SOME REMARKS ON PHILOSOPHIC METHOD

KAI NIELSEN

Perhaps we should say that there is no such thing as meta-philosophy. 'What is philosophy?' is itself a philosophic question. To talk about the nature of philosophy, its end (with its *double-entendre*), or its worth (or lack thereof), is, if this talk has any depth at all, to engage in philosophical discussion and argument. And while an obsession here can keep us from doing what may be—if philosophy has a point or some intrinsic worth—fruitful work in philosophy, Wittgenstein's obsession with such 'meta-philosophical questions' was neither irrational nor pointless and it surely did not keep him from doing probing philosophical work.[1] Some have said that meta-philosophical interests are a sign of a wanning interest in philosophy, but while this has never been true for me, I do remain ambivalent about philosophy and caught up in doubts about what (if anything) we can achieve in philsophy and about the worth of our achievement. (Recall Marx's famous remark in the *German Ideology*: "Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love.") A. R. Manser in his interesting inaugural lecture "The End of Philosophy: Marx and Wittgenstein" hit just the right note when he remarked:

> . . . whatever else philosophy may be, it certainly involves constant questioning of all that is normally taken for granted, whether it be the existence of the external world or the value of a present-day university education. However, if philosophy confined itself to challenging others' ideas, to dealing with problems that arose in other disciplines, it would be an arrogant subject, which indeed it often seems to be to those on the outside. It also, and necessarily if it is to be really questioning, finds its own existence its greatest problem. The mark of modern philosophy, and of any worthy of the name, is self-doubt.[2]

[1] It is rather fashionable now to ignore this meta-philosophical side of Wittgentstein. Yet on any 'naive' first reading of the *Philosophical Investigations* it is one of the first things to strike one. K. T. Fann succinctly and accurately stresses this side of Wittgenstein in his "Wittgenstein and Bourgeois Philosophy", *Radical Philosophy* 8 (Summer, 1974), pp. 24-7.

[2] A. R. Manser, *The End of Philosophy: Marx and Wittgenstein* (Southampton, England: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1973).

This calling itself into question is, of course, a vast project and I try here to catch only a corner of it. I try, after its programmatic demise, to show both something of importance which remains in proceeding by philosophizing from ordinary language and what its principal limitations are. I then take a new tack by examining a methodological turn taken by a way of philosophizing and looking at philosophy much under the influence of Quine.

I

The Stalinist phase of ordinary language philosophy has long since passed; 'ordinary language' is no longer the rallying cry it once was. In spite of his extensive influence, few philosophers continue to follow Austin's stringent and rather rigid methodological restrictions and directives. What has lived on in the thought and practice of many philosophers is the belief that ordinary language—any natural language—contains important and indeed refined conceptual distinctions which it is essential for philosophers to perspicuously display and indeed in their practice not to run rough-shod over by ignoring through adopting and / or perpetuating crude philosophical distinctions—reason and passion, analytic and synthetic, descriptive and evaluative, cognitive and non-cognitive—which ignore the subtle and refined concepts which are to be found at work in ordinary language in everyday life.

Against this very widespread and, I believe, important conviction philosophers of a Marxist persuasion (Gramsci and Althusser for example) have claimed that such an appeal to ordinary language is a very serious blunder, for ordinary language with those subtle and ramified conceptual distinctions in effect "expresses and enforces ideologies which systematically conceal the realities they refer to".[3]

Modern Anglo-American moral philosophy has been much concerned with ordinary language. Indeed many have thought this is an important source of its at least putative aridity. I will try to unsnarl something of what is at issue here and, of the difficulties generated by the issues in question. It is well to see initially that we are on the thoroughly contested and perenially perplexing ground concerning what philosophy is, what it can do and what point—if any—such an activity has. I want to proceed initially from some brief remarks Bernard Williams made about J. L. Austin's philosophical method and

[3]See here the editorial in *Radical Philosophy* 6 (Winter, 1973), p. 1.

practice.[4] They are important in their own right and relate significantly to some Marxist and radical criticisms which I will consider later.

Williams notes that if we examine Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* we will notice, at quite distinct levels, three different general aims being pursued. The first and most obvious, and by far the least important, is to establish that a number of key arguments used by A. J. Ayer in defense of phenomenalism will not work. Williams believes that these criticisms are for the most part "very effective"; others have thought that they were not and that Austin was indeed flogging a strawman and hardly coming to grips in any careful fashion with Ayer's arguments. It is not at all my purpose to try to adjudicate this here. Rather, no matter what we say about this, it seems to me that Williams is clearly right in claiming that this could not be Austin's central aim. *Sense and Sensibilia* were lectures of Austin's edited and published after his death. He repeatedly gave them at Oxford and it is difficult to believe that a philosopher of his stature would in lectures year after year be content simply to give a hostile review to a twenty year old book.

A second and wider aim, Williams remarks, could be to undermine phenomenalism or sense-data theory of which Ayer's book was an important statement. That is to say, we could look on Austin's purpose as showing that it was not the case that there are certain 'private objects' called sense-data which "we perceive in a way more direct or immediate than we perceive tables, chairs and so forth".[5] But if this is how we are to take Austin here, *Sense and Sensibilia* was remarkably unsuccessful, for it quite explicitly leaves out of consideration a key argument used by both Ayer and Price in arguing for sense data and in addition ignores very central issues raised by Moore which could well lead one to argue for sense data. Again, given Austin's very considerable philosophical acumen and his fierce integrity, it is very unlikely that he would have remained satisfied with such an incomplete performance if this had been his central aim in *Sense and Sensibilia*. Rather it is, I think, wise to follow Williams' hunch here and view Austin's concern with sense-datum theorists as only incidental.

What we should do is move to a third level and look for a quite different aim in *Sense and Sensibilia*, Williams states this

[4]Bernard Williams, "J. L. Austin's Philosophy", *The Oxford Magazine,* Vol. III (December, 1962), pp. 115-117.
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 115.

third presumptive aim as follows: Austin wished to illustrate
with his examination of Ayer's arguments for sense-data, how
philosopher's—in this case an important one—"tend to
obliterate important distinctions, to ignore the diversity of the
facts and to take little notice of how our language actually
works".[6] To show this it is sufficient to examine some reasonably
important philosophical arguments. Austin proceeds to do this
by showing how Ayer's arguments fail because Ayer (a) ignores
a considerable variety of relevant situations and (b) because he
neglects or misunderstands many subtle distinctions in ordinary
language. Ayer fails to command a clear view of how the
expressions in question are used and in what contexts they
are used; he fails to keep in hand distinctions between many
different linguistic expressions and different uses of the same
expression which apply quite differently in different situations.
When these things are kept in hand and clearly noted, Ayer's
arguments will be seen to collapse. (In this respect Austin's
approach was very much like that of the later Wittgenstein.)

However, even assuming this approach is successful in
showing how certain philosophical arguments went astray, how
is it that—since Austin did not have a completely therapeutic
ideal—linguistic observation is of use in establishing philosophi-
cal theses? Here Williams argues Austin pursued what in effect
is a Baconian ideal and was in fact remarkably unsuccessful.
Indeed he could in reality have hardly been anything else, for
he had set himself an impossible task. This task—following
out the lines of his Baconian ideal—was to patiently assemble
distinctions in ordinary use and then cautiously and very
tentatively elicit from them a theory. But, as Williams has
remarked, and MacIntyre has as well, the "trouble about this
is, that if taken literally, it is just impossible. There is no
classification without a purpose—in theoretical matters, without
a theory or a problem. Without some pre-existing notion of
what one wants the distinctions for, their number is entirely
indeterminate; one can go on making as many as one likes".[7]
It is such an unachievable and in reality impractical Baconian
commitment that gives force to the radical claim that British
philosophy is anti-theoretical. Austin certainly is not 'British
philosophy' and indeed this criticism of Austin has come from
within establishment philosophy, but he is a very central figure
in Anglo-American philosophy.

[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Let us look at the matter of appealing to ordinary language and at Austin's utilization of it from another angle. Aside from being a potent device for exposing hasty and indeed confused philosophical theses, showing them to be either utter or partial muddles, Austin also found a rationale—a rationale which Williams believes is actually a rationalization—for this close scrutiny of ordinary uses in what Williams calls, tongue-in-cheek, Austin's Wisdom of the Ages thesis. This is a much stronger version of what I said at the outset was an important element which survived the demise of ordinary language philosophy. The Wisdom of the Ages thesis is the claim that "our ordinary speech contains a battery of distinctions that men have found useful through the centuries, and which have stood the test of time, and that these are likely to be sounder than any which a theorist can—at least when in a hurry—think up".[8] We have, Austin claims, good *prima facie* grounds for believing that the distinctions built into our ordinary language are very good; it is *perhaps* possible to improve on them but at present at least it is foolish to undertake that, for we are not yet in a position to do so. It is first necessary to see with some tolerable clarity what these distinctions are. But, at present, we are not within a country mile of achieving that.[9]

Williams is justified in claiming, I believe, that true or false, the Wisdom of the Ages thesis is conservative. It may not, as it was first thought, be linguistically conservative, but it is conservative and it is *not philosophically neutral,* for it presupposes without argument that philosophical attempts to show that people are mistaken about some fundamental features of the world are themselves quite mistaken. (Here, for all his very important differences with logical empiricism, Austin's account and logical empiricism share a fundamental assumption.) Austin's approach has, as well, two further conservative features: (1) its Baconian methodology would, if this methodology were followed, make philosophical investigation literally interminable and (2) we have from Austin what in reality is a total innovation stopper in his insistence that before we can be justified in even trying out some tentative conceptual innovation in philosophy, we must first have examined in depth our ordinary stock of uses. That is to say, if this latter methodological injunction were followed, it would make it the case

[8]*Ibid.*
[9]J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 63 and J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 163.

that we would in practice never be justified in making even the most tentative conceptual innovations. Moreover, as Williams remarks, if these Baconian counsels had been followed, it is doubtful, if we would ever have had in ordinary language those very subtle distinctions, which Austin regards as so important. It may very well be that in the past those despised theorists may have initiated many of these very distinctions which Austin, rightly, so very much prizes. Indeed any kind of claim one way or the other here is such that for it we would need some rather extensive historical evidence—evidence which we do not have. But the shoe is surely on Austin's foot, for without it we are not justified in proclaiming as confidently as Austin does.

Austin has the commendable desire to give us plain truth undistorted by ideology, questionable profundity or elusive obscurity. Yet, as we have learned from Popper, human thought is not advanced by just accumulating as many accurately expressed truths as possible. In his prohibition of innovation, of taking chances, of boldly speculating and perhaps in the process talking nonsense, Austin and Austinian method are conservative and indeed harmfully so. Indeed free wheeling speculation with little concern for what it makes sense to say can get out of hand, as it has sometimes on the Continent and with British Absolute Idealists, but such rigidities as Austin stressed out of his fear of blather are stultifying.

However, behind the Wisdom of the Ages thesis, there is the milder claim I initially stated. That is to say, what we can take away, among other things, from the study of Austin—and from Moore, Wittgenstein, and Ryle as well—is that (a) our natural languages contain refined and important conceptual distinctions which it is crucial to have clearly before our minds before we rush off to make grand or even not so grand philosophical claims and (b) that indeed some philosophical perplexities can be resolved or better dissolved by carefully attending to those distinctions. If some philosopher claims that in making moral utterances we are only expressing or evoking emotions or that we only see our own brains or that no inductions can ever be justified, such an ordinary language technique is very much to the point and it does not commit one to conservatism or to the general claim that ordinary language is all right as it is and that the only legitimate philosophical task is to perspicuously display it. (This last restriction was Wittgenstein's, not Austin's.)

It is even of use in more interesting philosophical cases in moral philosophy. If someone tries to define or characterize good in terms of interests and in turn says that to talk about interests is to talk about what people want and attach import- ance to, then an attempt to get reasonably clear about the use and context of use of 'good', 'wants', 'interests', 'needs', 'prefers' and the like is going to be an important first step in assessing such a claim, though this does not mean, as far as I can see, that we must set out a complicated logical geography of these terms displaying all their logical interrelations. But we need here to attend to the standard employment of the terms involved (and their relatives).

Sometimes we need to do no more than to assemble enough such reminders to ascertain the intelligibility or the truth of a bald philosophical thesis, e.g. the thesis that for something to be extrinsically good is for it to have a capacity to satisfy our wants and for something to be intrinsically good is for it to be wanted for its own sake. (Another such example would be the bald claim that to act rationally is to act as a prudent maximizer; such that all those acts and only those acts, which, on the available evidence, promise to maximise an agent's expectable utility are for him the rational thing to do.) Yet while such an attention to ordinary language may often be effective against a crude ideal language philosopher or a certain kind of reductionist, it by no means is always decisive. Yet, as Austin recognized, and as many have come to recognize, it is at least often an important first move. In our care to avoid the conservatism, ideology and anti-theoretical posture of ordinary language philosophy we should not lose sight of this important insight.

II

This rather bland but (I hope) sensible response will not seem nearly strong enough in some quarters. Sean Sayers con- cludes a meta-philosophical discussion of "Ordinary Language Philosophy and Radical Philosophy" with the following declaration: ". . . ordinary language philosophy is an essentially conservative style of thought: it is incompatible with any genuine radicalism. It is anti-theoretical and anti-philosophical".[10]

I think it is an evasion to respond, as people responded years ago to a similar broadside by Gellner, that there is no such

[10]Sean Sayers. "Ordinary Language Philosophy and Radical Philosophy", *Radical Philosophy 8* (Summer, 1974), pp. 37-8.

thing as ordinary language philosophy. Certainly there are
important differences between Ryle, Hare, Austin, Malcolm,
Strawson, Hart, Foot, Cavell and Grice, to mention only some
of the many people philosophizing roughly in that manner, i.e.
from ordinary language. But certainly when one stands back,
say from the perspective of a Quine, Carnap or a Merleau-Ponty,
one can see important common assumptions and even more
importantly a common philosophical posture. The utilization
of an appeal to ordinary language—to what we would say when
—is one very crucial common 'philosophical policy' (if that is
the right word).

It certainly seems to me right to challenge the claim that
most philosophical errors are due to mistaken conceptions of
language. Some are, and some important ones at that, and
Strawson, Ryle, Austin and Wittgenstein have shown great
penetration in exposing them. But if one works through the
philosophical problems discussed and reasoned out in Henry
Sidgwick's *A Method of Ethics* or John Rawl's *A Theory of
Justice,* one will find only a few problems that will be resolved
or even profitably treated by such an approach.

It is fair enough to say, with certain caveats I shall bring
out below, as Sayers does, that ". . . philosophy is a theoretical
enterprize which cannot be conducted merely by reporting
ordinary usage", though a sense of historical accuracy prompts
me to remark, whoever thought that it could: Austin, Hare,
Malcolm, Strawson, Ryle?[11] They use ordinary language but
they argue and argue carefully as well. The appeal to ordinary
usage is only one element in their complicated and varied
manner of philosophizing. But Sayers makes a cutting point
when he remarks that "ordinary language philosophers in-
variably do not merely 'report ordinary usage', 'assemble
reminders' etc., but in the process also suggest a certain general
view about how things are".[12] A similar thing about substantive
matters obtains in moral philosophy in such severely meta-ethical
treatises as the major works of Stevenson, Hare and Nowell-
Smith. Surely what is to be done is to be explicit about such
matters and to argue for these substantive points in as
systematic and as rigorous a way as possible.

However we should also see, as Bernard Harrison reminds
Sayers in a response, that part of the force of the appeal to
ordinary language is against forms of reductionism (much of

[11]*Ibid.*
[12]*Ibid.,* p. 37.

the work of Hobbes and Ayer, for example).[13] Against "re-
ductionist philosophical schematics", it is important to remind
ourselves "of the real complexity of the conceptual distinctions
which we draw without thinking about it in everyday life".[14]
This element is prominent in the work of Wittgenstein and has
to some been a source of annoyance in the work of Cavell, Rhees
and Winch. Yet, it is extremely useful against reductionist
accounts of philosophical concepts. It shows that there are
certain things that reductionist accounts do not capture and
that it is essential to capture them in order to understand such
concepts as power, community, love, good, obligation, justice,
rationality or law, to cite only a few of the more obvious
examples.

It would certainly appear to be true that some ordinary
language philosophers are too content with just assembling
such reminders against reductionistic and oversimplified
metaphysical accounts and do not recognize, as Harrison
recognizes, that one "needs in addition a theory which exhibits
the epistemological bases of the distinctions in question".[15]
(Cavell and Rhees are paradigms.)

However, one must proceed much more carefully than Sayers
does regarding the claim that such an account must anti-theoreti-
cal, anti-scientific and anti-intellectual. It is all well and good to
call for a *philosophical* theory, but one first needs to have
some reasonably clear sense of what a *philosophical* theory
would look like. Contemporary philosophy, and particularly
what has been called ordinary language philosophy, has
developed powerful arguments to show that the theories of
traditional speculative philosophy are all pseudo-theories. We
have some understanding of what it is to have a theory in
empirical science and in logic and mathematics and even in
meta-mathematics. But we lack a clear sense of what it is
to have a *philosophical* theory. Wittgenstein has (to put it
minimally) given us reason to think that often at least what
has paraded as grand metaphysical theories, which will reveal
to us the nature, of 'ultimate reality', have turned out to be
houses of cards.

It is not at all a matter of being dogmatic on this point and

[13]Bernard Harrison. "Response to Sayers", *Radical Philosophy 8* (Summer, 1974),
pp. 38-9. Harrison illustrates this brilliantly in his "Fielding and the Moralists",
Radical Philosophy 6, (Winter, 1973). pp. 7-17.

[14]Bernard Harrison, "Response to Sayers", *Radical Philosophy 8* (Summer, 1974),
p. 38.

[15]Bernard Harrison, *op. cit.,* p. 38.

denying that there can be philosophical theories which reveal and systematically display substantive philosophical truths. Rather there can be, as F. C. Copleston shows, scepticism about whether a study of the history of the subject with its clash of doctrines shows anything like that. There can be, as well, a sense that the conceptions 'philosophical theory' and 'philosophical truth' are so problematic that it is not clear that anyone knows what he or she is asserting or denying when he or she claims to be making such an assertion or denial.

Lastly, and very minimally, there can be the kind of healthy scepticism that Michael Dummett brings to the fore in his discussion of Gellner. Gellner, like Sayers and many present day radical philosophers, attacked linguistic philosophy for limiting philosophy to a second-order activity. The sole task of philosophy, on such an account, was to give a correct or at least perspicacious account of the workings of our concepts so as to clear up the confusions that have arisen when we come to reflect on our concepts. Gellner's complaint was that such a limitation "excludes the possibility of a philosopher enunciating any substantive truths".[16] But what we want from philosophers in addition to conceptual analyses, Gellner goes on to remark, is just such substantive truths systematically accounted for and explained in a comprehensive philosophical theory. Instead of responding, as many linguistic philosophers might, by saying that what those people—the unspecified 'we'—want from philosophy is something that cannot be had, such an exacting philosopher as Dummett, writing in 1960, simply and sensibly remarks:

> I think that most Oxford philosophers would not be dogmatic on this point (thereby eliciting Gellner's accusations of evasiveness). They would not reject the possibility that philosophy could arrive at substantive truths: they would merely say that they do not see how this is to be done, and add that, while much past philosophy makes clear sense, understood as elucidation of concepts, they have not found a single convincing example of a philosophical demonstration of a substantive truth.[17]

[16]Ernest Gellner, "Logical Positivism and after or The Spurious Fox", *Universities Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 4 (August, 1957), pp. 348-64, *Words and Things* (London: Gollancz, 1959), and *The Devil in Modern Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), Chapters 2, 3 and 12.
[17]Michael Dummett, "Oxford Philosophy", *Blackfriars*, Vol. XLI (1960), p. 78.

Certain philosophical theologians thought they could demonstrate the existence of God. But it is, of course, highly problematical whether any philosophical theologian from Anselm to Plantiga has succeeded in that task. However, it need not, perhaps, be demonstration or proof that is required. It might well be enough by some movement of plausible reasoning to give plausible grounds for believing that substantive truths of the order of the existence of God or the correctness of central state materialism have been attained. That is to say, it would be enough to show that it is more reasonable to believe that God exists or that central state materialism is true, then it is to deny these things or to doubt that it is the case that God exists or central state materialism is true.

One of the things that it is interesting to note is that in two closely reasoned books in the domains of moral and social philosophy John Rawls and David Richards are both maintaining that they have given us at least plausible reasons for believing that even in these very problematical domains there are substantive truths—in some not very clearly specified sense of 'truth'—to be attained.[18] (But should we count them as substantive 'philosophical truths'?)

It is unclear whether, as carefully articulated as these accounts are, they will not turn out, as have so many efforts in the past, to be a house of cards or whether, against the dominant scepticism of our time in and over morals, we have good grounds for believing some substantive results have been attained or at least some guide posts have been erected, which would lead to such an attainment. If for no other reason, it is because such an issue is at issue that these accounts need a careful examination.[19]

III

In thinking about the work of Rawls in particular, it is important to keep in mind that he has been deeply influenced on foundational matters by his colleague Quine. In particular this means that he does not attach philosophic significance to the distinction (putative distinction) between the analytic and synthetic and he does not regard it as his proper philosophical

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[18]John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1971) and David A. J. Richards, *A Theory of Reasons for Action* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[19]Stuart Hampshire, "What is The Just Society?", *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (February 24, 1972), pp. 34-40.

task to give an analysis or an explication of moral and political
concepts. Making no sharp distinction—indeed regarding such
a distinction as artificial—between, on the one hand, the
analytical task of the explication of concepts and, on the other,
an examination of substantive matters, let alone regarding it
as the only proper philosophical task to do the former, Rawls
makes substantive claims, builds his account on contingent
matters of fact, appeals to scientific theories and takes it as
his task—and the task of moral philosophy—to give an
explanation of our moral capacities, including our capacities
to make and defend our considered judgements of rightness
and wrongness and goodness and badness. Where he gives
explanations, 'explanation', Rawls contends, has the same sense
that it has in science, the methodological approach is the same
and Rawls, preferred explanations are open, he claims, to tests
of a similar sort to what we have in the empirical sciences or
linguistics. At least this is his rather surprising official pro-
gramme.[20] (Often what a philosopher actually does is not what
he sets out to do or even what he thinks he is doing. It is not
only with the work of artists that self-deception runs high.)

Quine with his wholistic approach is well-known for refusing
to make a sharp division between science and philosophy and
for stressing that there is no domain or approach that is
distinctively philosophical. This seems to be Rawls' belief as
well and it means that he will approach the problems of moral
philosophy—indeed even define the problems and scope of
moral philosophy—rather differently than his predecessors did.

Many philosophers, less relativistic than Quine, but influenced
by his approach and in agreement with the attitudes I have
just articulated, take it as a working goal that philosophy need
not carry on as a matter of warring or mutually disinterested
schools or postures with essentially contested approaches, but
should in unity with science, and indeed as part of a 'scientific
conception of the world', theoretically elaborate such a con-
ception of the world. A ruling assumption here is that there
are no clearly demarcated divisions—let alone methodological
barriers—between scientific and philosophical activities.

With such an approach (J. J. C. Smart and David Armstrong

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[20]See also Rawls, presidential address to the American Philosophical Association,
"The Independence of Moral Theory", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American
Philosophical Association*, Vol. XLVIII (1974-75). For vigorous opposition to the
basic methodological moves here see R. M. Hare, "Rawls' Theory of Justice-1",
Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 23 (1973), pp. 144-147 and Peter Singer, "Sidgwick
and Reflective Equilibrium", *The Monist*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July, 1974), pp. 490-517.

are good examples) there is the confident belief—a belief
challenged by Kuhn and Feyerbend—that in science we have
clear progress and the accumulation, systematization and
sophistication of knowledge. Indeed we have in science, as
Armstrong puts it, a 'Book of Knowledge'. That, in looking at
the matter historically, there should be an invidious contrast
made here between philosophy and science is perfectly natural.
Yet we should recognize, as well, that in philosophy, though at
a slower and more vacilating rate, we also have had progress,
and that, as Armstrong confidently expresses it, with the
really extraordinary increase in philosophical talent over the
last thirty years, philosophy may well be on the way to a 'break
through' such as occurred in science at the beginning of the
Seventeenth Century.[21]

This last remark, also put forth earlier in our century by
pragmatists, will strike many, as it strikes me, as a little fanciful
and indeed Armstrong puts it forth hesitantly. The important
thing for us to fasten onto is not this last remark, but the
general claim that there can be a *scientific philosophy,* a system
of thought using rigorous argument (in many domains
mathematical logic) and not sharply separating itself off from
science by any rigid dichotomies, such as the analytic/synthetic
or the *a priori*/empirical, which can attain definite and
cumulative knowledge. Whether this can be achieved, as Rawls
and Richards believe it can, in the domains of moral and
political thought—a place where one might least expect it—is
something that deserves a careful but also a most sceptical
consideration. Indeed such a belief should have a sceptical
reception in any area of philosophy. But recent work in
philosophy makes it imperative that we soberly reconsider it.
It is indeed a long way from the turn taken by early linguistic
philosophy which sought to make philosophy something quite
distinct from science, even when, as with the logical empiricists,
philosophy is regarded as the handmaiden of science. Philos-
ophers such as Quine and Sellars, Armstrong and Smart, and
Rawls and Richards, practicing such a 'scientific philosophy',
have both linguistic philosophy (particularly as practiced by
Wittgenstein and Ryle) and traditional philosophy very much
in opposition to their methodological conception of their task.
Yet the rigor, systematic nature and boldness of their work
command attention and respect. Moreover, and closer to our

[21]D. M. Armstrong, "Continuity and Change in Philosophy", *Quadrant,* Vol. XVII,
No. 5-6 (September-December, 1973), pp. 19-23.

concerns, reflection on it and its methodological commitments, brings us back to our beginning, namely to the at least seemingly intractable puzzlement about the nature, scope and end of philosophy.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
AND
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY