

PARMENIDEAN SEMANTICS

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Many, if not all, philosophers have the idea that a (technical) philosophical investigation is a kind of investigation which yields information about the existence or nature of things. W. V. Quine has said: "The question what there is is a shared concern of philosophy and most other non-fiction genres."¹ G. E. Moore has stated that "the most important and interesting which philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the *whole* of the Universe. . . ."² It should be added that the philosopher's concern with what there is is not, it would seem, confined exclusively to questions about what exists in this, the actual, universe. According to some philosophical logicians, the introduction of "modal operators" and the use of terms called "rigid designators" extend the philosopher's (non-fictional) domain of discourse to include other possible universes, or worlds, and their contents. Modal operators, writes A. O. Rorty, can be thought of "as giving us information about the states of affairs across the range of possible worlds."³ Saul Kripke defines a "rigid designator" as a term which picks out one and the same individual across all possible worlds in which that individual exists.⁴

Wittgenstein has remarked that a philosophical problem is

¹ W. V. Quine, *Word and Object*. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1960, p. 275.

² G. E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953, pp. 1-2.

³ Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "Essential Possibilities in the Actual World," *The Review of Metaphysics* 25 (192): 607.

⁴ Saul A. Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman, eds., *Semantics of Natural Language*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972, pp. 269-270.

not an empirical one,⁵ which implies that the procedures used to conduct a scientific investigation, namely, observation and experimentation, are not relevant to a philosophical investigation. It is interesting to note in this connection that the title *British Empirical Philosophers*⁶ was given to one anthology of readings on the empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. This title, if indicative of the kind of investigation performed, e.g., by Hume in his purported attempt to discover necessary connections between causes and their effects, runs counter to Wittgenstein's remark. It suggests that Hume actually resorted to observation of cases in which causal relations are commonly thought to obtain but was in fact unable to find any instances of such a relation. Hume does, of course, represent his search as if it were an empirical one. In his own words:

... I consider in what objects necessity is commonly supposed to lie; and, finding that it is always ascribed to causes and effects, I turn my eyes to two objects supposed to be placed in the relation, and examine them in all the situations of which they are susceptible. I immediately perceive that they are *contiguous* in time and place, and that the object we call cause *precedes* the other we call effect. In no one instance can I go further, nor is it possible for me to discover any third relation between them.⁷

Bertrand Russell has heightened the impression that the philosophical disagreement over the existence of causal relations, relations such that if they existed would, to use a Humean phrase, "bind effects to their causes," is one to be settled by observation. He writes: "The controversy is... reduced to one of empirical fact. Do we, or do we not, sometimes perceive a relation which can be called causal? Hume

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1953, p. 47.

⁶ Edited by A. J. Ayer and Raymond Wrinch. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1952.

⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Bk. I, Pt. III, Sec. XIV, p. 155.

says no, his adversaries say yes, and it is not easy to see how evidence can be produced by either side.”⁸ The situation Russell reports is indeed a curious one if the dispute is really over what is or is not perceived. In an ordinary dispute over the existence of a certain phenomenon, such as a desert oasis, both sides can describe (or go on to explain) beforehand what would have to be observed to settle their difference of opinion. Their disagreement assumes that each knows, or at least has some idea of, what it would be like to encounter (as well as not encounter) the phenomenon in question, and hence what would constitute evidence for or against the claim in dispute. Russell’s words, however, suggest that those who take sides with Hume cannot describe what it would be like to find what they fail to find, an effect bound to its cause by necessity, and that those who profess to observe causal relations are nevertheless not in a position to say what it is they have perceived which the other side has somehow failed to perceive.

Hume, surprisingly enough, acknowledges this peculiar feature of the philosophical dispute over the presence of causation and in doing so calls our attention to its difference from an ordinary, factual disagreement. In the *Enquiry* he says: “We have no idea of this connection, nor even any distinct notion of what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour a conception of it.”⁹ It is plain that one cannot search for something about which he has no idea and that, consequently, whatever be the true nature of the dispute at hand it is not one to which empirical observation is in the least bit relevant. Hume could not have actually conducted the kind of investigation he describes himself as having made, since his failure to have any conception of what would be a necessary connection between natural events rules out as logically impossible any attempt to look for such connections.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1945, p. 669.

⁹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Sec. VII, Pt. II, p. 77.

The implication seems to be, in the case of Hume at least, that an empiricist philosopher is one who talks of the need to consult the senses in investigating reality but, like his rationalist counterpart, conducts his own investigations without ever leaving the domain of thought—ideas or concepts. A failure to have a conception of what it would be like for necessary connections to exist between causes and their effects was Hume's real ground for ruling causation (as opposed to mere constant conjunction) out of existence, not a careful scrutiny of actual cases in which we say one event brought about another. Whether explicitly or not, philosophers conduct their investigations in accordance with the rationalist notion that thought alone is capable of producing important information about the contents of the world, information of a kind which does not duplicate the findings of natural science but instead probes deeper into the innermost workings of phenomena.¹⁰ The problem is to find out how it is possible to learn about things without having to actually resort to things themselves, as does the scientist in his investigations of the world.

Over 2000 years ago Parmenides urged that we not "make an instrument of the blind eye, the echoing ear, and the tongue, but test by reason my contribution to the great debate."¹¹ The Parmenidean "test of reason" comes down to the method of *apriori* reasoning on concepts. The idea given expression in his injunction is that reasoning on concepts, unaided by sense-experience, is the appropriate procedure for determining the truth values of propositions about what there is. The Parmenidean "test of reason" turns out to be the actual procedure Hume used to decide the truth value of the proposition that causes are, of necessity, bound to their effects. And to all appearances, contemporary linguistic philosophers expect from an investigation of the ordinary use of language what

¹⁰ Quine, e.g., speaks of "a philosophical quest for the inner nature of reality." W. V. Quine, "Philosophical Progress in Language Theory," *Metaphilosophy* I (1970): 2.

¹¹ Quoted by Benjamin Farrington in *Greek Science*. New York: Penguin Books, 1944. Ch. IV.

traditional rationalists and empiricists alike have expected from the analysis of concepts, namely, ontological information. In the words of Hubert Schwyzer:

The appeal, in philosophy, to how we speak is meant, by those who practice it, to tell us something about how things really are. Some practitioners are perhaps somewhat warier than others about committing themselves in the material mode, but this is surely one mark whereby the philosopher distinguishes himself from other workers in the area of language. I do not think we would regard as a philosopher a man who investigated, say, the use of the words "know" and "believe," but flatly denied that he wished to tell us anything about knowledge and belief, and from whose work nothing at all about the nature of these things followed.¹²

The apparent belief that from a study only of how words are used we can obtain information about the things to which they apply has been characterized by C. D. Broad as "one of the strangest delusions that has ever flourished in academic circles."¹³ Schwyzer points out that this belief "is surely one mark whereby the philosopher distinguishes himself from other workers in the area of language." Conjoined, these two remarks imply that *only* philosophers suffer from this "strange delusion," and that, e.g., linguists, *qua* linguists, never fall victim to it. This requires an explanation. For what suggests itself is the idea that the linguistic philosopher alone deceives himself into thinking that words with an ordinary use have the magical power of creating their own denotations, and that we need not, therefore, look beyond the words themselves to determine whether there are actual things to which they apply. This kind of self-deception may be associated with the most

¹² Hubert Schwyzer, "Thought and Reality: The Metaphysics of Kant and Wittgenstein," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1973): 204.

¹³ C. D. Broad, "Philosophy and 'Common Sense,'" in Alice Ambrose and Morris Lazerowitz, eds., *G. E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970, p. 203.

natural construction to be placed on what the linguistic philosopher purports to be saying about usage, if we take his account of what he does at face value; but it certainly is not a realistic interpretation. No philosopher actually behaves as if he has such a belief. He, as well as anyone else, knows that witches are not brought into existence by virtue of the fact that the word "witch" has an ordinary use.

Antony Flew has singled out the so-called "Argument from the Paradigm Case" (abbreviated to APC) as "the clue to the whole business"¹⁴ of making a philosophical appeal to "how we speak" (to borrow Schwyzer's phrase). Ernest Gellner, who identifies the APC in one place as "superficially, a powerful argument"¹⁵ and later as "silly,"¹⁶ agrees nevertheless that this argument "is absolutely essential to Linguistic Philosophy: it pervades it and it is presupposed without qualification, denials notwithstanding."¹⁷ Here is Flew's account of the APC.

Crudely: if there is any word the meaning of which can be taught by reference to paradigm cases, then no argument whatever could ever prove that there are no cases whatever of whatever it is. Thus, since the meaning of "of his own free will" can be taught by reference to such paradigm cases as that in which a man, under no social pressure, marries the girl he wants to marry (how else *could* it be taught?): it cannot be right, on any grounds whatsoever, to say that no one *ever* acts of his own free will. For cases such as the paradigm, which must occur if the word is ever to be thus explained (and which certainly do in fact occur), are not in that case specimens which might have been wrongly identified: to the extent that the meaning of the expression is given in terms of

¹⁴ Antony Flew, "Philosophy and Language," in *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*. Ed. Antony Flew. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1956, p. 19.

¹⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*. With a Foreword by Bertrand Russell. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1979, p. 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

them they are, by definition, what "acting of one's own free will" is.¹⁸

Part of the difficulty in understanding Flew's account of the APC is his failure to make clear what is intended by the phrase "has a meaning which can be taught by reference to paradigm cases." Using his example, he seems to have this in mind: Since the meaning of "freely willed action" can be taught by pointing to actual situations to which this expression correctly applies, it follows that freely willed actions do occur. On this interpretation, what is supposedly *inferred* from a verbal premise about the meaning of "freely willed action" is already covertly slipped in the premise. The apparent verbal premise smuggles in the occurrence of what is to be demonstrated, namely, the existence of freely willed actions. The argument turns out to be a *petitio*, since the notion (in the premise) of pointing to actual cases to which "freely willed action" applies tautologically implies the occurrence of such actions. The inference involved reduces to the empty tautology that if there are freely willed actions then there are freely willed actions. This is not an inference which purportedly takes us from a fact of verbal usage to a fact of the world.

Russell has placed an interpretation on Flew's APC which is apparently quite different from the one just considered. He seems to interpret the specific argument by which Flew tries to explain the APC as an attempt to infer the existence of freely willed actions from a *verbal* fact. Thus Russell's interpretation is in accord with the idea, pointed out by Schwyzer, that linguistic philosophers wish to obtain ontological information from an examination confined to usage. Russell puts this forward as Flew's specific argument: "When a man marries without external compulsion, we may say, 'he did it of his own free will.' There is, therefore, a linguistically correct use of the words 'free will' and therefore there is free will."¹⁹

¹⁸ Flew, p. 19.

¹⁹ Russell, Foreword to *Words and Things*, p. xiii.

The notion of *having a linguistically correct use* in the premise of Russell's interpretation would seem to be one covering any expression which does not denote a logically impossible concept: that is, any expression which has a *descriptive* function in the language. The claim that "freely willed action" has a descriptive function (or use) states a verbal fact, since it makes a true statement about the use of "freely willed action" and does not assume the truth of the (non-verbal) statement that there are actual occurrences to which it applies. The truth value of a proposition which states a verbal fact is determined by an investigation that does not go beyond matters of "how we speak" to things or occurrences in the world. Since the fact that an expression has a descriptive use implies only the possibility of there being instances to which it applies, the truth value of the proposition that "freely willed action" has a descriptive use is one we determine independently of any investigation which directs us to actual cases in which actions are performed from free will.

Russell's interpretation, then, is not subject to the charge, as is the first interpretation, that the existence of freely willed actions is already built into the premise from which it is supposedly inferred. His interpretation would seem to be the only one that truly represents the premise from which a fact of the world is to be inferred as a verbal one, one to which only an investigation of how we speak (usage) is relevant. But how could Flew, or any other linguistic philosopher for that matter, imagine that, from the mere fact that "freely willed action" has a descriptive use in the language, we can come to learn that actions done from free will actually occur?

It is unreasonable to think that Flew is making the irresponsible guess (on Russell's interpretation) that because "freely willed action" has a descriptive use it *probably* has an actual application. There is no better reason for supposing that this is probably true than there is for saying that, because "winged horse" has a descriptive use, it is probably the case that winged horses exist. Construed as a probabilistic inferen-

ce, we are at a loss to understand how it could be seriously entertained as well as why the disagreement between Flew and his opponents²⁰ over the 'inference' was not immediately brought to an end. Both Flew and those who take exception to the 'inference' know that "winged horse" has a descriptive function in the language and that this fact alone does not lend any probability whatsoever to there being winged horses.

It might be thought that the "inference" is intended as a *deductive* one. If this is so, then it puts forward an entailment-claim: The proposition that "freely willed action" has a descriptive use *entails* the proposition that there are freely willed actions. The appropriate procedure for deciding the truth value of an entailment-claim is the Parmenidean "test of reason," the method of *apriori* reasoning. This may seem to explain why neither Flew nor his opponents bring to their dispute an examination which would either show that there is or is not a sufficient percentage of descriptive expressions having actual applications to warrant the claim that, since "freely willed action" has a descriptive function, it probably has also an actual application. An appeal to observation of cases cannot decide the truth value of an entailment-claim, but that it cannot needs to be supported in view of the fact that many philosophers have denied it.

The reason observation is not relevant to determining the truth value of an entailment-claim is that such a claim has no ontological or factual import. To see this, consider first what is involved in the claim (whether the claim is made explicitly or is merely implied) that a sentence of the form "Being ϕ *entails* being χ " expresses a true²¹ proposition. The

²⁰ In addition to Gellner's *Words and Things*, see the following critiques of Flew's APC: John Passmore, *Philosophical Reasoning*. New York: Scribners, 1961, p. 118. J. W. N. Watkins, "Farewell to the Paradigm-Case Argument," *Analysis* (December 1957). Watkins, "A Reply to Professor Flew's Comment," *Analysis* (December 1957).

²¹ The question whether an entailment-sentence states a *necessary* truth, when it states a truth, and the question whether "necessarily true" and "true" mean the same as applied to entailment propositions complicate matters and are of no concern here.

sentence "Being a vixen *entails* being a female fox" will do as an example.

It can be seen that the claim

- (a) The sentence "Being a vixen *entails* being a female fox" expresses a true proposition

is logically equivalent to the statement

- (b) The sentence "A vixen is a female fox" states a (logically) necessary truth.

Now (b) in turn strictly implies

- (c) The expression "a vixen but not a female fox" has no descriptive function in the language.

This is because neither (a) nor (b) can be true (as language is now used) unless the expression "a vixen but not a female fox" is prevented from describing anything.²² If it described anything it would have to describe a theoretical exception to the proposition that a vixen is a female fox, but the actual truth value of this proposition is its only possible one. Nothing counts as a theoretical exception to a proposition having only one possible truth value. The next thing to notice is that (c) strictly implies that the proposition

- (d) The expression "female fox" applies to whatever the word "vixen" applies to

states a *fact of usage*. A comparison of (d) with the proposition

²² The opposite view, that even phrases denoting logically impossible concepts have a descriptive function, reduces to the uninformative assertion that all phrases denoting concepts are phrases denoting concepts. To be the informative claim it looks to be, the view in question requires that there be a difference in the criteria governing the application of the expressions "has a descriptive function" and "denotes a concept." Such a difference is erased, however, by this view.

(e) The word "carnivore" applies to whatever the word "vixen" applies to will bring out the point.

What makes (e) a true proposition is the fact that the sentence "A vixen is a carnivore" states a true proposition. The proposition expressed by this sentence, however, has an actual truth value which is not its only possible truth value. Thus, although the sentence "A vixen is a carnivore" expresses a true proposition, the expression "a vixen but not a carnivore" describes a theoretical exception to the proposition that a vixen is a carnivore. This means that the (actual) truth value (e) happens to possess is completely determined by whether "a vixen but not a carnivore" describes what is actually the case. And whether it does so is not a matter to be decided by an investigation confined to how people speak but by one that requires our going to things in the world. In short, although (e) mentions the expressions "carnivore" and "vixen" and in this respect is like (d), it does not report a fact of usage.

To characterize both (d) and (e) as verbal is to say no more than that both mention words, and not to say in what way they differ in their verbal claims. (d) is made true by the use in the language of the terms mentioned, whereas (e) is made true, not by usage but by a "fact of the world" (Wittgenstein's expression). It is usage which prevents "vixen but not a female fox" from correctly applying to anything, actual or theoretical. It is nonlinguistic fact which prevents "vixen but not a carnivore" from applying to anything, and it does this without ruling out the *possibility* of its having an application. The latter expression does not lose its descriptive function in the language even though it has no actual denotation. The kind of investigation which is relevant to (d) is confined to an examination of language, in which an examination of things plays no role.

One who claims (or makes it evident he believes) that an entailment-sentence, one of the form "Being ϕ entails being Ψ ", expresses a true proposition implies that the corresponding sentence of the form "The expression ' Ψ ' applies to

whatever 'φ' applies to" states a fact of usage. The fact of usage is not, of course, what the entailment-sentence *expresses*; nevertheless it is this fact that we come to learn when we know that the entailment-sentence states a truth. To utter an entailment-sentence (with an understanding of what is being said) is to make an oblique claim about verbal usage. The expression "oblique claim" is intended to call attention to the fact that the proposition expressed by the corresponding sentence of the form "The expression 'Ψ' applies to whatever 'φ' applies to" is not the proposition the entailment-sentence expresses. What prevents identifying the verbal proposition with the proposition the entailment-sentence expresses is precisely the different idioms of speech in which, e.g., (1) "A vixen is a female fox" and (2) "The expression 'female fox' applies to whatever the word 'vixen' applies to" are formulated: Sentence (1) is in the nonverbal idiom in which we typically talk about things and (2) is in the verbal idiom in which words are explicitly mentioned. Because the difference in idioms is accompanied by a corresponding difference in the logical character of the proposition each expresses—(1) a necessary proposition and (2) a contingent proposition—we must beware of confusing the two and identifying the proposition (1) expresses with the proposition (2) expresses.

In determining the truth values of entailment claims we decide, unwittingly or not, whether the verbal propositions corresponding to them state facts of usage. Thus, if the entailment-sentence Russell attributes to Flew (namely, the sentence "The statement that 'freely willed action' has a descriptive use *entails* the statement that there are actions performed from free will") expresses a true proposition, then it will be a fact of usage that the corresponding verbal statement " 'freely willed action' has a descriptive use but no actual application" is without literal meaning—describes nothing. Of course, this is not a fact of usage, and we cannot seriously think that Flew somehow was led to suppose that it is.

In an effort to explain what looks to be a similar, blatant

misdescription of usage on the part of H. A. Prichard, who held the view that it is logically impossible to see physical bodies, Norman Malcolm says: "It is surprising that anyone should think . . . [e.g., that the phrase 'sees the moon' has no correct use]: but philosophical reasoning has a peculiar power to blind one to the obvious."²³ Later on he remarks that Prichard "was contending for something that is, beyond question, false,"²⁴ because "it is *not even a question* whether . . . [phrases like 'sees the moon'] have a correct use."²⁵ Malcolm does not explain what it is about philosophical reasoning that produces in people, who otherwise reveal a perfect familiarity with language in their everyday communication with others,²⁶ a blindness to what are facts of correct usage. Moore once said that certain views, such as F. H. Bradley's view that Time is unreal, are held only in a "philosophic moment."²⁷ This suggests the idea that a philosophical view which seems to be in direct conflict with what a philosopher otherwise *obviously* knows to be the case is not correctly interpreted when taken at face value. The implication would seem to be that such views are not, except in appearance only, inconsistent with any everyday belief a philosopher has about the world or language.

The philosophical claim, that if "freely willed action" has a descriptive use it has an actual application, can be recognized as a linguistic counterpart to an instance of the more general Parmenidean thesis that whatever is conceivable exists. The Parmenidean thesis would seem to dictate that the concept *freely willed action* is thinkable (or open to theoreti-

²³ Norman Malcolm, "George Edward Moore," *Knowledge and Certainty*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963, p. 180.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Malcolm agrees with this point. He says: "Undoubtedly Prichard used such forms of speech [as 'I see the dog,' 'I don't see him now,' etc.] . . . and would have acknowledged in various ways in practical life that they are correct forms of speech." *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁷ G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1922, p. 158.

cal exemplification) and so it has actual instances. The linguistic counterpart to this instance of the thesis results when the thesis is reformulated to accommodate talk about expressions whose literal meanings are said to be, by many philosophers, (logically possible) concepts these expressions denote. Wittgenstein,²⁸ as is well-known, suggests that we substitute the phrase "use of a term" for the phrase "meaning of a term," with the apparent idea in mind of dispelling the notion that the meaning of a term is an object which is grasped by the "mind's eye" and accompanies speech.

Parmenides tells us that the "test of reason" is the appropriate procedure for adjudicating a philosophical claim which purports to be about what there is. He would, accordingly, enjoin us to ignore the testimony of our senses, implying that it is not at all relevant, and bring only the "test of reason" to his thesis that it is impossible to think of what does not exist. The idea which clearly comes through is that his thesis is not, anymore than is the linguistic counterpart to one of its instances, empirical. It is not the empirical generalization that all thoughts are (as a matter of fact) thoughts of existing things or occurrences. Rather, his thesis would seem to be, on his own accounting, the entailment-claim that being a thought *entails* being the thought of an existing thing or occurrence.

Despite the fact that his words naturally invite this interpretation of his thesis, there is no better reason to suppose that Parmenides actually believed his thesis to be an entailment proposition than there is to think Flew actually imagined an entailment to be expressed by the words "The proposition that 'freely willed action' has a descriptive use *entails* the proposition that freely willed actions occur." It is just too bizarre (and we do not have any independent evidence) to suppose that Parmenides was actually of the opinion that, when translated into his native language, the sentence " 'thought of an existing thing' applies to whatever 'thought' applies to" states a verbal fact, and that "thought but not a thought of an existing

²⁸ Wittgenstein, p. 20.

thing” has no use to describe even a theoretically possible thought. We must attribute this opinion to him nevertheless, *if* we insist that the words “Whatever is conceivable exists” give expression to an entailment-claim as Parmenides uses them.

The only construction which would seem at all realistic to place on either the Parmenidean thesis or Flew’s apparent linguistic counterpart to one of its instances is one which (at least) satisfies this requirement. It must not force us to attribute to either philosopher wild beliefs about the world or a temporary blindness to usage. The interpretations according to which their respective positions are empirical beliefs about phenomena or misdescriptions of actual usage compel us to make such attributions. But the construction which makes their views out to be covertly presented, artificial changes in ordinary usage that are not introduced for everyday consideration avoids our having to do this. It also explains other features of these views which neither of the above two interpretations can. To take one example, it affords an explanation of how these views are able to create for us the lively impression of being about things (or occurrences). And it does so, unlike, say, the interpretation according to which these views are empirical, without our having to assume that the philosopher has the (conscious) magical belief, e.g., that thought creates the world of things, or what is the linguistic counterpart to this belief, that speaking brings things into existence. To see what the construction in question means concretely, consider an equivalent formulation of Flew’s apparent entailment-claim: the statement that ‘freely willed action’ has a descriptive use *entails* the statement that ‘freely willed action’ has a denotation.

The verbal proposition obliquely put forward by this entailment-claim is that the phrase “has a denotation” truly characterizes the expression “freely willed action” *in virtue of* the (verbal) fact that “has a descriptive use” characterizes this expression. Now it is not in virtue of a verbal fact that the

phrase "has a denotation" truly characterizes the expression "freely willed action," and the suggestion that Flew believes it is leads us back to the interpretation according to which he misreports actual usage. This demands that we accept the idea that a temporary blindness to facts of usage is responsible for Flew's philosophical position, a blindness for which it is difficult to provide a sensible explanation.

The alternative is to suppose that Flew *makes* his entailment-sentence express a truth by stretching the application of the phrase "has a denotation." Its use to characterize the expression "freely willed action" has been covertly altered to make the consequent of the entailment-sentence merely a non-verbal reformulation of the verbal fact stated in the antecedent. With the typical use of "has a denotation" as a backdrop, the entailment-sentence creates the semantic illusion that Flew has tried to deduce a fact of the world from a fact of usage.

The Parmenidean entailment-sentence, "Being a thought entails being the thought of an existing thing," is just the counterpart to this illusion. The phrase "thought of an existing thing" has been covertly stretched to cover what "thought" now covers. What is created as a result of this concealed change in the application of the phrase "thought of an existing thing", is the delusive impression of an attempt to deduce the existence of things from thought alone.

Flew, like his Parmenidean counterpart, is a semantic tailor. He covertly redesigns usage and produces for us the vivid but false notion that a linguistic philosopher is an ontological lexicographer: a lexicographer who tries to learn facts about the existence of things from an investigation of how we speak. Flew "solves" the age-old problem of freedom of the will by a Parmenidean extension of the term "has a denotation," not, as his words lead us to believe, by deducing the existence of freely willed actions from the verbal fact that "freely willed action" has a descriptive use.

Addendum

It would seem plain enough to anyone who takes the trouble to observe the behavior of philosophers that philosophy is saturated with Parmenideanism, in one or other of its forms. This offers the only explanation of how the philosopher is able to image that he is advancing claims about what there is, and that he is revealing new things about the world around him. O.K. Bouwsma has remarked on a mystifying difference between the nonphilosophical explorer of the world and his philosophical counterpart. The former *goes to* the things he reports on; but the philosopher, e.g., Spinoza, who plotted the scheme of things in the seclusion of his study, obtains his special knowledge of what exists in detachment from the world, as if the world itself was unnecessary to his investigation. Instead of examining the things he reports on, he gazes into concepts, i.e., the literal meaning of general words, or he scrutinizes the use of expressions in a language, or he does something which we normally think is equally unrelated to the task of obtaining knowledge of the existence or nature of things. All this, together with playing down the fact, which stubbornly resists dismissal, that philosophy cannot boast a single uncontroversial proposition, compels the conclusion that the aim of philosophy is not the pursuit of knowledge but a sham imitation of such a pursuit. Many important philosophers have expressed discontent with the condition of philosophy; but G. E. Moore, in a letter, has condemned philosophy in the words of someone who feels he has been betrayed by what he has held in the highest esteem. He wrote: "Philosophy is a terrible subject: the longer I go on with it, the more difficult it seems to say anything at all about it which is both true and worth saying. You can never feel that you have finished with any philosophical question whatever: got it finally right, so that you can pass on to something else."²⁹ It

²⁹ Quoted in Sotheby's announcement of the sale of the papers of G. E. Moore on 17th December 1979, from a set of letters to R. C. Trevelyan, R. Abbot and Bentwich between years 1896 and 1947.

is a strange thing that Moore never let such thoughts intrude themselves into his published writings. In Lazerowitz's many discussions with him not the smallest hint manifested itself. The impression is that a private scandal was not to be made public.

It is hard not to think that a subject which is practiced in the less well lighted part of the mind and requires blinding oneself to an unwelcome, irremovable fact will be accompanied by a weakened sense of reality. Consider Bertrand Russell's discussion of the philosophical theory of realms of existence:

It is argued, e.g., by Meinong, that we can speak about "the golden mountain," "the round square," and so on; we can make true propositions of which these are the subjects; hence they must have some kind of logical being. . . In such theories, it seems to me, there is a failure of that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in the most abstract studies. . . To say that unicorns have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in the imagination, is a most pitiful and paltry evasion. What exists in heraldry is not an animal, made of flesh and blood, moving and breathing of its own initiative. . . There is only one world, the "real" world. . . it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc. in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them an objective Hamlet. . . The sense of reality is vital in logic, and whoever juggles with it by pretending that Hamlet has another kind of reality is doing a disservice to thought. A robust sense of reality is very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other such pseudo-objects.³⁰

Moore's brother, Sturge Moore, described Yeats's talk as

³⁰ Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919, pp. 169-170.

“dream soaked,” which suggests that Yeats lacked a “robust sense of reality”—something that may well be an asset in a poet or artist. And we should believe the same thing of a person who was convinced that there actually are leprechauns or that Hamlet, the golden mountain, and the gods on Mt. Olympus really exist. The matter is altogether different with “the round square.” To imitate Spinoza, “Not even God can bring a round square, or greatest prime number, into existence,” to which might be added that neither could He conceive or imagine a round square or greatest prime. Unlike leprechauns and the golden mountain, which could, in principle, exist, what the terms “round square” and “greatest prime number” refer to cannot be apprehended: it makes no literal sense to say “The round square exists,” either in reality or in the imagination. Such a sentence as “A mathematical prodigy has imagined a round square or written down the greatest prime number” is devoid of intelligibility. A robust or weakened sense of reality can play no role in connection with what is logically impossible: a weakened sense of reality cannot make us accept a logically impossible concept, nor could a robust sense of reality make us reject it, the reason being that the phrase expressing it does not describe anything.

Against the notion that there are many universes of discourse Russell declared “There is only one world, the ‘real world’”; and he maintained that “What exists in heraldry is not an animal, made of flesh and blood, moving and breathing of its own initiative. What exists is a picture, or a description in words.” The implication of these words is clear. They are not directed against the empirical claim that in addition to horses and goats there are unicorns and winged serpents, but are directed to the nonempirical, philosophical proposition that unicorns exist in heraldry as “flesh and blood” creatures, that Hamlet is a fictitious character which is yet a real person, and that the gods peopling Mt. Olympus are living beings who nevertheless are mythical.

It needs no arguing to see that the concepts *heraldic flesh and blood unicorn, fictitious real person, mythological living*

god are logically impossible concepts like *greatest prime number* and *round square*. And to the acceptance or rejection of a logically impossible concept a sense of reality, strong or weak, is not relevant. But to say, as Russell says, that "A robust sense of reality is very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other pseudo-objects" is to surround the theory with an empirical air. We may well say that philosophers are practiced at making their theories appear to be about things, pseudo or otherwise.

The kind of work with nomenclature underlying the theory of domains of existence is by now familiar. It consists of a nonwork-a-day rearrangement of terminology which, when presented in the form of speech in which terms are used, not mentioned, creates the intriguing appearance of an elite science, one that dispenses with both observation and experiment. It will be remembered that St. Thomas called philosophy "the divine Science," which is to say, conducted by the mind alone.

The first thing that comes through regarding the semantic substructure on which the philosophical theory rests is the academic regrouping of logically impossible concepts, even when not explicitly so, with seemingly self-contradictory concepts. This is given recognition, whether conscious or not, by listing *the round square* with *the golden mountain, unicorns*, etc. To put the matter more accurately, terms which, because they stand for logically impossible concepts, have no descriptive use in the language, are artificially classified with terms that do have descriptive use, as well as with terms that function as names, e.g., "Hamlet," "Zeus." The second terminological innovation, essential to Parmenidean theory, is the introduction of a stretched, if linguistically idle, use of the term "has a denotation," which dictates its application to all expressions which are counted as having descriptive import. Together with the stretched use of the word "denotation," the phrase "there exist" (or "there are") is given a use which permits its occurrence in indicative sentences whose descriptive parts have logically impossible meanings.

RESUMEN

Algunas afirmaciones hechas por filósofos dan la impresión de que la investigación filosófica es similar a la investigación empírica; esto es, que los problemas filosóficos han de resolverse mediante hallazgos empíricos. Wittgenstein mantiene al respecto una opinión contraria.

Sin embargo, incluso los filósofos que parecen sostener el elemento empírico en la investigación filosófica (Hume y Russell serían ejemplos de esto) dan muestras de que una investigación empírica no es, al fin de cuentas, la indicada para dar razón de la problemática filosófica. La implicación parece ser, al menos en el caso de Hume, que un filósofo empirista es uno que habla de la necesidad de consultar los sentidos al investigar la realidad pero que, como su contraparte racionalista, conduce sus propias investigaciones sin abandonar jamás el dominio del pensamiento —ideas o conceptos. Si esto es así, entonces hay un problema: el de saber cómo es posible aprender algo acerca de las cosas sin tener que apelar, de hecho, a las cosas mismas, como lo hacen los hombres de ciencia en sus investigaciones.

Más de 2,000 años atrás, Parménides insistía en señalar que la razón, sin ayuda de los sentidos, era la única capaz de determinar la verdad o falsedad de enunciados acerca de lo que hay. De manera análoga, parece que los actuales filósofos del lenguaje esperan obtener información ontológica mediante el análisis del uso ordinario del lenguaje. Pero, ¿qué quiere decir esto? Los filósofos lingüistas no piensan, realmente, que la mera emisión de palabras tenga un efecto creador de denotaciones; no porque “bruja” tenga un uso ordinario habrán brujas.

Este artículo discute la posición de Flew que señala que el argumento del caso paradigmático es la clave acerca de por qué se apela filosóficamente al “cómo hablamos”. Pero es importante dar una interpretación adecuada de tal argumento, para poder dar razón de qué es lo que realmente muestra. La interpretación que se propone, para no tener que atribuir a los filósofos creencias extrañas acerca del mundo o una ceguera momentánea acerca de cuestiones de uso, es una que considera las posiciones filosóficas como proponiendo, de manera encubierta, cambios artificiales en el uso ordinario; cambios que no se introducen para un empleo cotidiano. La propuesta concreta de los autores al argumento de Flew, es que éste se propone como un enunciado de implicación formal (*entailment*); acerca de estos enunciados, para determinar su valor de verdad, *no* se requiere una investigación empírica, lo que los hace ser parmenídeos

en el sentido antes señalado. Por otra parte, en el enunciado impli-
cativo se propone la modificación en el significado (en el uso) de los
términos. Flew, como su contraparte parmenídea, es un sastre semán-
tico. De manera encubierta se diseña el uso y produce para nosotros
la noción, vívida, *pero falsa*, de que un filósofo lingüista es un lexi-
cógrafo ontológico; un lexicógrafo que intenta aprender hechos acer-
ca de la existencia de las cosas a partir de una investigación acerca
de cómo hablamos.

[J.A.R.]