PHILOSOPHY AND ILLUSION

MORRIS LAZEROWITZ
Smith College

> *"...concealed lighting can make things look very different from what they are. Why not pull the curtains and open the windows? The light will be better, the air will be fresher, and we shall be freer." John Wisdom,* The Structure of Metaphysics, *Foreword, p. xii.*
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> *"Once I had been able to tear aside an illusion that had previously dimmed my vision, once I had 'seen through' something, the insight thus gained was never lost." Ernest Jones,* Free Associations, Memoirs of a Psychoanalyst, *p. 63.*

Freud explained an illusion as a belief which has its origin primarily in a wish and maintains its hold on the mind through the strength of the wish rather than by virtue of evidence. When a wish is very strong the belief that it is or will be satisfied by the world springs to life and takes the form of a conviction, and any reason, however transparent and feeble, will serve to protect the belief from intellectual scrutiny. The wish may not, of course, be conscious, and it could, and in many cases does, introduce subjective distortions into reality by the mechanisms of transference and projection. Fantasy and illusion are the mental equivalents of a sanctuary, a refuge from a reality we feel we cannot face and so must deny. In fantasy and illusion we *make* the world accommodate itself to our wishes, but we do this at a price. We resort, in our waking life, to the mechanisms entering into the formation of dreams, and in doing this we place ourselves under the domination of a condition which weakens our sense of reality, which blocks our intelligence and impoverishes our powers of reasoning. Thomas Sturge

Moore described the poet Yeats' talk as "dream soaked", and to the degree to which our perceptions of reality are soaked with our illusions our ability to test reality is weakened. Spinoza said that a passion, i.e., an obssesion, is turned into an emotion, a need which has lost its compulsive strength and no longer dominates us, when we are able to form a distinct idea of it.[1] The implication is that understanding ourselves makes us freer.

The progress of civilization can in good part be described as the series of breakthroughs which have shattered the comforting illusions of mankind and brought in their wake emotional upheavals requiring great readjustments. The three most dramatic breakthroughs were those that destroyed the beliefs that the earth is the center of the universe, that man was God's special creation, and that consciousness characterizes all of our mental processes. Coming to terms with the ideas that our physical home is not the hub of existence, that we evolved from lower forms of life, and that we are strangers to the greater part of our own minds means giving up some of our infantile narcissism and facing up to fact. And this in turn can, and frequently does, lead to an increasing interest in our surroundings and our prizing understanding for its own sake as well as for its practical consequences.

The passing away of general illusions (an old expression for these is "innate ideas") which have their roots in wishes deep in our minds is a continuing process. As it turns out, there is good reason for thinking that philosophy, reasoned, polemical, technical philosophy, such as is contained in, for example, *The Critique of Pure Reason* and *Appearance and Reality*, is an illusion which has imprisoned the intelligence not only of ordinary intellectuals but of the greatest thinkers. There is considerable evidence for the claim that in

[1] *The Ethics*, Pt. V, "On the Power of the Understanding or of Human Freedom", Prop. III: "An emotion, which is a passion, ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof."

doing philosophy, i.e., in occupying ourselves with such questions as whether there are abstract entities or whether beauty is an objective quality of things, we have been doing one thing, on which we place small or no value, while believing ourselves to be doing another thing, on which we place great value. It is possible that the greatest philosophers, from Plato through Descartes, Kant, Hume, and Russell, to the contemporary linguistic analysts, have succeeded only in contributing chimeras to a chimerical subject, a subject which presents itself in the guise of a fundamental investigation of the world. Wittgenstein said that a philosophical problem arises when language goes on holiday;[2] and it is not unlikely that a philosophical theory is only the spurious imitation of a theory, that it is merely a piece of a re-edited terminology intended, not for practical adoption, but only for inner contemplation. The reality of technical philosophy, its substance, is, according to this iconoclastic hypothesis, concealed, artificially retailored language, the superimposition of different will-o'-the-wisp uses on the familiar language of common discourse. The illusion of philosophy is that its pronouncements state theories about the nature of things and that its arguments are pieces of evidence for or against the claimed truth-values of the theories. What is beginning to come through, in consequence of certain eccentric features of philosophy impressing themselves on us with increasing force, is that we have been the intellectual dupe of a linguistic deception of our own contrivance. The ancient Greek painter Parrhasius fooled a bird with his realistic painting of cherries; Xeuxis fooled Parrhasius with a realistic painting of curtains; and the philosopher deceives himself as well as his audience with his realistic imitation of a theory. It is natural to think of philosophy as standing somewhere between religion and the empirical sciences. Religion is concerned with the supernatural in relation to the natural, and its tenets rest on faith; whereas science is concerned with

[2] *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 19.

the natural, and its propositions are founded on experiment and observation. Philosophy is thought of as overlapping in subject-matter with both and relying on reason. No one but a metaphysical philosopher would be rash enough to say that science is an illusion.[3] As is well known, Freud declared religious beliefs to be illusions, sealed off from our scientific curiosity by a complex of psychical needs. And now some philosophical analysts have, in a non-quixotic spirit, put forward the unappealing thesis that philosophy consists of statements which, instead of being the pronouncements about phenomena they appear to be, introduce academically refurbished language. To illustrate, these philosophers maintain that instead of making a true or false claim about the world, the sentence "I alone am real" introduces a theatrically contracted use of the word "real". It is interesting to note in this connection that in the Smith College courses of study bulletin philosophy is grouped with religion and theatre under the general course requirements. One may wonder whether this grouping represents an intuitive perception into the character of philosophy. For the construction a small group of philosophical analysts places on philosophy represents it as a kind of linguistically staged theatre. This, for example, is how it represents the long argued Humean view that what we take to be productive causation is nothing more than constant conjunction. This view, instead of being interpreted as stating what connections in fact hold between classes of events, is taken to constitute a banishment of the word "cause" from our vocabulary, a banishment which is not carried out in our use of language for recording and conveying information.

It will be instructive to take a look at the metamorphosis of our conception of philosophy, the changes in our idea of what it is about and what it is capable of achieving. Plato gives us the exalted picture of the philosopher as the cosmic

[3] F. H. Bradley characterized science as self-contradictory.

seer, "the spectator of all time and all existence". Spinoza gives us the picture of the philosopher as the deductive analyst who classifies fundamental propositions into axioms and theorems covering all aspects of reality, and demonstrates the latter propositions from the former. He conceives himself to be giving a comprehensive and detailed accounting of what there is and how things hang together. Leibniz, by implication, delineates the philosopher as the mental penetrator into concepts, who by wholly analytical procedures is able to extract from them the answers to the ultimate questions about reality. F. H. Bradley gives us the lofty image of the philosopher as the profound thinker who speculates on "ultimate truth" and determines what is real and what is appearance by the power of thought. These philosophers, and many others in the metaphysical tradition, seem to have labored under the notion that by thinking alone it is possible to unlock the secrets of the world, determine its composition, and map the interrelations of its parts. The underlying idea is that philosophy is the highest science, "the Divine Science" according to Aquinas, which leads us "beyond the region of ordinary fact",[4] without requiring recourse to the procedures of the natural sciences.

The empiricist philosophers give us a more modest, perhaps more down to earth picture of the philosopher at work. Instead of describing him as the *a priori contemplator* of concepts they represent him as being primarily an analyst of experience, concerned to determine the sources of our ideas and the nature and limits of our knowledge of things. The empiricist tradition is complex and overlaps at a number of points with rationalism, and to try to define it would be a considerable undertaking. It seems, on the whole, to differ from rationalism in placing part of its reliance on sense-experience. Some of its professed findings appear to be the results of empirical investigations — so much so that a recent anthology of the British empiricist philosophers was publish-

[4] Bradley's phrase.

ed under the title, *The British Empirical Philosophers.*[5] The adjective "empirical" in the title suggests that the British empiricists' views were arrived at empirically —something which, to use G. E. Moore's famous expletive, is "a howler"— if one looks at what philosophers *do,* as against what *scientists* do. But the illusion that philosophy uses observation is there. Thus, according to Hume, what universally appear to be instances of a change being brought about in a thing by the action on it of another thing turn out on careful observation to be instances of independent, concurrent happenings. If, to use Hume's phrase, "I turn my eyes to two objects" which appear to stand in a causal relation to each other, e.g., a stationary billiard ball which to all appearances is made to move by another billiard ball colliding with it, the reality which comes to light is the concurrent but independent behavior of the two balls. What we see on looking closely at the billiard balls in action is like seeing at the same time a shooting star and a tree falling. Consider for a moment a different case. In connection with the view that our perception of things is indirect, G. E. Moore remarked that some philosophers have doubted that "there are any such things as sense-data";[6] and to remove their scepticism he invites them to look at the back of their hands, whereupon they will discover that they can "pick out" certain objects which are sense-data. And A. J. Ayer has argued that "all that our sense reveal to us are sense-data",[7] the ostensible implication being that this claim, like Moore's conclusion, is arrived at by some sort of empirical process of examining the elements in our perception of things. But it is easily seen that it is no more possible to pick out a sense-datum, when *all* that our senses reveal to us are sense-data, than it is possible to pick out a green thing in Emerald City.

[5] Edited by A. J. Ayer and Raymond Wrinch.

[6] "Defence of Common Sense", *Contemporary British Philosophy,* II, pp. 217-8.

[7] *Philosophical Essays,* p. 141.

Rationalism and empiricism are the two classical masks which philosophy has presented to thinkers, and they have been taken to be rival procedures with a common goal, namely, knowledge of reality. Our idea of philosophy began to change after G. E. Moore introduced his method of translation into the concrete. This method amounted to restating an abstractly formulated view in concrete, specific terms, which placed it in its proper, realistic setting. Thus, the general view that the existence of any relation implies an infinite regress of relations and hence that relations are unreal, when translated into the concrete, becomes the statement that there are no relational facts, that, concretely, nothing is to the left or right of anything, that no one is anyone's parent, etc. Such restatements of theories seemed to many philosophers to prick metaphysical bubbles, expose the theories as bizarre speculations which flout plainest fact. But what could not in time fail to impress itself in some way or other is the paradox involved in supposing that anyone, whose sense of reality in the normal pursuit of life was unimpaired, could actually hold, and continue to hold, views which are in such violent and obvious collision with fact. When it dawned on thinkers that whatever a philosophical theory was about it could not be about what Moore's translation into the concrete suggested it was, philosophy began to appear in a new light. This appearance acquired sharper outlines when the method of translation into the concrete was joined to Moore's increasing concern to examine the correct use in ordinary language of the words occurring in the expression of theories. The attention of philosophers began to shift more and more to language. In a metaphor, many philosophers began to look at their subject through linguistic spectacles, which is to say that something of the linguistic character of philosophy was beginning to show through its threadbare, if still colorful, traditional ontological dress. Thus, logical positivists —Carnap, Ayer, and others, set forth a two-fold claim (1) that the statements of metaphysics are not false but are,

instead, pieces of literal nonsense, and (2) that the proper task of philosophy is the analysis (and perhaps the "logical" reform) of language. The idea behind analytical lexicography is that it will lead eventually to "a true and comprehensive science of language"[8] which will realize Leibniz' ideal of a *characteristica universalis*. And the crude idea behind a *philosophical* Science of Language is that it will enable us to determine the truth-values of propositions about the world. One recently expressed claim for the philosophical investigation of language is, superficially, more modest than this. Prof. J. L. Austin has said: "When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena."[9] We sharpen our perception of things by looking more carefully at the *things*, not at words; and the idea that shows through is the old Leibnizian idea. According to Leibniz, "If we had it i.e., an ideal language we should be able to reason in metaphysics and morals in much the same way as in geometry and analysis." In his own quaint words, "If controversies were to arise there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants. For it would suffice to take their pencils in their hands, to sit down to their slates, and to say to each other (with a friend as witness, if they liked): Let us calculate." The idea, which is as old as philosophy[10] and is still current, is that it is possible to draw inferences about the world from the structure of language. The notion, which is shared with rationalism, is that the analysis of the meanings of words will yield knowledge of the nature of the objects denoted by the words.

[8] J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 180.
[9] *Philosophical Papers*, p. 130.
[10] See Plato's *Cratylus*.

It is likely that this notion links up with vestiges of magical thinking still in the depths of our minds.

Wittgenstein's work made the linguistic morphology of philosophy show through more distinctly than ever before. Many general remarks he made about philosophy, usually in arresting and imaginative language, and a good deal of his actual work, changed our idea of what it is and what it can do. And it also began to change our opinion of its value. To go back for a moment to Moore, in lectures he gave in London in 1910-11 he stated: "It seems to me that the most important and interesting thing that philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the *whole* of the Universe . . ."[11] In the same lectures he declared that philosophy is not concerned with "mere questions of words." At that time it seems to have been a gratuitous thing to say, unless it served to fend off a growing suspicion within himself. Several years later he was led to remark: "It seems to me very curious that language . . . should have grown up just as if it were expressly designed to mislead philosophers . . ."[12] Wittgenstein, in many of the things he said, represented the philosopher as being in some way or other concerned with "mere questions of words". The picture he gives us is that of a person whose intelligence has fallen under the bewitchment of language, someone who has got lost in its labyrinthian turnings and mistakes forms of expression for theories. The philosopher is, to use Wittgenstein's famous metaphor, a fly held captive in a fly bottle. The idea he gives us of the nature of philosophical problems is that they have their source in a confusion, the "confusion that considers a philosophical problem as though it concerned a fact of the world instead of a matter of expression."[13] In plain, unequivocal words he states: "Philosophical problems are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved,

[11] *Some Main Problems of Philosophy,* p. 1.
[12] *Philosophical Studies,* p. 217.
[13] From notes taken by M. Masterman and A. Ambrose in the intervals between dictation of *The Blue Book.*

rather, by looking into the workings of our language . . ."[14] But a philosophical problem which is "solved" by looking into the workings of language is *dissolved* by getting straight about usage. Much of Moore's work suggests that some philosophical views have their source in muddles of language. Wittgenstein's idea, or at least one of his ideas, is that all philosophical problems are the results of linguistic tangles and can be removed by our commanding "a clear view of the use of our words".[15] The philosopher thinks that philosophy will enable him to command a clear view of the universe; and Wittgenstein tells him that commanding a clear view of our use of words will show him that he has been suffering from a delusion induced by his misapprehension of the workings of language.

On Wittgenstein's account, or rather on one of his accounts, philosophers mistake an expression, because of its form, for a theory, and misconceive their objection to the expression to be an objection to a theory. And what will put them straight is correcting their mistaken idea about the actual use of the expression. To illustrate with an imaginary example, if someone were to insist that it is impossible to be *in* a mood, because a mood is not a kind of *thing*, like a house, the way to remove his mistaken notion that he was objecting to a factual proposition would be to make him see how the expression "in a mood" works in our language, how its use differs from that of an expression like "in a chamber". To revert to Wittgenstein's metaphor again, language is the philosopher's fly bottle, from which he can be set free only by being set right about the actual use of expressions. This kind of procedure is part of the program which some philosophers labeled "Therapeutic Positivism".

To some of us philosophy presented itself somewhat differently. It seemed that philosophers, despite their constant

[14] *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 47.
[15] *Ibid*, p. 49

debating, their critiques, and defences, did not wish to be freed from their captivity in fly bottle. Prof. John Wisdom wrote: "... in philosophy the atmosphere reminds me of a house the inmates of which are forever debating whether, when, and how they could, or should, go out, but never in fact do go out. Professor Lazerowitz would be sure to ask them whether they really *want* to go out. What an insufferable question!"[16] It seems clear that, whatever the nature of his fly bottle may be, the philosopher has no wish to leave it. Indeed, he gives every indication of thinking it a most desirable dwelling. A well-known American philosopher has even declared, with apparent satisfaction, that each philosopher has his own, private fly bottle. One is reminded of Mrs. Ladd-Franklin's letter to Bertrand Russell, in which she wrote that she was a solipsist and wondered why more people were not solipsists. A kind of abode she found desirable she was amiable enough to recommend to others. It is plain that the Platonist is content in his fly bottle and has no wish to be removed from it, nor does the nominalist from his; neither do the idealists, realists, sceptics, etc., etc., wish to be ousted from theirs. However much they may appear to try to free other philosophers from their fly bottles, they give every sign of wishing to remain unmolested in their own: a removal is an eviction, rather than a liberation.

A number of considerations went against the supposition that philosophical theories are linguistic statements about accepted usage which are mistaken for factual statements about the world. The same sort of considerations which show that a philosophical problem is not about a fact of the world also show that it is not about a fact of the language in which the problem is stated. The things which particularly demanded explanation were what might be called the *central enigmas of philosophy*, not only of metaphysics but of every part of philosophy, formal logic, for the most part, being

[16] Foreword to M. Lazerowitz' *The Structure of Metaphysics.*

an exception. These enigmas are the endlessness of philosophical disagreements, which after hundreds of years still hold no promise of final resolution, and the total absence of any established result, however minor. The explanation that forced itself on us was not that a philosopher misconstrues language, but that under the influence of likenesses and unlikenesses in the functioning of terminology he unconsciously *changes* language. The emendations he effects are presented in a form of speech which produces the vivid, if delusive, impression that he is announcing a theory about a feature of reality. On this account, we can understand why recourse to an examination of non-linguistic fact would not be relevant to the solution of a philosophical problem. The problem is not about matter of fact. This explains why, for example, the questions as to whether motion is real and whether abstract entities exist could be argued endlessly, with no one's experience being different from anyone else's. And we can also understand why recourse to an examination of linguistic usage, and why getting a clear view of the workings of our language, does not succeed in settling a disagreement between philosophers. On the present account, actual usage is no more in question than matter of non-linguistic fact. That is why calling attention to the use of the word "motion" to describe states of things does not resolve the dispute over the reality of motion. The picture that comes into focus of the nature of philosophical activity is that of a kind of verbal theatre, the actors in which are artfully trumped up expressions and the backdrop of which is ordinary, unaltered language. The reality behind the intriguing intellectual illusion that the statements of philosophy reveal cosmic truths is artificially stretched or contracted or rejected terminology.

Now, one thing which conspicuously stood in need of explanation is the philosopher's attachment to his position, an attachment which is charged with emotion. The explanation of this was found with the help of psychoanalytic con-

cepts. The general explanation is that in addition to the intellectual illusions the philosopher engineers with his manipulation of terminology his utterances give expression to unconscious fantasies. As is well known, an unconscious fantasy, like a dream, functions as the substitutive gratification of a wish, and cannot easily be given up. And it seems hardly a speculation to think that it is the need for his fantasy which makes a philosopher dupe to his own verbal legerdemain; it is this need which holds him captive in his fly bottle.

To sum up, a philosophical theory may be described as a structure in depth, whose major part lies below the surface of his conscious awareness, where it is safe from the prying eye of scientific curiosity. One part of the structure is a statement containing an ordinary term which has undergone a non-workaday alteration, that is, an expression which is not recognized as a piece of academically retailored language. Another part is a conscious but false impression, created by the statement: this is that the statement makes a claim about a phenomenon. And still another component of the structure is a fantasy, or cluster of fantasies, which the statement expresses for the unconscious region of the mind.

By means of an appropriately altered piece of language the philosopher creates an illusion for the conscious part of the mind, the illusion of discovering a truth about ultimate reality, and at the same time he effects an inner consolation for himself. Ch.I, verse 1 of the Gospel according to St. John reads, "In the beginning was the Word"; and it can indeed be said that the Word has lost none of its ancient, magical power. The philosopher, the Titan of the Word, knows how to bemuse his own intellect, as well as ours, by means of the magic which is hidden in language. Philosophy, we may say, is the bewitchment of the mind by the art of hidden gerrymandering with terminology.

To illustrate the view in a concrete way, consider Hume's celebrated 'discovery' that causation is nothing more than the constant conjunction of independent occurrences. This

claimed finding is represented as being the result of an empirical examination of an omnipresent phenomenon everyone takes for granted. In language that is appropriate to a scientific investigation, he invites us to "turn our eyes" to occurrences which, to all appearances, are instances of causation and to look with proper care, whereupon we shall satisfy ourselves that we have been taking a mirage for the real thing. It turns out, however, that the mirage is one of words and not of the world. This can be seen from the following consideration.

In general, anyone who says, "x is not really φ; it only appears to be", implies that he knows what it would be like for x really to be φ. Read literally, his words imply that he can say what it is that x lacks, which if possessed by x would make it φ. And in saying that x only appears to have φ he implies that the appearance pictures x as having what it in fact lacks. Further, he implies that he can *identify* what the appearance pictures that is not to be found in the reality. If he is unable to do this, then whatever it is that he wishes to convey by his words, he is not telling us that x only appears to our senses to be φ. He is using an ordinary form of speech to say something else than what his words naturally suggest. And, indeed, it turns out that a philosopher is not using language in the ordinary way when he declares, for example, "Water is not heated by the fire; it only appears to be. If we use our eyes with care we shall see that all that really happens is that water heats *of itself*, independently of the presence of fire." For if we question him, we find that he cannot describe a circumstance which, if it obtained, would make him grant that fire is the cause of the water heating, that it heats water in reality and not only in appearance. He cannot, in general, say what is required to make an occurrence one in which a causal transaction takes place, and therefore cannot say what the feature is whose absence makes him deny that causation occurs. This means that he cannot *identify* anything *in the appearance* of

a causal transaction which pictures a possible reality. Externally, the philosopher's talk is the talk of appearance and reality, but the fact is that he only pantomimes such talk. His use of language, whether mistaken or contrived, is not to describe a phenomenon.

Once it is seen that the philosopher is not using his words to express an experiential proposition, viz., the words, "Nothing is the productive cause of anything else; causation is no more than the constant conjunction of independent occurrences", it is natural to think he is using them to make a statement about causal terminology. Construed as verbal in import, they are to the following effect: The phrase "x is the cause of y" appears to mean "y is brought about by x", but in fact the phrase is used in the language to mean "y regularly occurs with x". The causal sceptic seem to be making a three-fold claim:

(1) "x is cause of y" does not mean "the occurrence of y depends on the occurrence of x",

(2) "dependent occurrence" has no descriptive use in the language,

(3) "x is cause of y" means "y regularly occurs with x".

Taking the sceptic to be stating the accepted meanings of terminology, he strikes us as somehow having got a wrong notion about the use of causal language. He appears to have the queer idea that "causation" *means* "constant fortuitous conjunction". But his use of language for the everyday purpose of communication makes it evident that he knows better, that he is aware of the linguistic fact that "x is cause of y" does not mean "y regularly but accidentaly occurs with x". It is unplausible to suppose him to be laboring under a mere verbal misapprehension, a misapprehension which does not intrude itself into his normal use of language and from which he cannot be moved by our calling his psychical attention to it. If we look closely at his putative three-fold claim, a peculiarity emerges which suggests the

conclusion that he is not misdescribing language, but rather is in some way changing it. It is easy to see that the expression "independent occurrences" has a use in ordinary speech only because "dependent occurrences" is an expression which describes actual or conceivable states of affairs. If "dependent occurrences" were deprived of its use, without some sort of linguistic reparation being made, the expression "independent occurrences" would lose its use: It would no longer have its descriptive function in the language. To think that "dependent"has no application to occurrences commits one to thinking that the descriptive force of "independent occurrences" is identical with that of "occurrences". For if "dependent" did not apply to occurrences, "independent" would not serve to distinguish between kinds of occurrences and would not have its present place in the language. In Emerald City where the only color is green there would be no word for green; for the word "green" has a use only when it serves to distinguish amongst colors, and it does this kind of work only if provision is made in the language for its use in expressions of the form "this is not green".

It is unnecessary to go into further reasons for thinking that the causal sceptic is not making a mistake about the use of language. The unavoidable alternative is that he has unwittingly re-edited language. To put the matter shortly, what has happened is that the word "independent" (Hume's term is "loose and separate") has been artificially stretched, by *fiat*, so as to apply to all occurrences, dependent as well as independent. Parenthetically, it is to be remarked that the everyday term remains unchanged and retains even for the philosopher its ordinary use in our language. No philosopher is a reformer of language. He introduces us to the stretched use of the word only in order to create the illusion that he is presenting a theory about the way the world works. This seems to be the correct conclusion to draw from the fact that he is *not* making a mistake about language and that the use he makes of language does give rise to the idea that he is

pronouncing a view about the way things happen. Undoubtedly there is more to the view than has been brought out here, more than just a piece of academically changed language and an illusion that is bound up with it. It is a creation of the mind and must, we are compelled to think, serve a psychical need. Like a dream, a painting, and a poem it undoubtedly caters to an unconscious widh. We may permit ourselves a guess at one of the fantasies linked with causal scepticism. When I was a student one of my philosophy professors declared in a classroom lecture that if he were the lawyer for the defence in a murder trial he would bring forward Hume's arguments against the proposition that one thing can by an action produce a change in another thing. No one, of course, except a professor in a "philosophic moment", would dream of using Hume's arguments in a court of law, but in dreams things work differently. In a dream, or in unconscious fantasy, Hume's arguments may well play the role of a defence against an inner accusation.

Let us consider another philosophical position, one which belongs to the rationalist rather than the empiricist tradition: the position, namely, that relations are unreal, or to express it in the words of its most famous advocate, "our experience, where relational, is not true".[17] The claim that whatever involves relations is unreal leads to the mystical conclusion that the world of space and time is an "impossible illusion"[18] and that ultimate reality is an undifferentiated something which cannot adequately be grasped in thought. In F. H. Bradley's words, "...a relational way of thought —any one that moves by the machinery of terms and relations— must give appearance and not truth... Our intellect, then, has been condemned to confusion and bankruptcy, and the reality has been left outside uncomprehended."[19] Briefly put, the argument for this view, whose profound appeal can be explained only by supposing that it connects up with

[17] F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality,* p. 34.
[18] *Ibid,* p. 30.
[19] *Ibid,* pp. 33-4.

material in the depths of the mind, goes as follows. Where there is a plurality of terms, i.e., a number of things or a thing and its properties or a collection of properties, there are relations between them. Now a relation is *something,* not nothing, and is, therefore, itself a term. Hence a relation, R, between terms is a term which must be related by a new relation, R′, to its terms, etc., without possible end. Thus, a plurality of terms implies relations between the terms, which nevertheless cannot relate them. For a relation to hold, an infinite regress of relations would have to be consummated; and this implies a final relation, i.e., a relation that is a term but is not itself related to its terms. This is self-contradictory; therefore, whatever involves relations is unreal.

Different philosophers have reacted differently to this view, and one important philosopher even rejected it with the air of dismissing a mistake too gross and transparent to deserve serious consideration. Bradley and his followers were, of course, not stupid, nor incapable of recognizing a mistake once it was pointed out to them. Indeed, Bradley was a subtle and original metaphysical thinker; and anyone who rejects his argument as grossly mistaken has on his hands the task of explaining why the mistake is not, from the beginning, plain to those who accept the argument, and why they cannot be made to see that the 'mistake' *is* a mistake. If he does not feel the need to seek for an explanation, or is satisfied with one that is overeasy or frivolous, it only means that he is playing the same kind of game as his opponent, a language game in which a holiday use of an expression is in contest. As in the causation example, the putative mistake is not transparent to the philosopher who makes it, because it is *not* a mistake. It is a non-progmatic re-editing of terminology. And it is rejected as a mistake by the critic (who does nothing more scientific than resist a verbal innovation) because with the language of truth and falsity he, like his adversary, helps conceal the nature of the philosophical controversy.

The philosophical sentence "Relational wholes are self-contradictory and exist only as delusive appearances", unlike the non-philosophical sentence "The sun does not really revolve around the earth, it only appears to do so", is not used to state a factual claim about what exists and what does not exist. Wittgenstein said that "we could not *say* of an 'unlogical' world how it would look";[20] and it requires no complicated reasoning to see that there could not be the sensible appearance of a self-contradictory state of affairs. If there could be, we should be able to say how an 'unlogical' world would look: *it would look like its appearance.* But there cannot be a self-contradictory appearance any more than there can be a self-contradictory reality. This is particularly easy to see in the present case: if being relational is self-contradictory, then the appearance of a relational whole will itself involve differentiation and relations and be self-contradictory. It will be prevented from existing by what prevents the corresponding reality from existing. But the philosopher who says "Relational states of affairs are self-contradictory and exist only in appearance" does not deny, nor does he wish to deny, the existence of the 'appearances'. His words are not intended to go against any fact.

Neither it is correct to take the metaphysician of the non-relational one as stating, in an oblique idiom, a proposition about the intelligible use of relation-terminology. Contrary to the construction so-called philosophers of ordinary language might place on his declaration, the import of his words cannot with any plausibility be interpreted as declaring that such terms as "between", "younger than", and "to the left of" have no use in the language and that such expressions as "Saturn is between the earth and Jupiter" and "Heidegger is younger than Bertrand Russell" are devoid of descriptive sense. For he uses relation-words correctly in his own talk and responds with understanding to their use by others. There is no doubt that if he were asked whether the sentence

[20] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* 3.031.

"Heidegger is younger than Russell" makes descriptive sense, he would react with surprise that such a question should be put to him and would say that of course it does. This shows that his philosophical utterance is not to be construed as making a factual claim about the actual use of terminology.

If we look with care at the argument for the statement that relations imply infinite regresses and hence are unreal, we can, I think, dispel enough of the verbal fog to see what the view comes to. We shall be able to see how a contradiction is *imported* into terminology that is free from contradiction, and how the delusive impression is created that a proposition is being advanced which denies the reality of ubiquitous features of the world. The gist of the argument is that the existence of two or more terms implies a relation between them, in Bradley's words, "if there is any difference, then that implies a relation between them";[21] but a relation is *something* and hence is itself a term which must be related to its terms. Thus an infinite regress is generated. It should be noticed that the ordinary use of the word "relation" does not dictate the application of the word "related" to whatever the phrase "different from or other than" applies to; it is intelligible English to say, in some cases, that x and y bear no relation to each other. The statement that difference implies a relation has to be understood as introducing an artificially stretched use of the term "related", a use in which it applies to whatever the term "different from" applies to. The central point of the argument, however, is that relations, since they are not nothing, count as terms, or to put it less ambiguously, count as *things* or *objects*. The metaphysical claim that relations are objects, like the more familiar Platonic theory that properties of things are themselves kinds of things, abstract entities, requires extended explanation.[22] Without going into this here, it will be realized that the rules

[21] *Appearance and Reality*, p. 29.
[22] See "The Existence of Universals" in *The Structure of Metaphysics*.

for the use of "object" do not stipulate the application of "object" to whatever "relation" denotes: e.g., the sentence "Betweenness is an object" does not exhibit a correct use of the word "object". The philosophical assertion that relations are things, instead of being based on a mistaken idea as to the actual use of "thing" or "object", has to be construed as introducing an academically stretched use of the word, a use in which it applies to what is denoted by relation-terms. To argue that relations are not *nothing* is a way of pointing out a similarity between relation-terms and *substantives*, which is, that relation-words can be changed into abstract nouns, "between" into "betweenness", etc.; and this similarity is used to justify reclassifying relation-terms with substantives. The philosophical statement, "Relation-expressions are substantives", when formulated in the non-verbal mode of speech, becomes "Relation are things (or objects)". It can now be seen how the regress of relations derives from a stretched use of "relation" and stretched use of "thing": the expression "stand to each other in a relation" is made, by *fiat*, to apply to whatever the expression "different things" applies to, and the word "thing", or "term", is made, by *fiat*, substitutable for "relation" and relation-expressions. In this way a contradictory regress is manufactured. The ordinary use of "relation" and "term" involves no regress of relations which require relations in order to relate. The *altered* use of these terms does involve such a contradictory regress; and there is no doubt that the alterations in terminology were made (unconsciously, in the way in which dreams are made) for the purpose of manufacturing the contradiction. The contradiction, in turn, is used to justify a further retailoring of terminology: the word "appearance" is stretched so that it applies, in a purely formal and empty way, to phenomena to which "relational" applies. The philosophical sentence "Whatever involves relations is unreal and exists only as appearance" gives rise to the idea that it is used to declare the insubstantiality of states of affairs everyone takes

for granted, but in fact it presents an academically contracted application of "real" and a stretched use of "appearance". An *ersatz* contradiction is made to justify a non-workaday re-editing of "real" and "appearance".

The metaphysical game that is being played with the words "relation", "thing", "appearance", "real" consists of concealed maneuvering with terminology which, because of the form of speech in which the game is played, creates the vivid illusion that a remarkable claim about phenomena is being argued for. And it is hard to think that the game is played solely for the intellectual effect it produces and that is does not link up with deeper material in the mind. It seems, indeed, reasonable to think that the game with terminology functions for the philosopher in a special way. The overtones of the view and the atmosphere surrounding it make it likely that with his renovated terminology the philosopher expresses his emotional rejection of the world. The sentence, "Relational states of affairs are unreal", may well have the underlying meaning: the world for me is unimportant and I wish to detach myself from it. When talk about the unreality of relations is joined with mystifying talk about "unbroken, simple feeling", it is permissible to guess that the words, "the relational is mere appearance, only the non-relational, i.e., 'unbroken, simple feeling', is real" express the echo of a wish to return to an early state in our pre-history. The state described so poetically by mystics and metaphysicians has been explained in the following passage in *The Need to Believe, The Psychology of Religion*:[23]

> "The state that is attained by a mystic is a state of euphoria or ecstasy in which the outer world seems to vanish and the self to stretch out, lose its boundaries, and engulf everything. This is simultaneously a proyection of the self into the whole environment and an introjection of the whole environment into the self. It is a return to what some

[23] Mortimer Ostow and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, p. 122.

psychoanalysts call the 'oceanic reunion', the world of the fed, satisfied baby on the delicious edge of sleep. All one's pleasure impulses are withdrawn from external objects and located inside oneself. And the variegated responses of the mind are narrowed and merged until they approximate the semi-conscious, slumbrous, undifferentiated pleasure of the baby immersed in the uniform ocean of his feeling."

RESUMEN

Freud explicaba una ilusión como una creencia originada en un deseo y que se sostiene por la fuerza de ese deseo y no por basarse en evidencia. Si el deseo es muy vigoroso, cualquier razón, por tenue que sea, servirá para resguardarlo. En las ilusiones hacemos que el mundo se acomode a nuestros deseos; para ello pagamos un precio: introducimos en la vida consciente el mecanismo de la formación de los sueños y obstaculizamos el uso de nuestra inteligencia y de nuestro sentido de la realidad. El progreso de la civilización consiste, en parte, en sacudir las ilusiones confortantes de la humanidad y enfrentarnos a la realidad. Y hay razones para pensar que la filosofía es una de esas ilusiones.

Es posible que la filosofía sólo haya contribuido a establecer quimeras, presentándolas bajo el disfraz de una investigación fundamental sobre el mundo. Una teoría filosófica podría ser, en verdad, la imitación espúrea de una teoría explicativa. Según esta hipótesis iconoclasta, la filosofía consistiría en la formulación de un lenguaje oscuro y artificial sobreimpuesto al lenguaje ordinario. Su carácter ilusorio estribaría en presentarse como teoría sobre la naturaleza de las cosas, cuando en verdad es sólo una imitación de teoría expresada en lenguaje engañoso.

Es interesante observar los cambios que ha sufrido el concepto de filosofía. Platón, Spinoza, Leibniz, Bradley y otros muchos parecían creer en la posibilidad de descubrir secretos del mundo y determinar su composición, por sólo el pensamiento. La filosofía sería la ciencia del pensar que nos lleva más allá de los hechos. La idea de los filósofos empiristas era, en cambio, más modesta y terrenal. El filósofo se ocuparía principalmente de analizar la experiencia y de determinar la naturaleza y límites de nuestro conocimiento. Muchos de los pretendidos hallazgos de esta corriente filósofica parecen resultar de investigaciones empíricas; de allí la ilusión de que el filósofo lleva a cabo observaciones.

Racionalismo y empirismo son las dos máscaras clásicas con que la filosofía se ha presentado como un conocimiento de la realidad. Nuestra idea de la filosofía empezó a cambiar con la introducción por G. E. Moore del método de traducir a términos concretos cualquier concepción formulada de modo abstracto. La atención de los filósofos empezó a dirigirse al lenguaje. Así, el positivismo lógico sostuvo que los enunciados de la metafísica son sin-sentidos litera-

les y que la tarea propia del filósofo consiste en el análisis del lenguaje. La idea que está detrás del programa analítico es conducir eventualmente a una ciencia del lenguaje que realizara el ideal leibniziano de una *characteristica universalis*. Según Leibniz, si poseyéramos un lenguaje ideal podríamos razonar en metafísica y en moral de parecida manera que en geometría y en análisis, eliminando las controversias. La idea es que podemos derivar inferencias sobre el mundo a partir de la estructura de nuestro lenguaje y que el análisis del sentido de las palabras suministrará un conocimiento sobre la naturaleza de los objetos denotados por ellas. Es plausible que esta noción se enlace con vestigios de pensamiento mágico acerca del poder del lenguaje, aún presentes en las honduras de nuestra mente.

La obra de Wittgenstein aclaró, como nunca antes, la morfología lingüística de la filosofía. Wittgenstein nos presentaba al filósofo como alguien preso del hechizo del lenguaje, perdido en el laberinto de las formas de expresión de las teorías. Los problemas filosóficos tendrían su fuente en una confusión: considerar que se refieren a un hecho del mundo, cuando atañen a la expresión. Un problema filosófico se disuelve al clarificar el uso del lenguaje. El lenguaje es la "botella caza-moscas" de la que sólo puede escapar el filósofo percatándose del uso correcto de las expresiones.

A algunos de nosotros la filosofía se nos presentó de otra manera. Parecía que los filósofos no quisieran liberarse de su cautiverio en el lenguaje. Es patente que el platónico, el nominalista, el idealista, etc., por más que intenten liberar a los otros filósofos de sus "botellas caza-moscas," parecen desear quedarse en la suya propia.

Muchas consideraciones abogan contra la idea de que las teorías filosóficas sean enunciados lingüísticos que se toman erróneamente por enunciados sobre el mundo. Las mismas consideraciones que muestran que un problema filosófico no versa sobre hechos del mundo, muestran también que no versan sobre un hecho del lenguaje en que se enuncia el problema. La explicación que se nos impuso no es que el filósofo mal interprete el lenguaje, sino que inconscientemente *cambia* el lenguaje. Las modificaciones que introduce en él, se presentan en una forma tal, que da la impresión de enunciar una teoría sobre la realidad. Así podemos entender por qué un examen de hechos no lingüísticos es irrelevante a la solución de un problema filosófico; pero también podemos comprender por qué un examen de los usos efectivos del lenguaje tampoco acierta a poner de acuerdo a los filósofos. Ni el uso efectivo del lenguaje ni el examen de los hechos son relevantes para resolver una cuestión filosófica.

Es menester explicar el apego del filósofo a su posición, lo cual puede lograrse con la ayuda de conceptos psicoanalíticos. Esa explicación general es la siguiente: además de las ilusiones intelectuales, el filosófo logra dar expresión a fantasías inconscientes gracias a su manipulación de la terminología. Una fantasía inconsciente funciona como la gratificación sustituta de un deseo; y parece ser la necesidad de su fantasía la que mantiene al filósofo cautivo en su trampa.

En suma, una teoría filosófica puede describirse como una estructura cuya mayor parte permanece bajo la superficie de la conciencia. Una parte de la estructura es un enunciado que contiene un término del lenguaje ordinario que ha sufrido una alteración insólita. Otra parte es la impresión, consciente pero errónea, creada por el enunciado, de que habla de un fenómeno. Otro componente, en fin, es una fantasía inconsciente expresada por el enunciado. Mediante una pieza alterada de lenguaje, el filósofo crea la ilusión de descubrir una verdad sobre la realidad última y, a la vez, se otorga un íntimo consuelo. La filosofía, podríamos decir, es el hechizo de la mente por el arte de tergiversar veladamente la terminología.

Puede servir de ilustración el descubrimiento de Hume de que la causación no es sino la conjunción constante de ocurrencias independientes. Éste se presenta como resultado de un examen empírico. Sin embargo, el miraje se debe a las palabras, no al mundo. Quien diga "x no es realmente φ, sino sólo lo parece", implica, por un lado, que sabe cómo sería x de ser realmente φ y, por otro, que puede identificar qué es lo que simula la apariencia φ. Si no puede hacer esto, no está diciendo lo que pretende. Para decir que x sólo parece ser causa de y, debería poder describir una ocurrencia que garantizara que x fuera realmente causa de y; esto no puede hacerlo.

Cuando vemos, así, que el filósofo no puede usar las palabras para expresar una proposición de experiencia, es natural pensar que las está usando para referirse al lenguaje. Estaría diciendo: 'la frase "*x es causa de y*" parece decir "y es producido por (depende de) x", pero significa en verdad "y ocurre regularmente junto con x" '. El filósofo parecería tener la curiosa idea de que 'causación' significa 'conjunción constante y fortuita'. Con todo, su uso del lenguaje ordinario nos hace ver que, en realidad, no está sujeto a ese engaño meramente verbal. No está describiendo el lenguaje erróneamente, está, en cierto modo, cambiándolo.

'Ocurrencias independientes' sólo tiene uso en el lenguaje ordinario si 'ocurrencias dependientes' describe una situación real o posible, pero si ésta última expresión no describe en realidad nada

—como pretendería el filósofo— también 'ocurrencias independientes' perdería su uso. Lo que ha pasado con el filósofo es que ha extendido, por un *fiat*, el uso de la palabra 'independiente', para aplicarla a todas las ocurrencias, dependientes o independientes. Pero el significado ordinario de los términos subsiste. El filósofo no reforma el lenguaje, sólo introduce un uso ampliado de la palabra para crear la ilusión de estar presentando una teoría sobre el mundo. Y ésta debe servir a una necesidad psíquica.

Consideremos ahora una posición racionalista: "nuestra experiencia de las relaciones no es verdadera" (Bradley), tesis que lleva a la conclusión de que el mundo espacio-temporal es una ilusión. El argumento en que se funda esa conclusión consiste en mostrar que la admisión de las relaciones conduce a un regreso al infinito.

Este argumento no es propiamente un error, sino una modificación de la terminología. La oración "totalidades de relaciones son contradictorias y sólo existen como apariencias ilusorias" no establece ningún hecho existente, pues no puede haber una apariencia sensible de una situación contradictoria. Si una relación es contradictoria, también lo será su apariencia; sin embargo, el filósofo niega la existencia de las relaciones mas no la de su apariencia. Tampoco puede interpretarse ese enunciado filosófico como si se refiriera al término 'relación', pues en el lenguaje ordinario el filósofo sigue usando los términos de relación correctamente y no puede menos de admitir que sí tienen un sentido descriptivo.

El argumento de la irrealidad de las relaciones sostiene que si hay una diferencia entre dos términos cualesquiera, ésta es una relación entre ellos; ahora bien, esta relación es *algo*, por lo tanto es un tercer término que debe, a su vez, estar en relación con sus relatos; así se engendra un regreso al infinito. Pero el enunciado de que una diferencia entre términos es una relación, no corresponde al uso ordinario de 'relación', introduce un uso artificialmente ampliado de esa palabra, gracias al cual se aplica a todo aquello a que se aplique la palabra 'diferencia'. El punto central del argumento es que las relaciones cuentan como términos, esto es, como *cosas* u *objetos*. Este aserto no supone una idea errónea acerca del uso ordinario de 'objeto', debe interpretarse como una ampliación del sentido de esa palabra, que la aplica a lo denotado por los términos de relación. El regreso al infinito deriva, así, de un uso ampliado de 'relación' y de 'objeto'. El uso ordinario de 'relación' y de 'término' no implica, en cambio, un regreso. Y no hay duda de que la alteración terminológica fue introducida (inconscientemente) con el propósito de llegar a la contradicción de las relaciones; la contradicción, a su vez, se utiliza para justificar una posterior

modificación de la terminología: la palabra 'apariencia' se amplía para aplicarse a los fenómenos 'relacionales'.

El juego del metafísico con los términos 'relación', 'cosa', 'apariencia', 'real', que consiste en tergiversar su terminología, crea la ilusión de un argumento que versa sobre los fenómenos. Y es difícil creer que sólo se juegue a ese juego por el efecto intelectual que produce; parece razonable pensar que funciona de otro modo para el filósofo: mediante él expresa su rechazo emotivo del mundo. El enunciado "las situaciones relacionales son irreales" podría tener por significado oculto: "el mundo carece de importancia para mí y deseo desprenderme de él".