lifetime of that body, had many different experiences of each of these (and other) different kinds (Moore 1959, 33-34).

### III

Has Moore made his case? Has he so swiftly and decisively with such truisms refuted such a pervasive and longstanding philosophical tradition, both metaphysical and epistemological? Like Norman Malcolm and Arthur Murphy, I think he has. But many others have thought that he has begged the question. However, can we justifiably take such a swift way with dissenters? Can we so easily and directly overthrow a ubiquitous philosophical tradition? Does this conviction of Malcolm, Murphy and myself finally just rest on animal faith? I shall argue that it does not. But even if it does, we should remember George Santayana's claim that animal faith in certain circumstances is not so bad. When push comes to shove, it *may* have to suffice for a philosopher who would be unrelentingly tough-minded (Ryle 1971, 153-69).

However, let us turn to the kinds of dissent from Moore that have been made and thought by some to be compelling. Moore, it is frequently thought, begged the question in asserting that he knows for certain his 'common sense' propositions on his list directed at his also listed paradoxical

metaphysical and epistemological propositions. Moore does not have that unassailable force for his defense of common sense that Moore claims for them. Consider ‘The earth has existed for many years past’ or ‘The external world exists’. Suppose a philosopher says of them that if you mean so-and-so by ‘earth’ and so-and-so by ‘exists’ and so-and-so by ‘external’ then yes, but if instead you mean so-and-so by these words, then no. What we philosophers, the claim goes, mean to be saying is typically a very difficult matter leading to very difficult questions and, the skeptical philosopher tells us, that this being so I cannot, if I would be open minded, make up my mind what to say or believe—or at least not as decisively so as Moore believes. Moore says of a philosopher taking that view that his view “is as profoundly mistaken as any view can be” (Moore 1959, 37). ‘The earth has existed for many years past’ and that Moore has a body are unambiguous propositions the meaning of which we all understand. There is no ground for making such an iffy dance about them. Anyone who takes—tries to take—a contrary view must, Moore has it, be confusing the questions about whether we understand their meaning, which we certainly do, and recognize their truth as well as we also certainly do, with the entirely different question of whether in knowing what these sentences mean we, in knowing we know that, are able to *give a correct analysis* of their meaning (Moore 1959, 37). Knowing the *meaning* or *use* of a word or phrase is one thing; knowing the *analysis* of a word or phrase is another. Knowing the *meaning* of a sentence is one thing; and knowing its *analysis* is another. We can know the meaning (use) of, for example, of the word ‘two’ while remaining at sea about its analysis. We may, to put it more simply, understand or know something without being able to say how we know we know it. I know now that I am writing this, but I still may not be able to say how I know it. Moore goes on to say,

It is obvious that we cannot even raise the question how what we do understand by a word or sentence is to be analyzed unless we do understand the word or sentence. So soon, therefore, as we know how a person who uses an expression is using it in its ordinary sense we understand his meaning (Moore 1959, 37).

We realize that about the two sentences mentioned above and about the word 'two'. We know quite routinely and unproblematically their meaning and that is a necessary condition for their being analyzable. Is it not *parti pris* to say that we do not really understand the meaning of something until we know how to say how we know it or to give an analysis of it?

Moore did not want just to know the meaning of 'The earth has existed for many years past' and 'The external world exists'; he wanted to know as well something distinct concerning those sentences, namely their truth and indeed their certain truth. He claimed he did know them to be true and indeed certainly true and wholly true. But knowing their meaning or even their correct analysis would not yield us that. And we could know their truth and even be certain of that without their analysis. Even if they were *a priori* propositions, which they are not, we would have to know that the use of their terms which is an empirical matter (something we would have to learn empirically) before we could know these propositions (sentences, if you will) were *a priori*. We would have to know, that is, the meaning of 'young dog' and 'puppy' before we could know that 'Puppies are young dogs' was *a priori*.

Given the above, it is unclear what work *analysis* can do here or even whether we should concern ourselves with analysis. We would have to know the sort of things I mentioned above for analysis even to begin. We would have to know how we establish 'Puppies are young dogs' is true and that it is differently established than 'Rattlesnakes are poisonous' and how we establish the truth of 'The earth has existed for many years past rather than just five minutes ago complete with fossils'. It is established to be true in ways more like 'Rattlesnakes are poisonous' than like 'Puppies are young dogs', but still not entirely differently than the latter. We need, before we can engage in analysis, to know how to use ordinary language. We need, that is, normally to understand and speak (if we can speak) or read (if we can read and if our language has been written) our ordinary language or some natural language. We need, in short, to have some natural language. And it is important to remember that *knowing how* and *knowing that* are different. We need to know



something empirical about snakes and something empirical about rattle snakes and something vague about the age of the world, e.g. that it has existed for many years past. Where does analysis come in over these matters? I am skeptical that it comes in anywhere. It seems to me superogatory. We know, and know it certainly, that the earth did not come into being five minutes ago with its fossils and the like. But how do we know it? Can this be a real question? Do we need *analysis* here?

So what is the point or rationale of analysis or, indeed, something conceptually more primitive than that? Exactly what is analysis? What kind of clarification, if any, does analysis yield? Does it help in establishing the truth of what we have mentioned in the previous paragraph? *Perhaps* it helps a little in establishing the ways to determine the truth or falsity of sentences like those mentioned above. It may help us establish whether sentences (or at least some) are *a priori* or empirical or something entirely different.

I will now make a brief digression. It is an advertisement for what will come in my final chapter. It is about my skepticism concerning the wonder working of analysis for philosophy. (Remember some analytic philosophers have said that philosophy is analysis.) I am as skeptical of 'philosophy as analysis' as I am of 'analysis is not enough' or 'analysis is enough' or 'what is it to get enough analysis?'. And when, if ever, do we have complete clarity? Or is not that the aim of analysis? If it is not, what is its aim? Do we have much, if any, idea of how to answer these questions? And can we plausibly say the aim, or even *an* aim, of philosophy is analysis? Do we have any idea of what counts as 'complete clarity'? More humbly, what counts as clarification, particularly when we are trying to do philosophy? Most fundamentally my skepticism is about whether analysis will do much, if any, work and, if so, what sort and what is it to even ask that.

There is a skepticism engendered, in part, by what I have said about Moore and analysis. If we can engage in analysis of a term or phrase only if we already know its meaning or know, that is, its use. We can then, and only then, according to Moore, engage in analysis. But how then does

analysis help us to gain more clarity and if it does, what kind of clarity? And is it an understanding, if indeed it is any understanding at all, that will enable us to better understand what is going on in the world or even in our talk of the world or of our talk about the talk of the world? Or am I raising pseudo-problems here? I don't want to say no clarification can be made; that would be absurd and undermine my own activity. Yet what is, if anything, *philosophical* clarification? And in philosophy is clarification enough? I remain skeptical about all these matters. What more, if anything, can analysis come to than just having an understanding of a word's or phrase's use? But the plain person, if he has a natural language, has that. Why philosophy? Does philosophy just come to an understanding of our talk about the talk of the world? Isn't it enough to have a good understanding of our own world which we can probably only grasp by knowing our talk of the world? Without some rudiments of that, we remain blindfolded. This is a necessary condition but it is not sufficient. So what more? And does it have anything to do with philosophy? And, if so, what?

I do not say that philosophical analysis does not do any work. I just question if it has much significance. If some philosopher says, 'The totality is what is necessary to make sense of things', 'Being not beings is what is essential to the world' or 'Not just a linguistic turn is needed but a transcendental turn as well to make sense of things', some debunking analysis is required or we are in the swamp. On the surface, at least, all these above *mentioned* sentences are nonsensical. They are, though in a somewhat more disguised form, as bad as 'For enlightenment we need to see the unseeable'. Before we are out of the swamp we must give some clarification and say clearly what we mean, if we mean anything, when such things are said. Why not call this analysis? If it is said instead that these remarks are *sui generis* and cannot be analyzed but must be taken just as they are, it looks like we are being obscurantist and evasive. But a lot more needs to be said about this, including an analysis of 'analysis'. Does this come to a pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps? I will return to these matters in the final chapter.

Like Ambrose, Malcolm and Murphy, I think there is something of crucial importance in Moore's defense of common sense and in the defense of ordinary language (Moore 1959, 32-59; Ambrose 1970, 86-88; Malcolm 1952, 343-68; 1970, 39-55; Murphy 1952, 299-318). I think as they do, that it is an important turning point, indeed an advance, in how many philosophers do philosophy and of how they conceive of their doing it. Malcolm, notwithstanding the above, thinks that Moore importantly misconceived what he was doing in his so-called defense of common sense. Yet paradoxically Malcolm thinks that Moore's defense of common sense (what he misleadingly called common sense) was the most important thing he did and will make his mark in the history of philosophy (Malcolm 1980, 38).

Malcolm seeks to show what Moore really achieved as distinct from what Moore *thought* he was achieving. Moore, according to Malcolm, was defending, without being clear about it, ordinary language as correct language, not common sense. I want to distinguish these conceptions. I think Malcolm's reading is an attractive conception and puts Moore more firmly in the ordinary language tradition of doing philosophy and more nearly in a Wittgensteinian way of doing philosophy, a way that both Malcolm and Ambrose follow and something I would call a broadly Moorean-Wittgensteinian conception of what philosophy should be. It could, I think not improperly, be called a meta-philosophy as Ambrose does call it, though it is radically different from Moore's conception of his own activity. Often, though not always, Moore's practice, but certainly not his tone, is Wittgensteinian. I shall first distinguish these two meta-philosophical conceptions and then argue that, though distinct, they can and should also live in peaceful coexistence, both doing important work. (Here I am more like Murphy and less like Ambrose or Malcolm.)

When Moore argued famously that when metaphysical philosophers argued there are no material objects that we never know any substantial thing for sure, that time is unreal, that we can only be aware of appearances and never of reality, they were making *seemingly* empirical claims, though grand ones, that were absurdly false but not unintelligible or nonsensical and that one can

refute them and decisively so by attending to one's ordinary knowledge, to attending to concrete *paradigms* of substantive things that we know with certainty to be true. This is Moore's conception and is how Murphy, in his under celebrated article, characterizes Moore's defense of common sense (Murphy 1952, 343-68). With his paradigm examples, e.g. 'Here is a hand' or 'I took a walk after lunch', Moore, translating into the concrete, relies (*pace* Malcolm) on empirical facts to establish his case though here he also gives them a conceptual twist, e.g. 'If there is a hand then there is a material world'. But appealing to empirical facts, other than linguistic empirical facts, is a no-no for Malcolm, Ambrose and ordinary language philosophers generally, but not for Moore or Murphy. Though isn't such an appeal in Moore's context plainly justifiable? And Moore and Murphy were as adamant as Wittgenstein and Ryle were that philosophical questions are not empirical questions and do not rest on empirical foundations. Ambrose and Malcolm will say Moore should be treated more hypothetically. It doesn't matter, they said, whether there really is a hand in Moore's proof of the external world but only that 'If there is a hand then there is a material world' is a logical or conceptual truth. But is it? Well, yes, if it is a logical claim of what Ryle calls 'the informal logic of the employment of expressions'. And it seems, at least, to be (Ryle 1971, 318).

On Malcolm's understanding these English-Hegelian metaphysicians were not at all saying absurdly false empirical things (as Moore and Murphy appear to believe) but that we cannot (logically cannot) know such things as time is real, material objects exist, and that we cannot (logically cannot) know that we cannot know anything of a substantive sort with certainty. Malcolm has it that (*pace* Moore's intentions) ordinary language philosophers were not resting their claims on matters of empirical fact but were saying that we cannot know or even understand what the esoteric metaphysician is saying. We can't do that because what they say is nonsense. Moore is telling us, by contrast, that since we do know these common empirical truisms for sure, that it cannot be the case that statements that are incompatible with the, as these metaphysical statements are, could be true. But these paradoxical metaphysicians claim to know these things.

But what they claim is not nonsense but plainly absurdly false. But has Moore shown this? Are Moore and the English neo-Hegelians instead just trading counter-assertions? Have neither proved nor established anything?

To make out the case that we cannot know these paradoxical things, statements like 'Space is unreal', 'Time is unreal', and 'Things cannot exist unperceived' cannot be true, we need, Ambrose and Malcolm claim, to show that to claim them involves a self-contradiction. Moore is not denying, on Malcolm's understanding, that sometimes an empirical possibility is in reality known to be an empirical actuality and that we have conclusive evidence for that. Rather, on Malcolm's reading, the paradoxical philosopher, the Moorean, should be taken to be claiming, is actually making a logically self-contradictory claim on the order of 'The unhearable was heard'. It can, instead, be shown by the method of translation into the concrete that the paradoxical philosopher is violating ordinary language by showing that he was making noises or making a mark or a series of marks that are unintelligible like 'Green smiles loudly' though, of course, not in such an undisguised way. Or turning it around: faced with the claim that time is unreal, the Moorean philosopher says, 'After lunch I had a walk and therefore time is real'. It does matter whether he really walked after he had lunch but that that such a truism as 'After lunch I had a walk' could possibly (empirically so) be true and often is and thus it cannot be contradictory to assert time is unreal. Here the appeal is to linguistic use, the appeal is to ordinary language.

#### IV

Has Moore actually shown that 'There are no material objects', 'Time is unreal', 'No unperceived objects exist', or 'No unperceived objects can exist' are all incoherent because self-contradictory or indeed incoherent in any other way or, for something quite different, manifestly absurd or just absurd? Has he shown that these sentences, when we try to assert them can, or just do, answer to nothing? But wouldn't that mean that 'There are material objects', 'Time is real',

'There are unperceived objects' are *logical* truths, at least in what Ryle calls informal logic, and their denials self-contradictory (Ryle 1971, 318)? But clearly they are not formal logical truths; they are also not *a priori*. So they are not logical truths of even informal logic. So hasn't something gone wrong with the Ambrosian and Malcolman reading of Moore's argument and that there is something wrong with their reading of his defense of common sense as a defense of ordinary language and not of common sense?

Suppose instead that we abandon the claim that Moore in his defense of common sense can show or needs to show that the metaphysical philosophers' paradoxical claims are either nonsense or self-contradictory and that Malcolm's once famous "Moore and Ordinary Language" is in some ways off the mark. Moore lists some metaphysical statements made by many philosophers, including distinguished ones, which Moore believes are at least false and indeed plainly so. Let us now say controversially empirically false. Still, they are now, we should take it, true or false, allegedly in some way *necessary* empirical statements, taken to be similar in logical status to 'Human beings are mortal' or perhaps to 'Space has objects'. Malcolm, following Moore, in "Moore and Ordinary Language", lists twelve philosophical statements which, as we now read Moore, are to be taken to be empirically necessary but not as being *a priori* truths, self-contradictory or in any other way contradictory (Malcolm 1952). I shall only list four but that reduction is made arbitrarily, for convenience without distortion, to shorten matters.

- (1) There are no material things.
- (2) Time is unreal.
- (3) No material thing exists unperceived.
- (4) We do not know for *certain* the truth of any statement about material things.

Moore has a common method, or so he claims, of refuting such philosophical (metaphysical) statements. It, as we have seen, has been called *translation into the concrete*.

If (1) is asserted Moore would reply, 'You are certainly wrong, for here's one hand and here's another and so there are at least two material things.'

If (2) is asserted, Moore would reply, 'You are certainly wrong; for *after* lunch I went for a walk, and then I took a bath and after that I had tea.'

If (3) is asserted, Moore would reply, 'What you say is absurd for no one perceived my bedroom while I was asleep last night and yet it certainly did not cease to exist then.'

If (4) is asserted, Moore would reply, 'Both of us know for certain that there are several chairs in this room, and how absurd it would be to suggest that we do not know it, but only believe it, and that perhaps it is not the case.'

Many philosophers believe that Moore's answers here beg the question with such metaphysical thinkers. There seems to be in what Moore does nothing like a proof or even a sound argument against them. We seem at least only to get counter-assertions. There seems to be nothing here to convince the metaphysical or even skeptical philosophers that these esoteric metaphysical claims are mistaken. There is, it is often claimed, no attempt made by Moore to show that philosophers, in making such metaphysical claims, have said something that is self-contradictory or otherwise *conceptually* impossible or even just plainly or unplainly false. Moore, some will think, has not refuted such metaphysical claims by reminding us of how language is being used: how our language-games are played or that they have violated correct language. (Think here of Waismann, 1968.)

Moore has in his attempted response to such claims of metaphysical philosophers or the skeptical philosophers (for exemplary examples, Bradley or Hume). Suppose they were just given a collection of empirical truisms without showing they can do the refuting Moore claims for them. How can these things legitimately convince the metaphysician or a skeptical philosopher like Hume that such philosophical claims as those on Moore's list (for us, just 1-4) are to be rejected? (Hume, of course, rejects metaphysical claims but on quite different grounds that does Moore.)

Moore's translation into the concrete gives us plain empirical truisms which cannot be rationally and reasonably denied. But it is not *logically* impossible to deny them. Still there is plainly strong evidence for the falsity of those paradoxical metaphysical claims. 'If there is a hand then there is at least one material thing. There is a hand. Thus there is at least one material thing.' The hypothetical sentence is a logical truth (what Ryle called an informal logical truth) or something that is logically necessary (Ryle 1971, 318). But that this is not enough to show that there are material objects is something that cannot be logically denied. For the second premise, is not a logical truth but an empirical truth that Moore thinks he has established by holding up his hand and saying 'Here is a hand'? The truth of this premise is not known by just thinking, by pure reflection. It is not a logical truth, even an informal logical truth, thus Moore has not shown and cannot show that it is logically true that there are material objects and that 'There are no material objects' is self-contradictory, informally or formally.

Suppose instead that we take it, as we plausibly might, that Moore, and Murphy following him, are claiming something that is just plainly empirically obvious. We could instead reasonably take Moore not to be trying to establish what is or is not conceptually and in that way logically possible or impossible, but what is empirically necessary, like 'Human beings are mortal.' That indeed is an unconventional *philosophical* stance. Philosophers are almost always after what is logically or somehow otherwise necessary. But that notwithstanding, what Moore and Murphy are doing, in reasoning in this way, is plainly rational and reasonable. Something that is here the best we can get and surely for the reasonable person sufficient. The stronger claims made for Moore may be like going for the color of heat. Some philosophers, unwittingly after the logically impossible, might say that the Moorean argument that I am about to give is not a *philosophical* argument at all. It does not make philosophical claims, but, philosophical or not, it may well be making a sound argument that will answer to philosophical claims and give us good reason to shove them aside. This is a view distinct from the above one (including Ambrose's and Malcolm's



articulation of it) but it is more in accordance with relying all the way along on what can be established empirically. (*If this is empiricism, then so be it.*)

Malcolm says in his earlier article “Moore and Ordinary Language” that these esoteric metaphysical propositions go against ordinary language and that Moore in effect shows this (Malcolm 1952). Does he do so? And if so, how does he do so and how is this, even if true, relevant to Moore’s “A Defense of Commonsense”? How does he establish that these metaphysical claims are false or does he do so? Has he shown they are contradictory? Why does a statement that goes against ordinary language establish that there is anything wrong with it? And does Moore show that they go against ordinary language? And does he show that in their going against (being incompatible with) what he takes, and rightly, to be empirical truisms establishes that these metaphysical claims are false or in any way untoward? I think so. Can this reasonably be resisted? I think not. But again is there here just a trading of counter assertions? I hope not. And I shall try to establish that it doesn’t come to just conflicting assertions.

How is any of this, even if established to be true, relevant to what I have been trying to establish here? To a plain person not caught up in philosophy, and perhaps even for some that are, those philosophical statements—Moore’s list of metaphysical statements to be resisted—are shocking, absurd, paradoxical or at the very least puzzling. When the philosopher and the unphilosophical person disagree they, initial reactions aside and perhaps the plain person’s intellectual convictions aside, seem at least not to be disagreeing about empirical facts but about what *language* shall be used to describe those facts. Ambrose and Malcolm would say they are disagreeing over what notation to adopt (Ambrose 1975; Malcolm 1952). Moore and the English neo-Hegelians seem to be disagreeing only about the correct way of speaking or about how to speak. Both esoteric metaphysician and the skeptical philosophers, when we examine the matter a bit, can be seen, in responding as they do, seem to be unwittingly engaging in a form of improper (logically improper) speech. They are doing something, though unconsciously, which is like saying

'I see something that is totally unseeable'. They are making utterances which are self-contradictory or entail utterances which are self-contradictory. Moore, after all, can plausibly be read—I did not say correctly—as showing those metaphysical assertions, though in a disguised way, are self-contradictory. Moore shows, Malcolm argues, that these claims actually function like overtly self-contradictory claims, e.g. 'I see something invisible' or 'There are round squares'. They only differ from the just mentioned sentences in not being clearly and overtly self-contradictory.

However, in the above listed claims by metaphysicians where has there been anything said which is evidently either self-contradictory or unintelligible? Don't we have here the metaphysician making rather abstract claims and shocking and utterly unrealistic ones as well? They will seem to the non-philosophical person to be crazy claims. The commonsensist seeks to refute them by confronting them with counterclaims that refute the metaphysical claims. For example, to respond to 'Time is unreal' by saying 'I had lunch after my lecture' is something that plainly could be true and unpuzzlingly so. As Malcolm rightly points out, 'I had lunch after my lecture' need not be true but only something that plausibly could be true. Moreover, things like that are often so. So it is at best false—factually false—that time is unreal. The plain person or the commonsensist philosopher shows that the esoteric metaphysician's claim that time is unreal could not be true by eliciting this plain empirical possibility which we know is often empirically true. And if so, then 'Time is unreal' is false and its denial is absurd. But isn't it true that 'Time is unreal' logically *could* be true? But do we have any idea of what it would be like for it to be true? Perhaps by having recognized that statements like 'I had lunch after my lecture' or 'I went to a film last night' are not necessarily false or meaningless, but something that plainly could be true and, that being so, then it could not be necessarily true that time is unreal. Since it is possibly true that I went to a film last night, it could not be necessarily true that time is unreal. And that statements like 'I went to a film last night' are sometimes true and evidently so it could not be true that time is unreal.

Some will, however, say that this is just a blunt counterclaim. The commonsensist refers to empirical truisms which logically speaking could be false but obviously often are not. The following should be said in response. These plain truisms are as true as anything could be or at least are truth-bearers that are true as anything can be. They can, while not being logical truths, be plain empirical truths that in most circumstances we can be certain of. They are far more certain than the metaphysical claims that in effect deny them. It is plain that it is vastly more reasonable to deny that time is unreal than to deny that professors often, or at least sometimes, have lunch after their lectures and that thus time is real. And that being true, the claim that time is unreal is either absurdly false, self-contradictory or nonsense. Take your pick! The commonsensist's proposition (to use Peirce's way of talking) plainly is vastly more rationale and reasonable than the metaphysical claim that time is unreal. And isn't this, Malcolm to the contrary notwithstanding, an issue of empirical fact? The claim that this is an empirical fact is something we can be far more secure about than any claim that time is unreal is a logical or in some other way a conceptual necessity.

We need not and indeed should not get involved in whether the commonsensist's or the metaphysician's claim or neither is about what is correct language or whether we should adopt some different notation from the one we normally use if you want to talk about the unreality of time. Perhaps they are both using correct language. Or *perhaps* à la Waismann we should be wary of talk of 'correct language' (Waismann 1968)? We can recognize, however, that the translations into the concrete that Moore engages in make it reasonable to believe that the metaphysician's claims are plainly and absurdly at best false.

V

However, so read, isn't Moore's claim that the metaphysician's claims, e.g. 'There are no material objects', 'Space is unreal', 'No material thing exists unperceived', are bluntly and obviously

false rather than, as ordinary language philosophers have it, self-contradictory, nonsensical or unintelligible? Has Moore actually shown that it is logically impossible that these metaphysical propositions could be true or could even be false? They are not like 'Invisible things are seen or could be seen' self-contradictory, or at least, if the metaphysician's claims are true, we do not know this and at least seemingly cannot know this. 'If there are hands then there are material things. There are hands, therefore there are material things.' The first premise is *a priori* true, but the second ('There are hands') is not. It is, rather, an empirical truism. So we have a premise in that argument that is not *a priori* true and neither 'There are no hands' nor 'There cannot be hands' is self-contradictory. Thus we do not have any argument for Moore's claim which is *logically* conclusive for the second premise, though obviously true, could be denied without contradiction. Moreover, 'There are hands', though not frequently uttered, is correct language. It is not like 'Sounds are unhearable' or 'Hands are transcendent' unintelligible. So Moore's argument is not *logically* airtight. We can, of course, rightly say that to deny that there are hands is palpably absurd, but still not *logically* absurd though it is empirically so. We can nonetheless conceive of a *possible* world where this is so. 'No one has hands' is not *a priori* and it, however oddly, could be said (just as it has) in English, though in most cases it would be an absurd thing to say. But still it is not unintelligible to say it. It is correct English. Moreover, no other premise is available to show that Moore's argument that these are material objects is *logically* conclusive or that its denial is logical impossible. *Perhaps* we have not even shown that a world without objects is conceptually impossible. To do that we would have to show that 'Space without objects' is like 'The heard is unhearable'; it is improper English that violates what Ryle calls the informal logic of English (Ryle 1971, 318). Perhaps it doesn't—though it is surely strange—but that, though making it somewhat problematic (to put it mildly), doesn't make 'Space has no objects' either an *a priori* truth or self-contradictory. It is, rather, absurdly false. We have not shown that 'There are no objects' is *logically* impossible nor that 'There are no objects' is *a priori*, though it is surely true as anything

can be that it is in fact impossible. The same is true for the other metaphysical propositions listed and attacked by Moore.

Moore gives arguments against them but it has been widely felt that these arguments are not *logically* conclusive and indeed that they are question-begging. But *au contraire* to ask for anything more in the way of establishment is to ask for the color of heat.

Malcolm wants to show in his last work on this topic that Moore's translations into the concrete do not yield paradigms of common sense knowledge that refute Moore's metaphysical opponents, prominently the English neo-Hegelians (Malcolm 1970, 49). Malcolm now has it that Moore's arguments should be taken to show that the very idea of there being material objects or of there not being material objects has no use in our language so that to assert it or deny it is nonsensical. The idea that there are material objects is not, Malcolm claims, an empirical claim. Rather, the very idea of there being no material objects, Malcolm has it, is a logical impossibility. This is shown, Malcolm claims, by showing 'There are no material objects' has no use in our language. But is this so? Malcolm claims that attending to our ordinary language shows us that by showing that 'There are no material objects' is not an *empirical* impossibility but a *logical* impossibility and thus 'There are no material objects' has no use in our language. But then its negation, 'There are material objects', has no use in our language either.

However, this cannot be correct. There certainly are rocks aplenty and rocks are empirical objects. That is a plain empirical truth—a plain empirical fact—that we know with certainty to be true. 'If there are rocks then there are material objects.' 'There are rocks' is not without a use in our ordinary language, though we would normally not go around saying it. That we have little need or occasion to do so is plainly obvious. 'There are rocks and thus there are material objects' while being so is not useful. Indeed it is useless. But it is still logically proper English. We understand it if it is uttered. It is not like 'Green ideas crack tonelessly'. That is not logically proper English and thus is not intelligible. 'Things without extension are extended' has no use because it is self-

contradictory. Has Moore, and Malcolm interpreting him, established that in either way 'There are material things' or 'There are no material things' have logically come to grief? Has he shown that they are logically unintelligible and in this way nonsense?

Moore, Ambrose, Malcolm and Ryle claim that ordinary language (any natural language) is correct language. If a sentence has not a logically proper part of any ordinary language (any natural language) or any language or system of notation dependent on any ordinary language, we cannot claim that the resultant noises or assemblances of words *yield* logical possibilities or even make sense. The sentence is a pseudo-sentence. That is, it is not a part of a language or anything that could replace language as a means of communication. The four allegedly metaphysical propositions I listed peccating from Moore are not, *at least on their face*, so self-contradictory. But 'A rock is just my idea of it' or 'The world is just my idea' are not logically proper English. They violate its informal logic (Ryle 1971, 318).<sup>6</sup> 'A rock is just my idea of it' or 'The world is just my idea' or 'Mountains are fictions' are not understood by us, or at least not with anything even remotely approaching intelligibility, while 'Material objects exist' and 'Time is real' perhaps are understood though they are truistic. But they are not something we need to or should go around asserting. However, that is a different matter.

The first three sentences I mentioned in the last paragraph are arguably pseudo-sentences like 'Rocks talk explicitly' or 'Marbles drink affably'. They use English words but they are not proper English sentences and are not intelligible unless made so by some radical stipulation. They are not part of any language-game or part of some linguistic practice. But 'There are material things' or 'Time is real' are. We can infer from them sentences like 'There maybe is a chair in the room' or 'Perhaps she took a walk after lunch'.

Moore should have concluded that these metaphysical propositions (Moore's list from which my four were taken) were nonsensical and not that they were obviously false for if a proposition is false (obviously or not) it could be true. That logical possibility cannot be ruled out.

Moreover, to successfully make the claim that it is logically true it would have to be shown that 'There are hands' and 'They had breakfast before lunch' are self-contradictions. But both are manifestly not. We would have to show that it is *contradictory* to deny that there are no material objects not just that it is absurd to believe there are none—so absurd that we have very little in the way of having an idea of what it would be like for it to be so. But that we have no idea of it doesn't mean that it could not be so or that we could come to have an idea of it. We would only know that it would be logically impossible to have such an idea if we could have no idea of what it would be like as we have no idea of what it would be like to have a round square. It must be something such that it would be contradictory to deny 'There are no material objects' or 'All temporal distinctions are illusory' are not contradictions. But have we established this? Instead, haven't (as Alice Ambrose argued) the metaphysicians Moore argued against seeking, though unwittingly, a change in notation (Ambrose 1975)? We have not shown 'There are no material objects' is self-contradictory but only that it is a pointless and absurd thing to say and that there is absolutely no point in challenging our notation, i.e., English, with its informal logical rules or linguistic practices. *All* natural languages so stand. To deny they are correct languages (*pace* Waismann) is without sense.

Something *seems* at least to be problematic here. It looks like we are still in a muddle. It seems at least that we should continue to ask ourselves whether it is true that 'There are no material objects' violates the informal logical rules of English (its linguistic regularities) as does 'Unhearable sounds rang out loudly'. Yet it is not clear that this has not been shown.

## VI

I come back to a reading of Moore on a defense of common sense which takes those esoteric metaphysical propositions as saying something that are absurdly false but not establishable as self-contradictory or even as violations of our ordinary use of language. Their own negations are not logical truths or any other kind of *a priori* statement and their assertions are not something rooted

in a violation of ordinary use. They are infrequently used. Only some philosophers use them. But they are not violations of the informal logic of our natural languages like 'Our ideas are orange'. Moore has not shown the metaphysical assertions he criticizes to be contradictions and his non-hypothetical counter assertions have not been shown to be logical truths either formal or informal. We have with Moore's claims no instantiation of such a rationalism; no such substantive *a priori* truths or rules or principles of reason.

Waismann notes, as does Ryle as well, that there are no theorems that have been proved in philosophy; there are also no axioms that can serve as substantive principles or rules of reason that just must be accepted on pain of self-contradiction or a flight into unintelligibility (Waismann 1968; Ryle 1971, 319-25). However, what Moore's defense of common sense should stick with saying, without taking sides about whether or not ordinary language is correct language or something that must finally be relied on, is that there are some common beliefs nearly universally held at least during an extensively given time and place that are more reliable to believe than any philosophical statement or any other statement that would deny them. Take as examples the four philosophical propositions taken from Moore's list as propositions that he has refuted or at least he claimed to have refuted. Moore, let us now assume we have established, has not succeeded in showing that these four propositions are self-contradictory or that they are not intelligible or so deviant that we cannot understand them or anything of that sort. But if we just consider his commonsensical arguments against these metaphysical propositions, it is far more rational and reasonable to accept these arguments against them than to accept these paradoxical metaphysical statements. It is far more reasonable to believe that New York is east of San Francisco and Honolulu is west of San Francisco or that my desk is to the right of my window than to believe that space is unreal or merely subjective. There are all kinds of paradoxical metaphysical propositions that can be refuted in this way and more decisively than any defense of such paradoxical metaphysical statements that can be given.



*If* to do Philosophy is to commit yourself to a defense of such metaphysical beliefs even in the face of such certainly true common sense beliefs which are incompatible with them, then it is a good thing to say farewell to philosophy construed as such a speculated Philosophy (Rorty 1982, xiv-xvii). It seems to me that so understood Moore has made out his case and that it is a vital achievement against a world of metaphysical paradoxes or obscurantism.

Let me, in concluding, put my argument and way of reading Moore's defense of common sense briskly and *perhaps* crudely. If there are rocks, then there is a material world. There are rocks, therefore there is a material world. This argument is as sound as any argument can be. And such arguments are beyond dispute. Similar arguments can be articulated for the other metaphysical claims Moore lists. Philosophers are wont to say that the second premise in the above argument, though true, is not philosophically satisfactory because it is not *a priori* and philosophy cannot rest on any empirical results. *If* so, it is so much the worse for philosophy. For the above argument is as sound as any argument can be and such an argument does not leave room for doubt.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See my “Anti-philosophy Philosophy: Some Programmatic Remarks.” *Dialogos* 64 (1994): 149-58. See also Rorty’s crucial distinction between philosophy and Philosophy in his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. xiv-xvii.

<sup>2</sup> See Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, David Armstrong, Robert Brandon, Peter van Inwagen, and Barry Stroud.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Brandon *may* be an exception. Rorty has claimed without an explanation that Brandon does not have a metaphysical bone in his body. That runs against at least a superficial reading of Brandon. I shall discuss Brandon in Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Their style is very different. Moore organizes his books and articles in a standard way and seeks to solve philosophical questions utilizing analysis in a standard way. Wittgenstein’s style and manner of argument is unique to him. He goes at things very unconventionally and while Moore wishes to *solve* philosophical questions, Wittgenstein wishes to *dissolve* them using his insistent therapeutic technique. He is deeply skeptical about philosophy in a way that Moore is not. They both are informalists and rely very heavily on ordinary language. But they do that for different purposes. To get a sense of the contrast compare Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* with Moore’s *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*. Yet Ambrose and Malcolm, who studied with them both, can without distortion find ways of blending their work to common purposes.

<sup>5</sup> See G. E. Moore 1953 and 1959.

<sup>6</sup> I have found it rather problematic to speak of the informal logic of a natural language. ‘Formal logic’ seems to be a pleonasm. Aristotle used Greek but it seems to me in doing logic he was doing something that was particular language independent. It was just accidental that he wrote his logic in Greek. And he was not concerned with the informal logic of Greek as Ryle was not just concerned with the informal language of English. But it is just an historical accident that he wrote in English as it was just an historical accident that Aristotle wrote in Greek. Ryle could have made the same point he was making when he spoke of the informal language of English if he had written instead in German, Swedish, French or Spanish or any other natural language. What he was talking about here could perhaps have been better put as the rule or norms that are common to certain practices in all natural languages. The same obtains for Aristotle. But speaking as Ryle does need not mislead or be untoward.

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# Meta-philosophy, Once Again

## Chapter 4

### Ordinary Philosophy I: Gilbert Ryle

#### I

In the previous chapter, I was principally concerned with G. E. Moore's defense of common sense and not only his own defense of it but also with what Alice Ambrose, Norman Malcolm and Arthur Murphy have said about it. With Ambrose and Malcolm, both Wittgensteinian *and* Moorean inspired philosophers, we have, integrally related with Moore's defense of common sense, an elucidation and defense ordinary language philosophy. We have in these endeavors an attempt to describe and elucidate what they very act of philosophizing can intelligibly be. This direct meta-philosophizing is something Moore never did. He, with his penchant for clarity, just intensely practiced philosophy.

Like Moore himself, and to a degree at least like Murphy, I think Moore's defense can be construed and defended independently of a Wittgensteinian-inspired (but unacknowledged) philosophizing about philosophy and Wittgenstein's iconoclastic therapeutic attacks, after a

penetrating elucidation of our use of language rooted in some particular puzzlement about what we say, a therapy-ing away of philosophy's grip on us, followed in ways it is doubtful that he would acknowledge what came to ordinary language philosophy. I argued something of that in the last part of Chapter 3.

I want here and in the following chapter to examine two of the Oxford Philosophers central to what has come to be called ordinary language philosophy: Gilbert Ryle and John Austin. I intend to do this with particular attention to my master theme of meta-philosophy. I am not searching for philosophy's *essence*. There is no such thing. I want, rather, to grasp and depict why philosophy and philosophers in early contemporary times became so obsessed with ordinary language philosophy. I could have turned to Peter Strawson or Paul Grice, but making a judgment call, I shall limit my concern to Ryle and Austin who are (or so I think) more relevant to thinking about meta-philosophy and what I take to be their relative importance.

I shall not consider Ryle's most famous book, *The Concept of Mind*, because it is less concerned with my own interests and, while it was a path breaker on its topic, it has been surpassed on this topic by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and in other ways by the work of Daniel Dennett, Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, among others. I shall concentrate instead on Ryle's papers 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 and his introduction and papers 13, 14, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31 and

32 of Volume II of his *Collected Papers*, with the most heavy emphasis put on “Ordinary Language” (23), “Theory of Meaning” (27), “Use, Usage and Meaning” (31) in Volume II and on pages 246-48 in Volume I of his *Collected Papers*.

So far in this book I have not, in thinking about what philosophy can and should come to—that is, in thinking about the putative important of philosophy—said anything about the history of how philosophy has been conceived. I have just leaped into the fray of where we are now and tried to determine what we can make of it, including what we can make of its putative import. Ryle, in the last half of his “The Theory of Meaning”, does a bit of this history before leaping into the fray himself (Ryle 1971b, 366-72). I will recount what he says before fraying into his own, as he puts it, “theory of philosophy” or, as I would prefer to call it, his meta-philosophical fray.

Ryle begins by saying, “Until fairly recently, philosophers have not often stepped back from their easels to consider what philosophy is, or how doing philosophy differs from doing science, or doing theology, or doing mathematics” (Ryle 1971b, 366). He has it that the general mass of philosophers only started to worry about what philosophy is rather recently, namely about sixty years ago (Ryle 1971b, 366). Only with the publication and subsequent extensive study of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* did it become for a while obsessive for many philosophers. Ryle pertinently asks why professors of “philosophy start so late and how and why did it come

to start when and as it did?" (Ryle 1971b, 366). Ryle seeks to answer this and ascertain something of the philosophical or, if you will, of the conceptual and intellectual importance of it.

He starts from an examination of the history of the use of the words 'philosophy' and 'philosopher' and their equivalents in European languages. For a long time, Ryle remarks, these words had "much less specific meanings than they now possess. During the seventeenth, the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries a 'philosopher' was almost any sorts of a *savant*" (Ryle 1971b, 366). Ryle goes on to say:

Astronomers, chemists and botanists were called 'philosophers' just as much as were Locke, Berkeley or Hume. Descartes's philosophy covered his contribution to optics just as much as his contributions to epistemology. In English there existed for a long time no special word for the people we now call 'scientists'. This noun was deliberately coined only in 1840, and even then it took some time to catch on. His contemporaries could not call Newton a 'scientist', since there was no such word. When a distinction had to be made, it was made by distinguishing 'natural philosophy' from 'moral' and 'metaphysical philosophy'. As late as 1887, Conan Doyle, within two or three pages of one story, describes Sherlock Holmes as being totally ignorant of philosophy, as we use the

word now, and yet as having his room full of philosophical, i.e. scientific, instruments, like test-tubes, retorts and balances. A not very ancient Oxford Chair of Physics still retains its old label, the Chair of Experimental Philosophy (Ryle 1971b, 366).

Up until Bradley's and Sidgwick's time, there existed the habit of assuming in a *somewhat* more technical sense of 'philosophy', a distinction between 'natural philosophy', i.e. physical and biological science, and metaphysical and moral philosophy, perhaps include logic. It was that the latter were concerned with internal, mental phenomena that most trenchantly went on as philosophy. Yet the former, concerned with external, physical phenomena, sometimes was considered philosophy: something that is weird to us moderns. Ryle goes on to say in this spirit, "Much of what we now label 'philosophy', *sans phrase*, was for a long time and by many thinkers confidently, but quite wrongly, equated with what we now call 'psychology'" (Ryle 1971b, 344). That is, a philosopher, *sans phrase*, was what was then called a mental and moral scientist. She or he (almost always a he then) was someone "exempted from working in the laboratory or observatory only because his specimens were collected at home by *introspection*" (Ryle 1971b, 367, italics mine).

This all sounds to us now as antique and quaint. Now, even a remotely informed person would not dream of so dividing things up. Why have things so drastically changed? Ryle thinks that



“three influences were chiefly responsible for the collapse of the once common assumption that doing philosophy, in something like our sense, was of a piece with doing natural science or at least of a piece with doing mental science or psychology” (Ryle 1971b, 367).

First of the three influences, there was Frege’s, Husserl’s and Russell’s saving mathematics from empiricism and psychologism. Mathematical and logical truths were plainly not psychological generalizations. We have here a non-inductive and non-introspective science. In logic and mathematics the proofs are rigorous, the terms exact and the theorems universal and demonstrable and not merely highly general truths or introspective insights. So as logic is certainly a part of philosophy, philosophy could not be correctly regarded or ranked as ‘mental science’.

From that it can be concluded, Ryle has it, that there must “be a field or realm besides that of the material and the mental that was at least part of philosophy that is concerned with this third realm besides that of the material and the mental, namely, that of the non-material and non-mental ‘logical objects’—such objects as concepts, truths, falsehoods, classes, numbers and implications” (Ryle 1971b, 367).

There is something right about this and, as we shall see, there is something badly wrong about it as well. The right part is that these logical and mathematical matters are a part of our lives which is neither a matter of the recognition of the existence and reality of material entities, e.g.

rocks, electrons, frogs, human beings, planets, stars, nor of mental entities, e.g. pains, itchings, tickles, dreams, thinkings, fears, but rather of (or so those philosophers thought) still different realities, e.g. concepts, truths, classes, implications, propositions, numbers and the like. But it is a mistake to think of them as 'logical objects' or as any kind of entity. We should—and must, to gain clarity—Occamize our world and stop trying to give it a Platonist cast or, for that matter, a Berkelian cast (Ryle 1971b, vii-viii). This spirit, along with anti-psychologism, came to capture many philosophers. Indeed, that was where the philosophical orientation was going.

Secondly, Ryle notes, *a priori*, speculative and introspective psychology is now out of business. Scientific psychology has come into being. (Note that this was something Wittgenstein continued to oppose.) The claims of epistemologists, moral philosophers and some logicians to be mental scientists had to be put in the dustbin of intellectual history. So-called 'mental science', e.g. psychology, became genuinely empirical, experimental and scientific. It was no longer done in armchairs by introspection. Statistics and experiment were involved. "What then," Ryle asks, "were the objects of inquiries of epistemologists, moral philosophers and logicians?" It was first thought by Brentano, Husserl and Meinong who became interested in *intentionality* and what came to be regarded as the principle of intentionality, what they mistakenly regarded as intentional or logical objects which they took to be the subject of philosophy. Some so-called mental states and

processes are what was called 'logical objects'. They had a distinct conceptual content. I speak here of inferences, concepts, propositions and the like. Ryle puts it this way:

Somewhat as in grammar a transitive verb requires an accusative, so in the field of ideas, thoughts and feelings, acts of consciousness are directed upon their own metaphorical accusatives. To see is to see something, to regret is to regret something, to conclude or suppose is to conclude or suppose that something is the case. Imagining is one thing, the thing imagined, a centaur, say, is another. The centaur as the body of a horse and does not exist. An act of imagining a centaur does exist and does not have the body of a horse. Your act of supposing that Napoleon defeated Wellington is different from my act of supposing it; but what we suppose is the same and is what is expressed by our common expression 'that Napoleon defeated Wellington'. What is true of mental acts is, in general, false of their accusatives or 'intentional objects', and vice versa (Ryle 1971b, 378).

This principle of intentionality (a principle of transitivity) came to be applied by these philosophers to "intellectual as distinct from the sensitive, volitional or affective acts of consciousness" (Ryle 1971b, 368). They distinguished "the various private, momentary and repeatable acts of conceiving, remembering, judging, supposing and inferring from their public, non-momentary accusatives, namely the concepts, the propositions and the implications which constituted their objective correlates" (Ryle 1971b, 368). They argued that for the mental

processes of counting, construing, interjecting, thinking, reflecting, imagining, referring and the like to be what they are, they must have accusatives “numerically and qualitatively other than these processes themselves” (Ryle 1971b, 368). For the very act of wondering to be wondering, it must be a wondering of something. For the very act of thinking to be thinking, it must be thinking about something. The particular \_\_\_\_\_ act of ??? (a psychological, empirical event) must be distinct from the non-psychological of what was being wondered about. This intentional logical object is neither physical nor mental or both (if such can be) and this, they had it, is what philosophy studies. So philosophy, they had it, is not, and cannot be, an empirical study. But psychology in that it studies, by contrast, the datable empirical event of my momentary wondering. Philosophy studies why we cannot wonder without wondering about something. Brentano construes this into an intentional object. We cannot wonder without wondering about such a ‘logical object’. We cannot just wonder. That is a logical matter, not a psychological matter. It is something that logicians and philosophers study. Beside the physical realm and the psychological realm there is, as the principle of intentionality shows, “a third realm of non-physical, non-psychological entities in which realm dwells such things as concepts, numbers, classes and propositions. They, and conceptions like them, came to be labeled by these philosophers under the

comprehensive title of *Meanings (Bedeutungen)*. We are speaking here of what has been called, rather obscurely, thought-objects, expressing the object of verbal action. As Ryle puts it,

Husserl and Meinong, proud of their newly segregated third realm, found that it was this realm which provided a desiderated subject-matter peculiar to logic and philosophy and necessarily ignored by the natural sciences, physical and psychological. Mental acts and states are the subject-matter of psychology. Physical objects and events are the subject-matter of the physical and biological sciences. It is left to philosophy to be the science of this third domain which consists largely, though not entirely, of thought-objects or Meanings—the novel and impressive entities which had been newly isolated for separate investigation by the application of Brentano’s principle of intentionality to the specifically intellectual or cognitive acts of consciousness (Ryle 1971b, 369).

The special and wholly distinctive domain, or, if you will, provenance or subject-matter, of philosophy was the realm of thought-objects or Meanings or, as we shall see, the *so-called* realm, for such a domain is entirely illusory.

To see what is going on here it will be well to return to the first and longer half of Ryle’s *The Theory of Meaning*—and this can be supplemented by papers 23 and 31 of the second volume of his *Collected Works* as well as papers of the last part, namely 15 and the whole of papers 16 and 17 of the first volume of his *Collected Works*, namely his assault on the denotationist theory of meaning.

With such considerations, many philosophers came to fix on what Ryle calls the theory of philosophy, that is, meta-philosophy. It became clear to many so concerned that we *needed criteria to distinguish the significant from the nonsensical or absurd*. Moreover, that needed to be systematically surveyed. Doing so, Ryle had it, was *a* distinctive task for the philosopher—some might say *the* most significant task.

Before the first world war discussions of the status and role of philosophy *vis-à-vis* the mathematical and empirical sciences were generally cursory and incidental to discussions of other matters. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was a complete treatise dedicated to fixing the position mainly of Formal Logic but also, as a necessary corollary, the position of general philosophy. It was this book which made dominant issues of the theory of logic and the theory of philosophy. In Vienna some of its teachings were applied polemically, namely to demolishing the pretensions of philosophy to be the science of transcendent realities. In England, on the whole, others of its teachings were applied more constructively, namely to stating the positive functions which philosophical propositions perform, and scientific propositions do not perform. In England, on the whole, interest was concentrated on Wittgenstein's description of philosophy as an activity of clarifying or elucidating the meanings of the expressions used, e.g. by scientists; that is, on the medicinal virtues of his account of the nonsensical. In Vienna, on the whole, interest was concentrated on the lethal potentialities of Wittgenstein's account of nonsense. In both places, it was realized that the criteria between the significant and the nonsensical needed

to be systematically surveyed, and that it was for the philosopher and not the scientist to survey them.

At this point, the collapse of the denotationist theory of meaning began to influence the theory of philosophy as the science of Platonized Meanings. If the meaning of an expression is not an entity denoted by it, but a style of operation performed with it, not a nominee but a role, then it is not only repellent but positively misleading to speak as if there existed a Third Realm whose denizens are Meanings. We can distinguish this knight, as a piece of ivory, from the part it or any proxy for it may play in a game of chess; but the part it may play is not an extra entity, made of some mysterious non-ivory. There is not one box housing the ivory chessmen and another queerer box housing their functions in chess games. Similarly we can distinguish an expression as a set of syllables from its employment. A quite different set of syllables may have the same employment. But its use or sense is not an additional substance or subject of predication. It is not a non-physical, non-mental object—but not because it is either a physical or a mental object, but because it is not an object. As it is not an object, it is not a denizen of a Platonic realm of objects. To say, therefore, that philosophy is the science of Meanings, though not altogether wrong, is liable to mislead in the same way as it might mislead to say that economics is the science of exchange-values. This, too, is true enough, but to word this truth in this way is liable to make people suppose that the Universe houses, under different roofs, commodities and coins here and exchange-values over there.

Hence, following Wittgenstein's lead, it has become customary to say, instead, that philosophical problems are linguistic problems—only linguistic problems quite unlike any of the problems of philology, grammar, phonetics, rhetoric, prosody, etc., since they are problems about the logic of the functionings of expressions. Such problems are so widely different from, e.g., philological problems, that speaking of them as linguistic problems is, at the moment, as

Wittgenstein foresaw, misleading people as far in one direction as speaking of them as problems about Meanings or Concepts or Propositions had been misleading in the other direction. The difficult is to steer between the Scylla of a Platonistic and the Charybdis of a lexicographical account of the business of philosophy and logic (Ryle 1971b, 370-71).

So what is philosophy, then? Can we, with Ryle's and Wittgenstein's undermining of denotationist theories of meaning, coherently speak, as many philosophers do (and I am confident that I, unfortunately, have somewhere said), of philosophy through elucidation as the clarification of concepts? This, unfortunately, has a Platonic ring. Can we, as Ryle wishes us to, Occamized it?

Well, as many thought in the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, we could do so by philosophy going linguistic, becoming linguistic analysis. Philosophy so construed is an examination and a theory about what it makes sense to say. Russell, when he came across the contradiction of the class of all classes that are not members of themselves, the contradiction in 'A Londoner saying all Londoners are liars' and the like, came to see that there are grammatically well constructed sentences with a standard vocabulary that do not say anything, that are not either true or false. Yet they are indicative sentences and not questions, imperatives or commands. They do not express propositions at all. They, as Ryle puts it, despite "their perfectly regular verbal



ingredients and their perfectly regular grammatical constructions, are meaningless, nonsensical or absurd” (Ryle 1971a, 246).

Those who took the linguistic turn, or the so-called linguistic turn, said, taking this to heart and to head, that philosophy is *a second-order discipline* that concerns itself with what can be said and what cannot be said—or perhaps more exactly with what can significantly be said and what cannot significantly be said.

We can come to see the difference between science and philosophy by noting that science makes true or false statements about the world; philosophy, by contrast, examines the rules or reasons that make some statements true or false and others nonsensical. As Ryle succinctly puts it, “Science talks about the world, while philosophy talks about the talk of the world” (Ryle 1971a, 247). In this way, it was claimed, philosophy goes linguistic and second-order.

However, as we have remarked and as Ryle along with others has made us aware of, not all talk about talk is philosophical. There are grammarians, etymologists and teachers of rhetoric who talk about talk, but that talk is plainly not philosophical talk. It is talk about language but it is not doing philosophy and in that way talk about the talk about the world. It is such talk about talk alright, but not philosophical talk.

Ryle goes on to make a slip that I am confident he cannot intend. “Doing philosophy consists in what can and cannot be *significantly* said, and not what can or cannot be elegantly or idiomatically said” (Ryle 1971a, 247). Certainly, the last part of the quoted sentence is right. But here crucially we have not sorted out philosophers from other linguistic analysts or, if you will, philosophers. Linguists (think of Chomsky, for example), grammarians and etymologists are at least sometimes concerned with what can significantly be said. We have to say that philosophers are concerned with what can be *philosophically* significantly said. But now we are back in the stew for we have not said what distinguishes or demarcates philosophy from all other such activities, particularly all intellectual activities. Why is Chomsky, with his indeed significant work, not doing philosophy while Wittgenstein is?

Ryle speaks of the “logical conditions of significance” (Ryle 1971a, 248). *Perhaps* logicians can say what that is. But that is not evident and it is not the case that philosophy is just logic, at least if we mean what is usually meant by logic, namely ‘formal logic’. That Ryle does not mean that is clear from his work. He is solidly in the *informalist* camp. Logic for him is not just formal logic. He speaks of “the informal logic of the employment of expressions” (Ryle 1971ab, 318) and says that “the non-formal expressions both of everyday discourse and of technical discourse have their own unscheduled logical powers, and these are not reducible without remainder to those of

carefully wired marionettes of formal logic” (Ryle 1971b, 316). How ‘logic’, as used by Ryle and by many other ordinary language philosophers, is stretched. We seem, instead, to be speaking of the rules of language or the norms of linguistic practices or perhaps just practices, *sans phrase*. It is no longer altogether clear (to understate it) how the *logical* conditions of significance differ from the conditions of significance of our practices. More importantly, how and why has the search for conditions of significance becomes distinctive of what demarcates philosophy and becomes, it also at least seems, to be something that is empirically ascertainable and thus relying on Ryle’s or Wittgenstein’s saying not philosophical. ‘I can’t know what is false’ is empirically determinable by looking at how our language is used. Isn’t this plainly an empirical matter? Moreover, and distinctly, we need not follow Russell and come to regard philosophy as a distinctive second-order discourse. This will not work, at least not without further distinctions, for there are lots of discourses which are second-order but not philosophical. To get ‘the essence’ of philosophy—to get something that is common to and distinctive of all and only philosophy—we need to determine what is distinctively philosophical discourse and, as well, but distinctly, which second-order discourse is distinctively philosophical second-order discourse. We have not done either of these things. We need, or so it seems, to ascertain what is philosophically significant and what in particular demarcates a second-order discourse as a philosophical one.

## II

No doubt, we should give up seeking for the essence of philosophy or for what kind of natural kind it is, or indeed for whether it is a natural kind. There are no essences; there are no such natural kinds. Chemistry has them, but not philosophy or any of the social sciences. However, it *may* not be a mistake to see philosophy as concerned with, *perhaps* even exclusively concerned with, what can and cannot intelligibly be said, and indeed not only that but, in some sense, significantly be said. But this very likely is too essentialist. We need carefully to think out things here. Perhaps this comes to analytical work?

Pulling ourselves down to the ground, let's start with what we do say but we don't say, and what we ask whether but do not ask whether.

Examples:

1. We do say 'It is 2PM in London', but we don't say 'It is 2PM on Mars'.
2. We do say 'I feel a mosquito biting my behind', but we don't say 'I feel the visual image two inches behind the bridge of my nose.'
3. We do say 'I have made up my mind to try to think but I will probably fail', but we don't say 'I will try but I have made up my mind to fail' (Hampshire 1959, 112).

4. We do say 'I doubt whether he is in pain', but we don't say whether 'I doubt I am in pain' (Hampshire 1959, 246).
5. We do say 'Jones talks a lot', but we don't say 'The desk talks a lot.'
6. We do, or at least can, say 'I will but my body does not obey me', but we do not say 'My will does not obey me.'
7. We do say 'For a second he felt a violent pain', but we do not say 'For a second he felt deep grief.'
8. We do say 'He seems to believe in God', but we do not say 'I seem to believe in God.'

All of these 8 examples, except *perhaps* the last half of the last one, we accurately record what we English speakers say and do not say. Do we also record what we can and cannot say without some arbitrary stipulation, or, if this is different, what we can and cannot significantly (intelligibly) say?

All except perhaps 6 and 8 also could be understood as being something we can and cannot say. And even 6 clearly goes through the hoops if we substitute 'intend to' and 'intend' for 'will'. Again, they also are in accordance with what we cannot intelligibly say. And what we cannot intelligibly say we cannot significantly say, but what we can, and often do, say is things which are intelligible but not significant, e.g. 'It is hot in Montreal in the summer' even when it is plainly hot, or 'It's raining' even when the person we say it to plainly sees it is raining. Remarks that are pointless or boring usually need not be, and usually are not, unintelligible but, though they have

significance (a sense) they are not significant. And perhaps their being intelligible is a necessary condition for their being boring or purposeful.

However, do we cook philosophically with any of these things? Well, it's worth noting, given some things philosophers say, to see that some things that are superficially grammatical cannot be said, or, if you will, be said intelligibly. Do all such things involve what has been called 'depth grammar' and 'logical grammar' or what Ryle calls the 'informal logic of our ordinary or technical expressions'? Can we so solve or dissolve philosophical questions by attending to what he calls the informal logic of our language?

In examining the eight items listed above, I have given good reasons for our being able to cognize what we say and do not say. But have I given good grounds in all eight of them that while we do not say them, we could not intelligibly say them and if that is so, that they go against ordinary language and in such a way that they, taken without stipulative change, could not be intelligibly said? We cannot intelligibly say 'It is 2pm on Mars', 'I feel the visual image two inches behind the bridge of my nose', 'I will try to think but I have made up my mind to fail', 'I doubt I am in pain', 'The desk talks a lot', 'My will does not obey me', 'For a second he felt grief'. These sentences are pseudo-sentences, and though in an ordinary way they are grammatical in order, they still go against ordinary language in such a way that they do not make sense. Can we give them meaning by

stipulation? Perhaps, but even that is not clear. And it is not clear that it would alter things. We have no idea of what these sentences say because they cannot, unless by stipulation, say anything. Knowing the informal logic or grammar of our ordinary language, we know that they could neither be true nor false. They are not like ‘During the twentieth century it never snows on the equator’, and ‘There were palm trees growing in the Antarctic during the twentieth century’. These statements, probably never uttered, are plainly false and their denial is something absurd, though not logically absurd, to say. They do not go against ordinary language as do ‘It is 2pm on Mars’ or ‘The desk talks a lot’. These last two sentences are nonsensical. The former is false and absurdly so, but still intelligible. It is something that it is absurd to go around saying, except as an example when doing philosophy.

The philosophical statements that Moore lists in his “Defense of Common Sense”—“There are no material things’ or ‘Time is unreal’, to mention just the first two—are not unintelligible but just absurdly false. Moore shows, and utterly convincingly, that this is so. His argument is sound and indeed airtight, but he has not shown that these statements go against ordinary language and misuse the informal logic of such a language such that they are shown to be self-contradictory or in some other way unintelligible.

Because he has not done that, he has not *philosophically* refuted them, given the use of 'philosophy' that has come into being and is deployed in distinctive ways by Wittgenstein, Ryle, Malcolm and Ambrose. Philosophy, the claim goes, is not concerned with what is true or false but with what is neither true nor false; with, that is, unintelligible imperatives. Moore simply does not do philosophy in that sense in his "Defense of Common Sense" and in his "Proof of the External World". He relies on plain empirical facts and our knowledge that there are unquestionably such empirical facts. With this in place, he has conclusively refuted the philosophical (metaphysical) claims that he has listed. I would contend that he has done something better than philosophy for he has given an uncontroversially sound argument for his above claims. His argument is as decisive as anything that is in any philosopher's arsenal, and usually much more so.

### III

If philosophy is concerned with what (logically speaking) we can and cannot say—at least as one of its important aims—it still does not entail concern with just any particular concern with what we do say or do not say now. 'Florida is generally colder than Alberta', though not grammatically or philosophically (logically) in error, is something that philosophers or linguists or anyone else who is in the least bit informed would not say except as an example of a sentence that,



when used assertively, is perfectly intelligibly although absurdly false. But it is certainly not something that someone cannot say—the thing that Austin thought we should give the most attention to. Moreover, it is not a part of our discourses. But this obtains because of our straightforward and utterly uncontroversially non-interpretive knowledge of the facts of the world. Not all facts, Vattimo to the contrary notwithstanding, are interpretive, e.g. Iceland has rocks. We philosophers are concerned—I did not say solely concerned—with what we do say or do not say, what we can say and cannot say, as fallible keys to what are the unscheduled logical rules of our linguistic practices governing our sayings and unsayings, our thinking and unthinking, our ways that we can do things with words without arbitrary stipulations and with some background rules (norms) of language which make possible a sometimes valuable use of stipulations. But everything, or even most things, couldn't be stipulative or there couldn't be any stipulation at all. There must be in place some non-stipulative sentences which make stipulation possible. Just as there must be some non-interpretive sentences which make interpretive ones possible.

However, philosophy does not stop there, or should not stop there. We want also a knowing *that* of that which logically can or cannot be and also a knowing that of what can be or cannot be significantly philosophically said or not said. If something logically cannot be said, then plainly there is no possibility of it being significantly said. 'There are round squares', 'Seeable unseeables',

'Speakable unspeakables', 'Inexpressible truths', 'If today is Monday then it is the last day of the week' or 'Intangible reality is the really deep reality'. If these things, as they cannot (except *perhaps* controversially the last one) be said intelligibly and tautologically, then they cannot be significantly said either. But what can intelligibly (without logical incoherence) be said may be things that, as things stand, cannot be significantly said. It can be said that 'The moon is made of green cheese', 'Doha is in North Dakota', 'You should wash your ears each day', 'Political economy is concerned with cash flows' without any of these things being of *philosophical* significance. Even things that can truly be said and be of human importance, e.g. 'Gaddafi's forces were defeated and the rebels took power' or 'Lincoln was assassinated but Reconstruction in the South still went on for a time'. These things happen to be true, and importantly so, but they could have been false and, of course, we can say them, and they are routinely said. They are humanly and historically significant but are they philosophically significant?

What of our significant sayables are philosophical sayables? Or are there no philosophical sayables except the negative ones of therapeutic metaphilosophy? We clearly cannot say that if something is intelligible—sayable—then it is philosophical significant. But what then makes sayables philosophical sayables? Is anything that shows us that something is not logically sayable make it a philosophical remark? Of course not. Take 'There can't be three-sided squares' or

'Speechless speakables'. They clearly are utterly worthless philosophically except as clear examples of what cannot be said. Is proper philosophy limited to showing, particularly where it is not evident, the unscheduled powers of our linguistic practices? What it will allow us to say and what we cannot intelligibly say? Frege and Brentano Platonize these informal logical powers; Wittgenstein and Ryle, by contrast (though partly for different purposes), Occamize them. But they all see this as doing philosophy and it is indeed something significant to do. But is this *all* philosophy can do? There are a lot of philosophers who think philosophy can and should do more. But what, and how is it to be characterized?

Russell's problem about whether there can be a class of all classes that are not members of themselves, Hume's problem about whether we can devise an ought from an is, the problem of whether ought implies can, the compatibilist's claim that we can be free even in a deterministic world, problems about what intelligibly (logically) can or cannot be said and classical philosophical problems are all philosophically significant, or at least have been traditionally thought to be so. But again, what, if anything, makes these alleged philosophical sayables philosophically significant sayables while other sayables, even ones like Moore's that we have already discussed, cannot be without absurdity? Is it because with the philosophical ones there are puzzles and paradoxes? Is it just that they are puzzles or paradoxes that makes them philosophical matters? Is it just that

philosophy enters where we have a paradox? Some philosophers will say so, but not me. What should be said here? Do we know where we are here? And is that itself a philosophical problem? Is there anything to be said here except by giving a list of the problems in the history of philosophy of what it has regarded as the problems of philosophy? But that would not be what is wanted by most philosophers. They would not want to say that. But what, then, should be a bit of philosophy? Is a philosopher, as one once told me, a person who likes to solve paradoxes and just any paradoxes? That can't be so. Wouldn't that make philosophy a trivial matter? Suppose we say, 'Well, not just *any* paradoxes.' What paradoxes, then? And then by what criterion or criteria, if any, do we philosophers pick out philosophical paradoxes? Are they really the deep ones? All the deep ones or just certain ones? Are we back to the philosopher's history of philosophies lists again? That may seem to many philosophers, and indeed to others interested in philosophy, unsatisfactory. But how do we ascertain which of the deep ones are philosophical? And what counts as 'deep'? Is 'philosophically deep' as empty as the saying I read on a dishwasher cleaning box 'Deep Cleaning'? How do we, except arbitrarily, pick out the deep ones and the 'really deep ones'? Do we have a sense of deepness and, if we do, what is that? Are our wheels spinning in mud here?

#### IV

One thing a philosopher is concerned with, as we have seen, is what has been called meaning or use. This came particularly, principally and sometimes obsessively to the fore in the first quarter of the twentieth century when skepticism arose above the exuberant metaphysical systems extant and flourishing on the European Continent and in the United Kingdom. However, as the memory of Hume attests, this has happened before. Indeed, it happened before that with Montaigne and still earlier with some of the Greeks. But it was never as extensive as it became in the first half of the twentieth century. Frege, Brentano, Meinong, Husserl, Hägerström, Anderson, Russell, Peirce, Moore and Wittgenstein came on the scene and in various ways in various parts of the world put such considerations front and center.

Let us examine a bit of this. What seems to be absurd to us now—what Ryle calls a monstrous howler—it was initially in the twentieth century assumed that nearly all words were names or functioned like names. Descriptive phrases ‘The café around the corner’, ‘The tallest person in the room’, ‘The strongest hurricane of the century’ did duty for proper names. But all words or phrases are not nouns. ‘Having a meaning’ is different from ‘standing for’. As Frege noted, ‘The morning star’ and ‘The Morning Star’ stand for the same thing, but they have different

meanings. 'The first person to walk on Mars' does not designate or stand for anything but it does have a meaning. We understand immediately what it is that is being said. Moreover, proper names such as 'Fido', 'Toby', 'Hans', 'Erik', 'Sven', 'Pedro' designate—stand for—something but they do not have a meaning. We can't look them up in the dictionary, though note that 'London', 'Peoria' and 'Thunder Bay' are in the dictionary. Yet where they are the dictionary gives us descriptions of them so that we can identify, say 'Thunder Bay', know what country it is in, what province in that country, how large it is and perhaps its central attractions, if any. Note, too, that stellar nomenclature, as Ryle notes, works in the same way. 'Jupiter' and 'Mars' are locatable but they no more have a meaning than 'Pedro' or 'Joe' or 'Isaiah' do. Learning the meaning of a word or phrase—or the 'use' of it, as it later came to be said—is learning what can be done with these words or phrases. Learning that for a word is learning its roles inside actual or possible languages. A sentence is not a list of words but a significant and rule-determinate way of putting them together. As Ryle puts it, it says one thing; it is not an inventing of a lot of things. And a word is not a list of letters. 'Jlpye' is not an English word and probably not a word in any natural language.

Such considerations should shipwreck what was dogma in the first quarter of the twentieth century: "that to mean is to denote, in the toughest sense, namely that all significant expressions are proper names [or function like names] and what they are names of are what expressions

signify” (Ryle 1971b, 360). What words mean then, the dogma has it, are what they stand for. It should be obvious from what I have said above that we should not equate signifying with naming, or saying with designating. ‘Ken’ can name, designate, denote and stand for but it hasn’t a meaning or use. You can’t look it up in the dictionary any more than you can look up in the dictionary ‘Ken is stingy’. It doesn’t have a meaning or use—a style of functioning—that may be defined or explained. You understand, if you have even a little English, that it (usually) is a name of a male human being. ‘Ken’ is not a sayable, though it is speakable and it denotes.

Adjectives, verbs, prepositions and conjunctions are also tools in signifying. They do not designate, denote or name. They do not stand for anything. As Ryle puts it, what can be said truly or falsely is at last contrasted with what cannot be significantly said. Meaning (use) is finally detached from the notion of naming or standing for and reattached to the notion of saying.

Knowing what an expression means involves knowing what can (logically) be said with it; knowing its rule-governed employment. That is to say, it is knowing the informal logic of the expression. It is knowing what some call the logical syntax or logical grammar of a word or phrase or more safely the logical rules of our natural language, e.g. you can say ‘the wood is hard’ but you can’t say ‘the wood prays’. Ryle rightly claims that in learning to understand, talk and read what we gain is a knowledge by *wont*, or what we may vaguely call a knowing the informal logic of our language. We

*may* not be able to state these rules but come slowly from nursery on to operate with them. We know *how* to use them, but we very well may not know how to state the rules of their use. We have a form knowledge of *how* but little, if any, knowing that here (Ryle 1971b, 212-25). We may know what we can say and not say, but we may very well not know *why* we can or cannot say it. Some of the nay-sayers may very well be reduced to say ‘That can’t be done’, as your parents told you that you can’t eat pears with your spoon. It comes to just a brute telling, for all many of us may know.

We learn, as we graduate from the nursery, for example, that though mother and father can both be tall, they cannot both be taller than the other. We learn that it makes no sense to say the latter. Questioning about use, and in that sense, the really *operative* sense of meaning, is to learn now to employ expressions in making assertions, asking questions, imploring, demanding, commanding, instructing and the like. We learn that to do things with words, to utter sentences of any kind, we must first learn that.

Questions about the use of expressions usually are questions about how to describe the way to operate with them (Ryle 1971b, 307). They are not questions about what, if anything, these expressions stand for or fail to stand for. They are not questions of linguistic usage, that is, questions of the history, practice, fashion or vogue of expressions. Questions of usage “can be local or widespread, obsolete or current, rural or urban, vulgar or academic. There cannot be a misuseage



any more than there can be a mis-vogue, though 'cool' or 'Cab Sav' may be an unfortunate vogue, the methods of discovering linguistic usages are the methods of philologists" (Ryle 1971b, 308).

Philosophers are not interested in such sociological generalities about usage. They are, rather, interested in discerning and accurately describing the uses of words, that is, how they are employed. To understand a word or expression is to know how to operate with it. It is a very practice-oriented activity. The philosopher wants such a knowledge by wont. Indeed, if he doesn't have it, he cannot even philosophize. But she also wants to *elucidate* its uses; this comes to knowing how to tell how to operate with uses of language. This might be taken to be a distinctive philosophical task when directed at words such as 'know', 'believe', 'good', 'moral', 'rational', 'cause', and 'consciousness' that tend to generate in certain people at certain times perplexities that lead to paradoxes for them and perhaps for others when they are alerted to them.

The use of an expression, as I have said, is the habitual employment of it; a matter of knowing *how* to make those employments. By contrast, knowing how to elucidate or describe the use is a distinct matter that is characteristically philosophical, though not all describing or elucidating of such matters is philosophical. And the describing of a knowing how, as distinct from a mere recording, whether from a philosophers or someone else, requires a knowing *that*. The

latter is at least one thing that a philosopher should seek to do. But to be able to do that presupposes their having a knowing how.

Attention to what, logically speaking, can be said and what cannot be said, e.g. 'We cannot know what is untrue, though we can in those cases know that the unknowable 'something' cannot be true. We know, for example, 'Rocks reflect tranquility', a pseudo-sentence, is nonsensical and that what is nonsensical can be neither true nor false.

Awareness of such matters *gives us an anchor in philosophy*. With this understanding we can determine what can be true or false and what is nonsensical, e.g. 'I know the unknowable'. And, Ryle and Wittgenstein, along with Ambrose and Malcolm, stress this. It is a grasp of such matters which determines where we can go and cannot go in philosophy. We cannot, as some Romantics thought, grasp the deep truth, let alone that there could be a deep truth, of the ineffable.

Ordinary language philosophy resists the claims of formalizers who claim a different anchor. The formalizers claim that to gain genuine clarity in philosophy we must master and utilize the notational scheme of some formal language, say *Principia Mathematica*. But the unscheduled logic of everyday statements cannot even in principle be represented, let alone clarified, by the formulae of formal logic. The "non-formal expressions both of everyday discourse and technical discourse hve their own unscheduled logical powers and these are not reducible without remainder

to those of the carefully wired marionettes of formal logic” (Ryle 1971b, 316). Ryle goes on to say, “‘Back to ordinary language’ can be (but often is not) the slogan of those who have awoken from the formalizer’s dream. This slogan, so used, should be repudiated only by those who hope to replace philosophizing by reckoning” (Ryle 1971b, 317). He continues, saying that it is “salutary to keep on reminding ourselves and one another that what we are after are accounts of how certain words work, namely like ‘see’, ‘look’, ‘overlook’, ‘blind’, ‘visualize’ and lots of other affiliated expressions” (Ryle 1971b, 317). Ryle concludes “Ordinary Language” with:

We are interested in the informal logic of the employment of expressions, the nature of the logical howlers that people do or might commit if they strung their words together in certain ways, or, more positively, in the logical force that expressions have as components of theories and as pivots of concrete arguments. That is why, in our discussions, we argue *with* expressions and *about* those expressions in one and the same breath. We are trying to register what we are exhibiting; to codify the very logical codes which we are then and there observing (Ryle 1971b, 318).

## V

Ryle and Wittgenstein are very alike in certain key respects and Ryle acknowledges that he is indebted to Wittgenstein. They are both ‘back to ordinary language’, though Wittgenstein would not like that slogan. They both give careful attention to the uses of our natural languages, to

the uses of our words and expressions in philosophizing and try to ascertain and describe how our language works. But Ryle wishes by this careful attention to *solve* philosophical problems and, to some extent at least, codify the unscheduled rules of or ordinary uses of our ordinary languages: the rules that govern what we can say and cannot say. Philosophers should be particularly concerns with the uses of expressions which indirectly or directly play key roles in the philosophical tradition. Ryle wanted to set out clearly the informal logic of these expressions and to a certain extent show how they are interlocked. In this way he sought modestly to contribute to philosophical theory.

Wittgenstein would have none of this. His goal was a *therapeutic* one, namely to free us from philosophical theories and philosophical perplexities and disquietudes generated, at least in part, by our misunderstandings of the workings of our language. The construction of philosophical theories and the making of philosophical claims, as we have seen in the first chapter, came from Wittgenstein to a suffering from a kind of conceptual disease which we should cure ourselves if we can. (We should not just sink in it with pleasure as some sink in a warm bath. This is something that John Wisdom and Stanley Cavell come close to doing with philosophy, but never Wittgenstein.)

Wittgenstein did not seek, or so was his wish, to construct theories—and most surely not systematic theories—of the workings of language, broad and unified descriptions, to say nothing of

explanations of the workings of language. He did not seek a broad and unified or codified description of the informal logic of our language as Ryle seemed to and took as the aim, or central aim, of ordinary language philosophy. (Sometimes, though, Ryle writes as if it were just in the debunking business.)

Wittgenstein, as is particularly evident in the second part of his *Philosophical Investigations*, sought to give brief and penetrating descriptions of bits of the uses of our language and to break our disquietudes about it and the failures of understanding that blocked our understanding and caused deep disquietude in some people philosophically attuned. He sought to give brief descriptions for a particular purpose of the ways of functioning, the ways we employ our language, where this description would free us from our specific perplexities and obsessions about our thought and about what it is to make sense of things. He did not seek to codify things, most particularly to in any comprehensive way set them coherently into some kind of theory of metatheory or even *ambulando* to solve, as Ryle did, some philosophical problem, but to *dissolve* our philosophical perplexities, like sugar in water as he put it, so that we were no longer tormented endlessly by questions or made to feel that we could not solve any philosophical question. He wanted to free himself and us from philosophical disquietudes which obsess us.

Though Ryle's temperament was very different, he seemed, at least, to be without any of the *angst* or disquietude that Wittgenstein felt. Nevertheless, he still required the interconnectedness of philosophical questions. He realized that we should not treat philosophical questions like (or so he regarded them) chemists' or detectives' questions—questions which can and should be tackled piecemeal. Finish Problem A this morning, file the answer, and then go on to Problem B this afternoon. Finish it and file the answer and process on in such a manner. Ryle goes on to say:

This suggestion does violence to the vital fact that philosophical problems inevitably interlock in all sorts of ways. It would be patently absurd to tell someone to finish the problem of the nature of truth this morning, file the answer and go on this afternoon to solve the problem of the relations between naming and saying, holding over until tomorrow problems about the concepts of existence and non-existence (Ryle 1971b, 372).

Wittgenstein, of course, like Ryle, and indeed like just about everyone else, would agree that is no way to proceed in philosophy. That notwithstanding though, many philosophers in practice proceed pretty much in that way. But not Wittgenstein. He wanted 'complete clarity' which he thought was the philosopher's drive and that he came to think constituted a conceptual disease. He came to realize that that could not be had. All that could obtain was a tidying up of things which

would, as time went by, become untidy again. There was no theory, no last word that would finally settle things. It was not that clarity wasn't enough, but that we couldn't get the deep kind of clarity that philosophers so determinedly sought. It was that kind of clarity that would free us from our philosophical disquietudes. But that could not be finally had by anyone with a philosophical temperament. It was extremely difficult to free people so stricken from that disease. We can, at best, only get a surcease from that disease and we could only get for a time the illusory belief that we should have achieved such clarity and grasp of the ungraspable whole that we are obsessively driven toward. Hegel may have thought that was the aim of philosophy and that he had obtained it, but it is not to be had. That is the *über* metaphysical quest, but is it utterly unobtainable.

Ryle was not so philosophically driven and alienated. He did not have Wittgenstein's disquietudes. He was not even anything like so ambivalently alienated. He was not obsessed with grasping what philosophy could come to to give us peace. He thought, rather, that he and Wittgenstein had developed a method of analysis that, if rigorously, sensitively, reflectively, patiently and determinedly applied, could solve philosophical paradoxes and muddles, though he thought new ones would continue to emerge. Some might be solved for good; others could, with patient analysis, be moved along a little toward eventual resolution. But there was nothing there that we should get upset about or be obsessed by. It is difficult, and perhaps unfair, to think of him

as a complacent and cultured elite member of the British Establishment. One wonders what Berthold Brecht would have said about Ryle, had he known about him.

All that aside, it is important to note that Ryle, unlike Wittgenstein, though there was some modest progress in philosophy. He was not like the logician Schefer, who thought philosophers batted things around over millennia and never settled anything. Wittgenstein did not share Ryle's modest optimism.

Ryle and Wittgenstein had their differences, and not just in attitude and temperament but in philosophical disagreements. However, they also had some crucial agreements. Both fastened on the crucial importance of an understanding of 'use' and they agreed that that could give us a de-mythologized grip on what a philosophical understanding comes to and on how it could give us a grip on how to detect philosophical nonsense through, as Ryle put it, an understanding of the informal logical syntax of our ordinary language and technical language dependent on it. This grip on logic of our language, Ryle thought, could help us debunk extravagant and mistaken philosophical claims, including monstrous howlers. It could help in working our way, for a little while anyway, in getting out of the Augean stable and, with our escape, also cleaning it up a bit. Ryle thought this could be done by a conscientious attending to our language.



The rest of their differences seem, mainly at least, to be a matter of *temperament*. They both realized that temperament-*caused* differences in philosophical outlook—perhaps in any rational outlook—contributed nothing to the justification or the justifiability of going one way or another, though it *might* put us into a better position (or so Ryle thought) where we could gain a justificatory stance (Ryle 1971b, 153-69).

Royce and James were tender-minded philosophers and Austin and Quine tough-minded. Aristotle was more tough-minded than Plato, Hobbes more tough-minded than Leibniz, and Spinoza more tough-minded than Descartes. However, sometimes it is difficult to place a philosopher in either camp: Berkeley, Reid, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Weil, Sartre, Pascal, Dewey and Heidegger as just a few examples.

In his “Taking Sides in Philosophy”, Ryle sensibly makes the point that being tough-minded makes us sensitive to some philosophical issues that being tender-minded does not, but being just the opposite makes us sensitive to other philosophical issues that being tough-minded does not. Is it better for a philosopher to be tough-minded than tender-minded, or just the reverse?

Ryle thinks, perhaps plausibly, that there is no answer to these questions. (Is he *perhaps* suggesting they are not real questions?) Moreover, a justification of a claim, philosophical or any other cognitive kind, is not settled by realizing that being tender-minded pushes you to take one

position so that position is justified or that that position is mistaken, or that being tough-minded pushes in the opposite direction. Such causal pushing justifies nothing, though it may help put one in a situation where one can more readily get a justification, one way or another. But the crucial thing to see is that *temperaments do not rationally settle anything unless one temperament*, all things considered, can show itself to be more reasonable and rational than another competing temperament or that people who are tough-minded come up with more reasonable and justifiable philosophical stances or vice-versa. Something like one or another of these things might be so, but justification itself would have to be temperament-independent. But that that is so for the tough-minded or the tender-minded is an open question. And that this has been established is also questionable, though this is not to say that it could not be established.

It is not that one attitude—being tough-minded or being tender-minded or some blend thereof—is more causally efficacious than another. But what is the most effective path is not necessarily the most justified path or the just *simpliciter*. The thing to see is that *cases are not reasons*. So the justificatory question is not settled in a reasonable way by a temperament stance or orientation. The justificatory question remains as to whether it can be more reasonable to claim one or the other with respect to tough-mindedness versus tender-mindedness so that we can and

should say to narratives which temperament we should try to cultivate (Ryle 1971b, 153-69). Or is it a matter of 'You pay your money and you take your choice'?

Rooted in temperament or not, does Wittgenstein's therapeutic stance and his general stance toward philosophy cut deeper than Ryle's? It is, to me at least, tempting to say that it does. But is that or anything like it warranted or could it even be? I can't help but feel that Wittgenstein's therapeutic stance cuts deeper. Is this just a temperamental reaction on my part? Do we run out of reasons here? If so, then what?

## VI

As we have seen, Wittgenstein and Ryle, as well as ordinary language philosophers more generally and earlier logical positivists, took the, or at least *a*, central philosophical task to be to distinguish sense from nonsense: what it makes sense to say from what it does not. The logical positivists' criterion—the verifiability or testability principle, as it was later called—was found to be too narrow, even in the nuanced articulations in the later work on that topic by Rudolf Carnap and Carl Hempel. Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophers such as Ryle, Austin, Strawson, Ambrose and Malcolm, had a broader and more adequate criterion, namely what violated the informal logic of ordinary language. We can intelligibly say 'She felt a momentary pain', but not 'She

felt a momentary grief. The central task, if not the sole task, of philosophy is to distinguish sense from nonsense; what we realize can't be said, as Austin saw, was central.

Philosophy is concerned with what can be significantly said; with criteria of significance.

Does this just come to what intelligibly can be said or what correctly can be said or not said in some ordinary language or some technical language dependent on some ordinary language? We correctly and intelligibly can say 'Books are often found on desks', but it is seldom, if ever, a significant thing to say. It is seldom said but it is a correct thing to say. It is plainly intelligible and it is significant to say, though perhaps false, 'The war in Afghanistan is unwinnable'. But it is not, at least in most situations, *philosophically* significant, though it is very significant.

What makes a logically significant remark a philosophically significant remark? Someone having studied Wittgenstein or Ryle would say that, while paradoxical and/or puzzling, it still correctly describes the informal logic of ordinary discourse or a technical discourse dependent on it. If she were a Wittgensteinian, however, she would have added that it is something, though puzzling and a disquietude, which can be dissolved like sugar in water.

A philosopher who knows what she is doing is a debunker or a corrective elucidator of some philosophical paradox or disquietude. We still, however, need a characterization of a *philosophical* paradox or a *philosophical* disquietude. What is this? Wittgenstein and Ryle seem here to be

reduced to giving examples. Perhaps Ryle (but not Wittgenstein) would be satisfied with an accurate description of the informal logic of his language. But any accurate description for any bit of our language for any purpose where we attend to the informal logic of our language? That is implausible. Is it helpful to add what accurately describes the 'depth grammar' of our language and, as well, the 'depth grammar' of any natural language? After all, Wittgenstein was not just concerned with German, or Ryle with English. Indeed, they were not, unlike Austin was sometimes, concerned with it for its own sake. But all that apart, do we have any good sense of what we are talking about in speaking of 'depth grammar'? It is suggestive, as it is in Wittgenstein, but it is very unclear that it is more than that. And perhaps it is even falsely suggestive.

Something that conflicts with ordinary language or with stipulations rooted in ordinary language is unintelligible, e.g. 'Procrastination drinks melancholy'. Consider a line from a song: "Old Man River don't say nothin', but just keeps rollin' along." Rivers literally don't speak; logically can't speak. It is not an empirical question that rivers cannot speak, but it would be crudely unperceptive to say that that musical lyric was nonsense. Think of when you heard it sung, say, by Paul Robeson. If you must be very literal here, you can stipulate that it literally means 'The river for a long time has passed by silently with little noise'. If some blockhead says 'Rivers don't talk', saying so is deviant unintelligible English. With such people, if we do not just laugh we can make

the above stipulation that it is 'translating' a metaphor into wooden English. (Note another metaphor there.) Our language is shot full with metaphors. (Note again another metaphor.)

Something consisting of English words in a recognizable English sentence structure such as 'The stone walked' conflicts with ordinary language. Untranslated, say the use of the stipulation, e.g. 'The stone was moved by the very force of the tremendous wind'. Something that does not conflict with ordinary language. We who are English speakers understand it but without such a stipulative re-description, 'The stone walked' is nonsensical. We can't understand it. Such a cluster of words, all intelligible in themselves, is an illustration of a pseudo-sentence. That we can detect such pseudo-sentences is a good negative check that some talk, say, 'Being is transcendental', is nonsense. Having that negative check in hand frees us from a lot of logical, ontological, epistemological and sometimes even meta-ethical paradoxes. And this work, particularly in Wittgenstein's hands, has been enlightening. It enables us to cut a lot of cackle. But is it the only thing that has been philosophically significant? Is philosophy only a debunking activity? Remember how this claim distressed Frederick Waismann?

There are at least the following, quite distinct matters which have been thought, not unreasonably, to be of philosophical significance.

1. People want to make sense of their lives, to find or give some meaning or purpose to them. Is this not a philosophical problem and an important one?
2. People typically want, if they can, to determine the right way or at least the most reasonable or decent way, to live. Perhaps this can't be done? People may be under the illusion that they have done it, but if they are clearheaded, they will realize this is impossible. Is this really the way it is? Is this not a philosophical problem and an important one? Are people really asking for the color of heat here? Would someone who is not confused about his language ask this? That seems, to put it mildly, a bit dogmatic.
3. There is in some quarters talk of the human condition. What that is is anything but clear. Can we with care characterize it so that it will have some reasonable clarity? That seems, at least, a demandingly important question. It is worth striving for a clearly determinate answer, some reasonable answer, as to what that condition is. I don't speak here of being able to give some *final* word or some *last* word that answers this for all times and climes. There can be nothing like that. But perhaps we can get something that for a time will gain a large reflective consensus among a number of people that will not leave us with a nagging philosophical or moral disquietude? Do we not have philosophical issues that do not come just to require for their resolution or dissolution an accurate description of our language, to giving what Wittgenstein called a perspicuous description?
4. Most people are not rational egoists or any other kind of egoist. They, to a certain extent, care about others as well as themselves. Some of them extensively. But most of us are not angels. We do care about others and not just instrumentally or sometimes not even at all instrumentally. Do we not with such caring want to ascertain what a good *polity* would be and want to help make it so, at least in our corner of the world? Do we not want this to

come to be a reality, for there to be a community that will answer to the interests of as many people as possible? And do we not want this to happen, not just for our corner of the world but for the whole world? I don't mean to say that most of us aspire to become a Gandhi or Martin Luther King, but that we want to help things to go along in that direction. We want a world that would answer to the needs and interests of as many people as possible. There are ways that we people should live together and we want, if we can, to determine what those are and how they can be achieved. Or is this vastly unrealistic and utopian? Is it not the case that life, including our political life together, is just one damn thing after another until we die? Will not the non-evasive recognition of the extent that our world is and has always been a chamber of horrors dash any such utopian hopes? Doesn't it make them irrational? Isn't what should be thought and done here in part a philosophical question? Don't we have philosophical problems here and demanding ones? Or should or must a sober philosophy be silent here? These are not just, or perhaps not even at all, problems or puzzles that emerge from misunderstandings of the informal logic of our language or a misunderstanding of some of our uses of language. Do we have a conception of philosophy that even seeks to nudge us in the direction in which we should go here? Should we say that is not a philosophical task? Philosophy's concern is only with what we can and cannot say and not with what we should and should not do or be. Do we philosophers really want to say that?

*Sometimes* people are led astray concerning these four issues by their misunderstandings of the logic of their language. What they take to be the proper philosophical response to them, the mistakenly think, requires a metaphysical, epistemological or meta-ethical response—or perhaps



all three. We need theories of one or another or all of these sorts to answer these four, if you will, existential problems in the appropriately deep way. *Some* caught up in some way or another by these esoteric matters will say things of the following sort. Only by knowing and following the ineffable commands of God or believing that all ethical utterances are just expressions of emotion or that all normative political claims can be nothing other than social demands can we come to grips with these problems. These different things and many others of the same type have been taken as gospel by one or another philosopher. We are inevitably, if we would be non-evasively thoughtful, caught in some such metaphysical, epistemological or meta-ethical issues. We can't escape—or so it has been said—having some such theories in facing these four matters. Do we really need answers to the just mentioned philosophical issues to answer these four existential problems? What does being thoroughly rational and reasonable saddle us with here?

I think the Wittgensteinian therapeutic path is the way to go here and that Ryle's *practice* aids and abets that. Careful attention to the informal logic of our language will enable us to set such metaphysical, epistemological and meta-ethical *considerations* aside in attending to these four matters. To attend to these four issues, we certainly do not do Wittgensteinian therapy. Rather, without a metaphysical, epistemological or meta-ethical song and dance, we can just go directly at them. We, where we need such therapy to unblock us, after such debunking we can and should go

on to say and argue something positive and substantive concerning them. But in taking such a turn we should not re-enchant ourselves by immersing ourselves in metaphysics, epistemology or meta-ethics or go (try to go) transcendental. We can and should say farewell to such matters.

## **Notes**