PHILOSOPHICAL LECTURE

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF METAPHYSICS

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Read 18 January 1961

I SPEAK of the metamorphosis of metaphysics because I want to trace a change in identity and an identity in change in the development of metaphysics. People sometimes speak as if the metaphysician were a pretentious and really very silly old man who is now dead, and has been replaced first by the logical analyst, and later by someone still more on the spot, the linguistic philosopher. It seems to me misleading to talk like this. True when someone whom we know very well changes very profoundly we may say, 'He is no longer the same person.' And saying this we combat the deadly inertia of our minds which makes us dismiss as a mere pretence anything in what a man says or does which does not fit the picture of him which the past has given us. Jack, who never misses a party and 'always has some new crack', is suddenly serious and insists that he would like to throw it all up and grow roses. Even if we do not say 'Nonsense', we still cannot help a smile which shows him that we do not take seriously what he is saying. It's this inertia in our awareness of each other which is one of the things which often makes a person unable to talk to someone who knows him well in the way he can to a stranger. For a stranger will not laugh when he says what is out of character, or rather, what does not fit the model of him which the past has presented to others and even to himself. But, on the other hand, a stranger may be misled if he takes present appearance as the sole clue to a person's real nature. The last phase of a man's life may show us something in him which never appeared in his youth, but it may also conceal from us something which once showed plain enough though now it never shows except in some flicker of word or manner, significant only to one who knew him long ago. He has now, perhaps, sat for years at a window gazing at a landscape in suburbia. This too, it is true, shows his nature. But the secret of this inanition may elude us until we learn of something that went before, never forgotten but never recalled.

All this reminds us of the laborious, intricate, subtle process by which, alive to the variety in perpetual change, we yet in

that variety detect a unity, in the obvious, the hidden, in appearance reality. It is something we never cease from doing, whether in everyday life, in poetry, in drama, in history, in science, in philosophy, and even in metaphysical philosophy which also, so it has been commonly said, is somehow concerned with appearance and reality.

So in the hope of gaining a better grasp of the real nature of metaphysical philosophy or, as one might call it, the philosophy of the schools, let us look back at how it once appeared and at what came after. And in doing this let us look at three things: first at what metaphysical philosophers said about philosophy; second, at how they formulated metaphysical questions; third, at what they did in order to answer these questions.

2. About 1920 Dr. J. Ellis McTaggart was still lecturing at Cambridge and he might be called the last of the 'speculative' philosophers at Cambridge or even in England. Although he knew Russell and Moore he still put metaphysical philosophical questions in the traditional forms 'Is time real?' 'Does matter exist?' 'Philosophy,' he used to say, 'is the systematic study of the ultimate nature of reality.' The scientist, he said, studies systematically the nature of reality but not its ultimate nature. The poet, he said, does not study the nature of reality systematically, but he does study its ultimate nature. This last remark is an important clue to what he meant by the mysterious phrase 'the ultimate nature of reality'. For it appears that this phrase refers to something which at least some poets do which scientists do not do or do much less. But what is this? Which poets do it and when do they do it most? So far as I know, McTaggart said little or nothing in further explanation of this reference to poetry. Why not? What did he mean? What made him say that poets study the ultimate nature of reality? On the face of it it would seem that a metaphysical philosopher is much more like a scientist than he is like a poet, and surely the scientist does in some sense study the ultimate nature of matter and even of mind. One would not be surprised to hear a scientist say that it has been discovered that objects which seem to us solid are not really solid, that our flesh and bones, and chairs and tables, and even stones, are ultimately not solid, that ordinary experience makes us think they are solid but extraordinary experience enables us, if not to observe at least to infer that they are not. All this reminds us at once of metaphysical philosophers who have said that though things seem large and round and soft or hard, small and angular,

they are not; that though they seem to come and go they do not; that though they seem to be in space and time they are not. It reminds us of philosophers who have said that what seems to us physical and material is not, that our bodies and even chairs and tables and stones are not material but are really collections of ideas, impressions, sensations, in our minds, or in the mind of some timeless being. The metaphysical philosopher seems for a moment to differ from the scientist only in that he goes further. The editor of *British Contemporary Philosophy* at the end of the preface to the second volume of this collection of philosophers' writings speaks of their common purpose of 'exploring the frontier provinces of human experience and perchance bringing back authentic tidings of what lies beyond'. But now is it characteristic of the philosopher to explore the frontier provinces of human experience? Is it not much less Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and much more Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Kaffka, Lawrence, Freud, who 'travel to the bounds of human experience'? And do these explorers attempt to bring back tidings of anything that lies beyond human experience? Surely it is with human experience itself that they are concerned. What they write about may be as imaginary as the frictionless planes and perfect pulleys of the engineer, but this leaves it true that what they are concerned with in the end is the wide but well-known world.

But we must leave this matter for the moment and ask what questions McTaggart and the traditional metaphysical philosophers asked themselves. They asked, 'Is time real?' 'Does matter exist?' 'Does mind exist?' 'Does evil exist?' 'These things', they said, 'appear to be real but are they? After all what seems to be so is sometimes shown by further experience to be an illusion. Perhaps what all experience *superficially* suggests is so, more fundamental thought may show to be an illusion too, to be appearance and not ultimately real.'

These are traditional questions in their traditional form.

3. What a change then, what a shocking change, came over the scene when in 1918 Moore wrote: 'The questions whether we do ever know such things as these, and whether there are any material things seem to me, therefore, to be questions which there is no need to take seriously: they are questions which it is quite easy to answer, with certainty, in the affirmative.'[1] What a change when Moore, in lecturing on the soul, the self, the mind,

[1] Quoted by Professor Morris Lazerowitz in 'Moore's Paradox' in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore.*

the ego, declared that he would not concern himself with the question 'Does the soul exist?' but with the question 'What do we mean when we say such things as "I see this", "I did see that".' What a change when in 1914 Russell said that he believed that the problems and the method of philosophy had been misconceived by all schools,[1] that philosophical problems all reduce themselves, in so far as they are genuinely philosophical, to problems of logic.[2] For instance, the traditional philosophers had troubled themselves with the question 'How can such beings as Zeus, the horses of the gods, and Mr. Pecksniff, not have being, not exist? For how can what does not exist be thought of or talked of, how can it entertain or annoy us? How can what does not exist have any property?' Russell showed that this old riddle vanishes under logical analysis as surely as does the riddle 'What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?' He then turned his attention to those philosophers who prove, not that things which do not exist do, but that things which do exist do not, or at least that there is no real reason to think they do. For instance, McTaggart[3] at the end of a discussion as to the existence of matter concludes that there is no more reason to think that the causes of our sensations are coloured, warm, large, round, or heavy than there is to think that the face of one who boils a lobster red must itself be red. He says, 'The result is that matter is in the same position as the Gorgons or the Harpies. Its existence is a bare possibility to which it would be foolish to attach the least importance since there is nothing to make it at all preferable to any other hypothesis however wild.' Other philosophers felt that this was going rather far. And Russell, remembering the sophistical performance in which philosophers had made it appear that Gorgons and Harpies do exist, now ventured a suggestion to those who were purporting to prove that chairs and tables do not exist.

> Look here, [he said],[4] surely what you really mean is not that chairs and tables are fictions like the Gorgons and the Harpies, but that they are *logical* fictions like force or the economic man or the average Englishman. You do not really mean that everyone who says anything about chairs and tables is hopelessly mistaken or irrational. What you mean

[1] *Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] *Some Dogmas of Religion*, section 73.

[4] See, for instance, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, especially Lecture III.

is that just as statements about the average Englishman can be analysed without remainder into statements about individual Englishmen whom we see everyday, so statements about chairs and tables can be analysed without remainder into statements about what we can expect to see and feel.

There was something attractive about this suggestion. But it was revolutionary. It was not that no one had suggested before that to speak of material things is to speak of bundles of impressions or sensations. What was so unpleasantly revolutionary was the suggestion that metaphysical philosophers who had seemed to be concerned not with any merely logical question but with whether matter exists were really concerned with a logical question. Philosophers of the old school stood aghast yet unable to check the rapid metamorphosis of a subject which had been a study of the nature of reality and now seemed no more than the purely logical investigation of the structure of propositions, the minute analysis of the meanings of words. But we who were the bright young things of the logico-analytic era welcomed the change from the absurdity of exploring the universe in an armchair to the pleasure of a dance beneath the brilliant lights of *Principia Mathematica*. We even joined hands in a party with the pragmatists amid the ruins of tradition.[1]

Even after the revolution certain difficulties beset us. Logical fictions, logical constructions, seemed to be everywhere. We did not mind that. But exactly how were they constructed and out of what? Chairs and tables, Russell had taught us, were no 'part of the ultimate furniture of heaven and earth'. But on what then could we rest? Sense data perhaps, the constituents of the ultimate atomic facts corresponding to the atomic propositions into which all other propositions can be analysed. But now what is it to analyse a proposition? It is to analyse the meaning of a sentence. But then what is the meaning of a sentence and what is it to analyse it? However to this we soon had an answer. To analyse a class of propositions, we said, is to translate a class of sentences. For instance, to analyse propositions about material things into propositions about sense data or sensations is to translate sentences about chairs and tables into sentences about sense data or sensations, to analyse propositions about good and evil into propositions about our feelings is to translate sentences of the sort 'This is good', 'That is bad', into sentences of the sort 'I like this' or 'We disapprove that'.

[1] Here remember James's camping party and what he calls a metaphysical dispute about a squirrel: *Pragmatism*, Lecture II.

With this advance we did not *deny* that philosophy is a matter of the logical analysis of propositions, but we *supplemented* this account of philosophy with the explanation 'And the analysis of propositions is the translation of sentences.' This advance has sometimes been referred to as a change from 'the material mode of speech' to 'the formal mode'. It is the change from a mode of speech in which a speaker appears to refer to a logical, abstract, entity, such as a proposition, into a mode of speech in which he apparently refers to a word or a sentence.

Although this change from the logical to the linguistic mode of formulating philosophical questions was not adopted by all philosophers of the logico-analytic group one must not forget its importance. For with it went a change in what philosophers did in answering philosophical questions. While one speaks of 'analysing propositions' one speaks of 'trying to see their structure', 'trying to see whether one thing is or is not part of another'. When one speaks of translating sentences one speaks of inquiring into a plain matter of fact, namely whether people would or would not always be prepared to substitute a certain expression for another.

This change was indeed important. It cleared away, or seemed to clear away, or in part cleared away, the exasperating hesitancy one felt as to what to do when philosophers disagreed as they sometimes still did even after the logico-analytic reformation. An appeal to the self-evident, to the intuitively obvious, leads sometimes to unpleasant hints of blindness or of seeing what is not there. What a relief to turn instead to the plain facts of linguistic usage! But this change must not be thought of as a change from a logical phase in which one asked *only* questions as to the interrelations between such timeless entities as propositions and predicates, and *never* asked 'What would we say?' to a linguistic phase in which one asked *only* 'What would we say?' No, the change was not so sharp as this. In the logical phase questions were put in the form 'What is the analysis of propositions of the sort so and so?' But no one who remembers, for instance, Moore's lectures of that time will forget the frequent appeals to what one would in ordinary language say. The change was more like this: In the logical phase we thought of recalling the usage of words as a *means* to insight into the structure of the abstract entities, the propositions and the properties for which those words stood. In the linguistic phase the usage of words appears to be itself the ultimate object of study. Imagine someone concerned with the relations between blocks made of

ice or glass so transparent as to be almost invisible. He may sometimes find it difficult to answer a question as to whether one block does or does not extend beyond another. But if each block is enclosed in a coloured frame which in most cases fits it pretty well then he may as a first step answer questions about the relations between the frames and so reach indirectly answers to questions about the relations between the blocks. How much more boldly though, how much more freely, will he give his attention to the frames if we tell him that we are no longer interested in their contents, if they have any contents at all. In the same way, or so it seemed, when we describe philosophy no longer as the physics of the abstract to which the usage of words may provide useful clues but as itself the study of the usage of words then we are freed from trying to see those meanings which seem to grow more hazy as we gaze at them and may turn with relief to a task anyone who is patient can do, namely that of recalling the usage of words.

And this advance to the boldly, not to say blatantly, linguistic phase led to another important change. It showed a way out from an impasse produced by an obsession with definition and exact equivalence. Russell before our fascinated gaze had, as I have said, despatched the inhabitants of the world of fiction and of legend, such as unicorns and the ram which flew or swam from Greece to Colchis, those bewildering beings which have never existed and yet, it seems, must linger somewhere in the realms of being, if they are to be so much as the subjects of a conversation. He had despatched them by providing a rule for analysing the propositions which seem to be about such beings into equivalent propositions which no longer seem to be about such beings because they are plainly only about descriptions of these beings. It was no wonder that, slightly inebriated by this success, we supposed that the same procedure must be at once sufficient and necessary to dissipate such philosophical disputes as those about the existence of material things, or of mental things.

Alas the exact analyses were not forthcoming, or rather at one moment it seemed as if they were and at the next as if they were not. Russell would suggest in the *Analysis of Matter* or the *Analysis of Mind* the lines on which with a little care the requisite analyses could be found. But Moore would produce some objection to the correctness of the suggested equations.

While philosophical problems were put in the form 'What are the propositions which together make up the ultimate parts of

what we mean when we speak of things of sort *X*?' it seemed essential to find parts which made up exactly that of which they formed the parts. And when the philosophical problems were recast in the linguistic mode 'Can sentences of sort *X* be translated into sentences not of sort *X*?' it seemed essential to find sentences not of sort *X* which meant neither more nor less than sentences of sort *X*. But these translations could not be found. And this was not because of an accidental paucity of the English, French, or German language. It was no accident at all. The most typical tough old metaphysical puzzles are just those which arise when, pressing a question of the form 'What ultimately are our reasons for statements of sort *X*?', we come at last to reasons which though they are all we have are *not* such that statements of sort *X* can be deduced from them whether singly or in combination. The difficulty would be removed if we could say that statements of sort *X* are reducible to those upon the truth of which our confidence in statements of sort *X* is ultimately based. But the difficulty is that statements of sort *X* are not deducible from those on which they are ultimately based and therefore not reducible to them, not analysable into them; in other words a typical metaphysical difficulty about what is expressed by sentences of sort *X* cannot be met by translating those sentences into others. Remember the pattern of metaphysical trouble. For instance, someone says, 'Has anything happened before this moment? Has there been a past? Do we know what we claim to know about the past?' You are amazed at such a crazy question. However, you reply perhaps, 'Well I know I wound my watch this morning.' But the sceptic asks, 'How do you know you did?' You are again amazed but still you perhaps reply, 'I always wind it when I get up and I certainly got up this morning.' The sceptic replies, 'If you knew these two statements to be true you could indeed deduce that you wound your watch this morning. But both these statements are statements about the past and are therefore included in those about which I am asking how you know them to be true.' You reply perhaps, 'I remember getting up this morning and for that matter I remember winding my watch.' The sceptic says, 'When you say that someone remembers an incident do you not imply that that incident took place?' You reply, 'Certainly. I could not remember winding my watch this morning if I did not wind it.' The sceptic says, 'So your claim to remember winding your watch this morning includes the claim that you wound it. It therefore includes a claim about the past. And I am

therefore asking how you know that you do not merely seem to remember but do remember winding your watch this morning.' You reply, 'Well I certainly seem to remember winding it. I can see now a mental picture of the watch in my hand as I wind it. I do not need to know the past in order to know that I now see this mental picture. Besides here is the watch ticking away. If you now take a watch that is not going you will find that it will not go unless someone winds it and if you ask people whether they wound my watch this morning you will find that they all reply that they did not.' The sceptic says, 'But you can not deduce from all this about the present and the future that you wound your watch this morning nor anything else about the past.'

The position is becoming clear. Any statement from which a statement about the past can be deduced is or includes a statement about the past. And therefore to reduce the latter to the former is not to translate a sentence about the past into one which is not about the past. Any statement which is not about the past and does not openly or covertly include one, is not a statement from which a statement about the past can be deduced, and therefore not one to which a statement about the past can be reduced, and therefore the sentence which expresses it is not one into which a sentence about the past can be translated.

The position is the same for any typical metaphysical question.

How then, it may be asked, did it come about that Russell did meet a metaphysical difficulty by means of an analysis, a translation? The answer is that difficulty about how a classical scholar's statement such as 'The ram swam' can be true although there was no such ram is in an important respect like typical metaphysical difficulties but is also in an important respect unlike them. Suppose someone says: 'If a man marries the daughter of a daughter of his father's parents then he marries his cousin.' For a moment you may feel it difficult to be sure whether this is true or false. However you soon say, 'Well now this just means that if a man marries the daughter of a paternal aunt then he marries his cousin, and that of course is true.' Here reformulation has helped. But then the difficulty was not at all metaphysical.

Suppose now that a classical scholar says, 'The ram swam', and suppose that though usually you are quite sensible and well able to make sure whether such statements are right or

wrong, you now suddenly feel a difficulty and say in a puzzled way, 'Surely this could be true although there was no such ram and yet how could it be?' This difficulty hardly hinders you in your grasp of the actual world as does a failure to realize that seven half-crowns is the right change from a pound when you have bought a two-and-sixpenny cake. The difficulty is like a metaphysical difficulty in that the question 'Surely this statement can be true and yet it cannot be' evinces at the same time an increased apprehension of the logical character of the statement and a misapprehension of its character. When suddenly one puts this question to oneself one is noticing more explicitly than one had done before a difference between the scholar's statement 'The ram swam' and the farmer's statement 'The ram swam.' At the same time this first expression of sharper apprehension is confused. It evinces a failure to see the peculiarity of the statement for what it is—an unusual, temporary, failure to keep its logical character firmly in mind.

On the other hand your question 'How can all these statements about what does not exist be true?' is not expressing mixed apprehension and misapprehension which extends to *all* statements equivalent to those you refer to. In your case there are statements equivalent to those you refer to about which you are not bewildered. Consequently your bewilderment can be removed by reminding you of this equivalence, by reformulating the statements which trouble you in statements which do not, by translating the sentences which temporarily mislead you as to the verification appropriate to what is asserted by those who utter them into sentences which make this plain, and, in particular, make plain how it is that what is expressed by them may be true although they are about things which do not exist.[1]

With a typical metaphysical statement or question the situation is different. Here the mixed apprehension and misapprehension extends to *all* statements equivalent to any member of the class of statements to which the metaphysician refers. In his case there are no statements which both (1) are equivalent to those to which he refers and (2) do not bewilder him. Consequently no translation will bring out and disentangle his apprehension and his misapprehension, no translation will transform his bewilderment into insight without distortion.

Does this mean that nothing can be done for the metaphysician because he is absurdly asking that statements exposed to certain

[1] See W. E. Johnson, *Logic I*, p. 166.

risks of error shall be shown to be inevitable consequences of, deducible from, reformulatable in terms of, statements not exposed to those risks? It does not. It means that that is not what the metaphysician is asking for. Does this mean that the unsuccessful attempt to reformulate the metaphysician's question in the form 'Can sentences of sort *X* be translated into sentences of sort *Y* and not of sort *X*?' in no way helped us to understand what the metaphysician does ask for? It does not. On the contrary the question 'How can we translate sentences of sort *X*?' suggests the question 'How may we define sentences of sort *X*?' and this suggests the question 'How do we define the expression "is a sentence of sort *X*"?' and this suggests the question 'How shall we define the expression "is using a sentence of sort *X*" or "is using a sentence in the way *X*"?' And this suggests the questions 'How shall we explain, *whether by definition or not*, what it is to use a sentence in the way *X*?' 'How shall we describe a man who is using a sentence in the way *X*?'

There is a double change here. First there is a change from asking for a rule for translating sentences of sort *X*, for instance sentences about abstractions, such as the average man, the Indian elephant, to asking for a rule for translating sentences of the sort '*A* is using a sentence of sort *X*', for instance, '*A* is using a sentence about an abstraction.' This change is of importance because although any rule for translating sentences of sort *X* provides a rule for translating sentences of the sort '*A* is using a sentence of sort *X*', the converse is not true. For instance, it is absurd to ask for a rule for translating sentences which attribute a property or relation to something into sentences which do not. But this does not mean that it is absurd to ask for a rule for translating sentences of the sort '*A* is using a sentence which attributes a property or relation to something.' The definition '*A is attributing a property*' means '*A is marking an affinity between something and other things real or imaginary*' is not far wrong.

The second change is a change from asking for a definition to asking for a description. We ask now *not for a definition* of what it is to use an expression, for instance, the word 'cold', to put a question as to the external world as opposed to a question as to how someone feels, but for some *explanation*, some *description*, of the differences between one who uses the expression to ask about the weather and one who uses it to ask someone how he feels.

This change too is important. Often when someone asks 'What is a so and so?' it is impossible to answer with a definition

and often even when this is possible it is useless. Faced with this situation people sometimes say, 'We do not really know what it is for a thing to be a so and so' or, more moderately, 'We cannot say what it is, cannot put into words what it is, for a thing to be a so and so.' But this is because without knowing it they have become wedded to the idea that one does not know what it is for a thing to be of a certain sort unless one can give a definition of what it is to be of that sort, or to the more moderate but still false idea that one cannot put into words, explain, bring before the mind, what it is to be a thing of a certain sort except by a definition. The moment these ideas are formulated and so brought under the light of reason they disappear. Of course we know that the meanings of words are not taught only by definition in terms of other words, that is an absurd idea. And no doubt just as sometimes the meaning of a word is taught, introduced to the mind, not by definition but by examples real or imaginary and painted or described, so its meaning may be revived before the mind sometimes by definition but also sometimes by examples. But though the ideas that we do not know or cannot say what it is for a thing to be of a certain sort unless we can define it are rejected when plainly stated, they may continue to lurk in the mind. In order to *realize* their falsity as opposed to merely *knowing that* they are false let us look at one or two examples in which definition is impossible or futile while explanation by description and sample is possible and valuable. When someone asks, 'What is schizophrenia?' one may reply, 'A schizophrenic person is a person with a split mind.' This answer *may* satisfy the inquirer. But it may not. He may ask, 'But what is it to suffer from a split mind?' One may perhaps provide a definition of this expression too, but one may instead immediately employ what one may call 'mother's method' for explaining what things are. A child asks, 'What is a greyhound?' His father replies, 'A greyhound is a dog of a certain sort.' 'I know', says the child, 'but what sort?' 'Well', his father says, 'a greyhound is a dog in which the power to weight ratio. . . .' But his mother interrupts. 'Look', she says, 'that's a greyhound, and you remember your uncle's dog, Entry Badge, well that was a greyhound. But now that', she says, pointing to a Borzoi, 'is not a greyhound, and even that', she says, pointing to a whippet, 'is not.' Or perhaps she recalls the rhyme

> A foot like a cat, a tail like a rat,
> A back like a rake, a head like a snake

and so on. In short the mother replies with instances of what is and what is not a greyhound or by comparing greyhounds with what they are not, and these two procedures merge into one. Asked 'What is the feminine nature?' we may reply with a definition, 'It is the nature of a female human being.' But somehow what we wanted is not contained in this easy and correct answer. Shakespeare takes longer to reply with his long stories of Juliet, of Desdemona, of Cressida, of Lady Macbeth, of Portia, of Orlando. And yet of course, his longer, less neat answer may show us as we had not yet seen it the unity in infinite variety which is the feminine nature, or, for that matter, human nature.

All this reminds us of how an answer to a 'What is a so and so?' question may be none the worse because it is not a definition, and may indeed be the better, because, more explicitly than any definition, it compares things of the sort with which we are concerned with other things, things which, though like, are different.

Remembering this we are no longer under a compulsion to provide a definition when someone asks, 'What is a poet?' 'What is a mathematician?' 'What is it to make a statement about mental things, about material things?' We are free to answer the questions 'Does matter exist?' 'What is matter?' not in the form of a definition of statements about material things but in the form of an account of what it is to make a statement about a material thing such as 'It's cold' or 'There are bees in that hive' as opposed to statements about things in the mind such as 'There are bees in his bonnet', or 'I am cold', or 'He has a warm heart.' And this account need not take the form of a definition provided it brings out by hook or by crook the unity within variety which marks on the manifold of possible statements those which are about material things in contrast to the rest.

How satisfactory to pass from a phase in which philosophical questions seemed to call on us to explore some country we could never reach, to see behind some veil we could never penetrate, to open some door we could never open, to a phase in which no such demand is made of us but, instead, only the demand that we should analyse a class of propositions we often assert, translate a class of sentences we often utter. And then when it seems that we are being asked to translate the untranslatable, how satisfactory it is to find that this too is not being insisted upon, that we are being asked only to bring before the mind, by hook or by crook, the role these sentences perform, the procedure

appropriate to ascertaining whether one who has pronounced such a sentence has spoken the truth or not, the logical character of a type of inquiry. For such a task though difficult and laborious is not impossible.

4. But now, just when all seems well, something seems to have been lost, and not merely something but too much. While we put our questions in the traditional form they were indeed intractable, but at least we seemed to be engaged on some task which somehow contributed to our apprehension of reality, of the facts, and this did not mean merely facts about how people would use words. Was this all a mistake?

Let us look back and I think we shall find that the first philosophical phase, properly understood, was not so unlike the last and then that the last, properly understood, is not so unlike the first.

Although the traditional philosophers described philosophy so differently, and formulated their questions so differently, did they proceed so differently from the way philosophers proceeded later? Take their attempts to show that matter does not exist. These attempts were of two sorts. There were attempts to show that matter, involving as it does time and space, involves a contradiction. Now one cannot prove statements self-contradictory except by a purely logical procedure; statements as to what is so though it might not have been and statements as to what is not so though it might have been, are beside the point. Consequently those philosophers who argued on these lines that there are no material things no more proceeded in a matter of fact manner than does one who proves that there are no equilateral triangles with unequal angles. Second, there were those philosophers who in considering the question 'Does matter exist?' proceeded as, for instance, McTaggart did in *Some Dogmas of Religion*. What does he say? He says (section 66), 'What reason can be given for a belief in the existence of matter? I conceive that such a belief can only be defended on the ground that it is a legitimate inference from our sensations.' 'It is evident', he says (section 68), 'that the sensations are not themselves the matter in question.' And as to the causes of the sensations, he says there is no reason to believe that they resemble the sensations in such a way that they, the causes, are entitled to the name of matter. At the end of section 73 he says,

> A man who boils a lobster red may have a red face—there is nothing to prevent it. But his action in causing the redness of the lobster gives us no reason to suppose that his face is red.

The result is that matter is in the same position as the Gorgons or the Harpies. . . .

At first it may appear that McTaggart is saying that though it is conceivable that we should have had reason to believe in the existence of matter we in fact have not. But careful examination of his argument reveals that at no point does it depend upon a statement which could have been false. His conclusion that we have no reason for our statements about material things is derived from the premiss (1) that if we have then those statements are legitimate inferences from our sensations and (2) that they are not legitimate inferences from our sensations—they are not legitimate *inductive* inferences, like conclusions as to what is behind one based on reflection in a mirror, nor are they legitimate *deductive* inferences, like conclusions as to the existence and nature of the honey bee based on premisses about innumerable honey bees.

If at this point someone were to say that McTaggart is really concerned with a question of logic, one might agree on the ground that though he makes some show of being concerned with something which might have been otherwise he is not. One might agree further that he is concerned with whether statements about material things are deducible from statements about our sensations. One could not agree that McTaggart is saying that statements about material things are reducible to statements about our sensations since he insists that the existence of matter is not deducible from such statements. On the other hand one might hesitate to say that he denies that statements about material things are reducible to statements about sensations. For in section 62 he says it is certain that my body influences myself, and in section 63 he says that I cannot change into bread the stone I see and touch, and in section 74 he says,

> If we ask then of what reality the vast mass of knowledge holds true which science and everyday life give us about matter, we must reply that it holds true of various sensations which occur to various men, and of the laws according to which these sensations are connected, so that from the presence of certain sensations in me I can infer that, under certain conditions, I shall or shall not experience certain other sensations and can also infer that, under certain conditions, other men will or will not experience certain sensations.

The fact is McTaggart, like Berkeley and others, is not sure which of two pictures of our knowledge of the material world he wishes to present. According to the first picture we

are like prisoners confined in separate cells and never allowed to look out of the windows of their cells at the outside world nor to hear any sound of it. Each has a mirror, sound reflector, and other instruments which he believes reproduces faithfully what goes on outside his cell including what is reflected in the instruments of other prisoners. When a prisoner says something about the outside world, perhaps that the sun is shining, he does not mean merely that his instruments show the sun as shining nor even that his instruments and those of the other prisoners show the sun as shining. Not at all. He can remember other days, when he relied upon no mirrors or radio sets, and were he now given his freedom he would discard them all and say, 'The sun is shining' or 'The sun is not shining' no matter what might be the programme on the apparatus on which he is now obliged to rely. Indeed it is because when he speaks of the sun and the outside world he refers to something beyond what he can observe, the reflections in his instruments, that we must say that his knowledge of the outside world is indirect and not what it might be. According to McTaggart's first picture our knowledge of the material world is like the prisoner's knowledge of the world outside his cell except that we are even worse off in that we have never known better days when we could turn from the shadow show of our sensations to the reality they reflect, nor can we dream that better days will come.

According to the second picture we are like prisoners who have been imprisoned so long that now when any of them seems to speak of the outside world and says, perhaps, 'The sun is shining' he means only that in his mirror the sun shines, that his sound machines will give a sound as of voices saying, 'Yes, the sun is shining.' In such a case each prisoner has direct knowledge of what he claims is so when he says, for instance, that the sun is shining. For now he means only something about what his mirrors and other instruments show, will show, or would show. According to McTaggart's second account of our knowledge of the material world we are like the prisoners in the second case. When we say, 'This is champagne not vinegar' what we mean is something about the programme of sensations we may expect.

But now what is this second account of our knowledge of the material world? Is it not the same as that which Russell offers us when he says that material things are logical constructions out of sense data,[1] is it not the same as that which the logical

[1] Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 101.

analyst offers us when he says that when we speak of material things and say, for instance, 'This is champagne not vinegar' what we mean can be analysed into a complicated statement about what sensations we may expect.

McTaggart it is true does not come down firmly in favour of this account; indeed I should say that upon the whole he gives the impression that statements about sensations are not related to conclusions about material things as statements about individual men are related to conclusions about the statistical construction, the average man. Upon the whole he gives the impression that premisses about sensations or sense-data are related to conclusions about material things as premisses about pictures in a mirror are related to conclusions about what is pictured except that we have never turned to what is pictured. But this leaves it true that he is concerned with the same question as that which concerned the logical analysts, namely, 'Are statements about material things reducible to statements about our sensations or do they refer to something over and above our sensations?'

It is not my aim to discuss which of these models of the logical character of statements about material things is correct, nor to wonder whether perhaps they are both unsatisfactory and, perhaps, both helpful—as when one calls a man the wisest fool in all Christendom.

No, my aim at the moment is to say this: read over what McTaggart says. Does he at any point rely upon some premiss which though true could conceivably have been false? Does it not now appear that if we look not at what traditional philosophers said about philosophy, nor at the form of words in which they couched their questions and their answers, but at the procedure they adopted in reaching their answers then we see that what they did was after all different only in air and in guise from what is done by their logico-analytic successors. Their aim appeared to be different, but their proceedings were fundamentally the same. True they preserved the air and guise of specially cautious scientists seeking to ascertain what is actual, not merely what is possible; but this was only a disguise for a procedure as purely *a priori* as that of the purest student of the structure of the possible, the most detached analyst of the abstract. And the analytic procedure, as we have already noticed, differs from that of those who ask not for the analysis of propositions but for the translation of sentences only in the openness with which the last appeal is allowed to appear

as an appeal to the usage of words. Nor is this fundamental concern with the usage of words diminished when, no longer obsessed by equation or translation, we ask at last not for the definition but for the description of the usage of words.

5. But now, alas, we seem to have lost nothing only because we never had it, seem to have lost only an illusion, the illusion that somehow philosophy played some part in revealing the actual, and that not merely the actual use of words but the actual state of things which the use of words in everyday life, in history, in science, in law, purports to represent. That idea it now seems was all illusion.

But was it all illusion?

6. Consider a somewhat parallel case. The statements 'Two and two always make four', 'Seven and five always make twelve' may at first seem to be statements which tell us about what actually happens in nature. Indeed teachers sometimes introduce these statements in such a way that a child may naturally think that they are established by experiments with beads, marbles, and the rest, and that they would be false were these experiments not to turn out as they do. It is only later that the child learns that these mathematical statements are statements which could not have been false no matter what had happened. They are not statements which would be shown to be false were we to drop two beads into a box and then two more and then upon opening the box find seven. Such a miraculous sequence of events would show only that we had been wrong in thinking that beads never breed other beads; it would not prove that two and two do not make four. When one says 'If there are two and two then there are four' one is not saying of two possible states of affairs then whenever one is actual the other is also as one is when one says 'If you drink this you will recover.' But if one is not doing this when one says 'Two and two—that means four' what is one doing? Is one saying 'The words "Two and two" mean the same as the word "Four"'? When one says 'If there are a dozen there are twelve, if there are two dozen there are twenty-four' is one saying 'the expression "a dozen" means the same as "twelve"'? Sometimes—but only when one is teaching the meaning of the word 'dozen' to someone who does not know its meaning, not when one is making the mathematical statement 'Two dozen, that means there are twenty-four.' One is making the mathematical statement only when one is *not* teaching, or even reminding oneself or another of the meaning of the expression 'a dozen'. It begins

to seem as if one is making a mathematical statement only when one is saying nothing. What can be the point of making a mathematical statement, and in particular how can the making of it ever be of any use in apprehending the actual?

Let us think. When, in what circumstances, does one find it worth while to make a mathematical statement? Suppose someone knows that there are thirty-four guests at her party and can see set out three groups of glasses, in each group three rows with four glasses in each row. Still she is worried as to whether she has enough glasses. 'Look', you say, 'In each lot three rows of four. Three fours is a dozen. Three dozen means thirty-six. Thirty-six is thirty-four and two extra.' Her face clears. Your mathematical talk has not been useless. It has helped to set in a new light an actual situation, it has helped in reviewing an actual situation. The same effect *might* have been obtained without making any mathematical statement. You might have said: 'There are three groups and in each group there are three rows of four glasses. There are three dozen glasses. There are thirty-six glasses. There are thirty-four glasses and two extra.' Had you done this you would have made only statements which though true could have been false. Each later statement presents only what has already been presented in the one before it, but each later statement *presents differently* what has already been presented. Suppose one says, 'Indigenous, at Epsom, covered 5 furlongs in 53·6 seconds, so he travelled for more than half a mile at rather over 40 miles an hour.' The second description of this colt's performance omits part of the information provided by the first, but apart from that the second description may enable one readily to grasp the affinities and differences between his performance and that of locomotives, automobiles, cyclists, in a way in which the description in terms of furlongs may not. One may review an actual situation by redescribing it without making any mathematical or logical statement. But in fact we sometimes find it helpful to insert mathematical and logical statements which are all hypothetical and make no declaration as to what is actually the case and further are not dependent upon what actually happens in the way in which 'If you deprive rats of vitamin B they lose condition' is. For instance, one may say '5 furlongs in 53·6 seconds is over 40 miles an hour' or 'If anything covers 5 furlongs in 53·6 seconds then its average speed is over 40 miles an hour.' In saying this one prepares oneself to review actual situations, or, to put the thing another way, one reviews possible situations.

One may do this with an eye to reviewing an actual situation which is already before one. But one may do it without much expecting ever to come upon a situation of the sort one reviews. For instance, I may say 'If I earned a salary of twenty thousand a year I should be earning wages of about £380 a week.' It may entertain me to review this possibility, to try to realize better what it would be like, even though I do not expect the possibility to become an actuality. In short, with such statements one reviews the possible.

Here then in mathematical statements we have statements which at first appear to be telling us about what in fact happens in nature like the statements 'There is no smoke without fire' or 'Faint heart never won fair lady', and then turn out to be independent of what actually happens in nature, turn out to be nothing but words in which we review the possible. But such review of the possible may at any time serve us in reviewing the actual, for at any time the possible may become actual.

Mathematical and logical statements review the possible only on quite conventional lines. One may review the possible upon unconventional lines. For instance, someone may say: 'Suppose that on several occasions two men dream very vividly but very differently. Suppose that no research into the past, however careful and extended, reveals a hidden circumstance sufficient to explain why the one dreams as he does and the other as he does. Suppose, however, that the dream of each exactly and vividly portrays events which happen to him the following day. In such a case would not the explanation of the dreams lie not in what went before them but in what came after? But can the explanation of an event lie in what happens after it?' This question is not one to be settled by investigating nature. One might for a moment be tempted to call it a verbal question. But it is not a question of linguistic fact as to what people would say, nor a question of linguistic policy—'Shall we call an associated but future difference an "explanation"?' It is a question in which we frame and guide our efforts to view, to review, to contrast, to assimilate, to differentiate the shocking possibility we contemplate. Hitherto whenever we have been mystified because on one occasion an event occurred and on another occasion it did not, diligent research has always revealed a difference in what went before. In the case of the dreams we have imagined this would not be so. In face of such a shock we might feel our faith in science and order tremble, and then, looking at the situation again in the light of a modi-

fied notation, we might find our faith in science and order restored in a wider form. For looking not only at what goes before events but also at what comes after we might find a justification, not for the old faith that for every difference between two states of affairs there is always a difference in their present or past surroundings, but for the wider faith that for every difference between any two states of affairs there is always a difference *somewhere* in their surroundings, present, past, or *future*. At any moment such purely fanciful and also unconventional reviews of an extraordinary possibility may be needed by those concerned with the actual. For sometimes nature pulls a rabbit from a hat and makes our dreams come true.

Again someone may review unconventionally not some extravagant possibility but some familiar possibility. Sometimes we may be concerned not so to prepare ourselves for the extraordinary that we shall not be unable to 'take it in' when it occurs but to revive or renew our apprehension of possibilities so ordinary that when they are actual we hardly bother to take them in. Christ's story of the good Samaritan was not a story of some unparalleled incident. The point of the story lay in Christ's question 'Who was neighbour to him who fell among thieves?' When dramatists, poets, novelists, present to us possible situations and give us a new view of these situations they do not assert, like historians, that such situations have actually occurred. They review the possible. But such review of the possible leads to a new view of the actual whenever and in so far as that reviewed as possible becomes actual.

So far so good. Words which make no statement as to the actual but merely review the possible may at any moment aid our apprehension of the actual.

7. Now what about metaphysical philosophy? Unquestionably metaphysics puts in a different light certain sorts of possible incidents and undoubtedly such incidents often occur. For instance, when a metaphysical philosopher says that questions as to good and evil are questions of taste, or questions as to how we feel, this puts in a new light what one does if and when one asks a moral question. Such an account of what one is doing if one asks a moral question represents a person who asks, for instance, 'Would it be wrong to go?' as more like than we had ever imagined to one who asks 'Would we feel guilty if we went?' Perhaps this account of moral questioning distorts it. Perhaps another metaphysical philosopher says, 'No, if someone asks "Would it be wrong to go?" then he is usually asking for

further information as to what the present circumstances are, as to what are the facts of the case. It is only when no further question of fact remains that the words "Would it be wrong?" put to the hearers a question as to what his sentiments are towards going.' Perhaps a third philosopher says, 'No, this won't do. One who replies "It would be wrong" is not expressing his sentiments. His words are imperative and they mean "Don't go".' Perhaps a fourth philosopher says, 'No. You are all profoundly distorting the situation. The words "It would be wrong" are an answer to a question, and this question is not one which directly all the circumstances are known becomes a question of sentiment or no question at all, only a request for advice or orders. On the contrary, questions of right and wrong, good and evil are those which will be asked when we come to our last account. They will be argued before the Judge from whom no secrets are hid, they will be settled by the Great Accountant who makes no mistakes and whose books omit no liability and no asset. When an accountant calls a man bankrupt or declares him solvent his voice may betray contempt or satisfaction; when one calls a man a sinner or declares him a saint one may be said hardly to mean what one says unless one not only grasps his affinity to a paradigm as when one calls a spade a spade, a greyhound a greyhound, but also feels towards him in a certain way. As meta-moralists we must note this; for as meta-moralists we are concerned with what is done by one who makes a moral judgement. But we must note also how, just as the question "Is he bankrupt?" may call for thought even after all the facts have been ascertained, so may the question "Is he a sinner?" An answer to the question "Is he a sinner?" commits the speaker to an attitude to reality in a way in which an answer to the question "Is he bankrupt?" does not. But this does not make it any less an instrument for apprehending reality.'

I am not concerned here to argue which account of moral questioning is right or better, nor even to argue that the whole of this piece of meta-morals leaves us with a better apprehension of what it is to be concerned with a moral question than that we had before the meta-moralists began their talk.

But I do submit that each account, for better or for worse, puts in a new light anyone who is concerned with a moral question and that the whole discussion does this too even if at the end of it one is no more and no less inclined to offer the word 'objective' or the word 'subjective' as adequate descriptions of the nature of such a question as 'Would it be wrong?'

The fact that we use the same word as we did before the metaphysics began, or that we are still dissatisfied with both words, does not mean that we do not know any better whether and how such questions are subjective or objective. When counsel for the plaintiff and counsel for the defendant present conflicting views of a case, then if one listens only to one of them one may easily get a distorted view of the case. It may even happen that when one listens to both, one's view of the case is in some way less clear than it was before one had heard all the argument. But it will certainly be different. And even if one still gives the same answer as one gave before the case came up for consideration the apprehension which lies behind the answer is different from that which lay behind it before.

On the other hand while recognition of *a priori* truth in logic and mathematics throws light both on what happens when a statement of a certain sort is made and also on the situation described by that statement, recognition of *a priori* truth in metaphysics does not in this *double* way throw light on the actual. Suppose a mathematician says, 'To say that there are three times twelve things of a certain kind in a certain place is equivalent to saying that there are thirty-six things of that kind in that place.' Consideration of what the mathematician draws our attention to will throw a light both on what is being done if and when someone says, for instance, 'There are three times twelve glasses here' and also on the situation which this person describes. Suppose a metaphysical philosopher says, 'To say that a thing is sweet is very like and yet profoundly different from saying that to most creatures with a sense of taste it tastes sweet.' Consideration of what the metaphysician draws our attention to will throw a light on what is being done if and when someone says, for instance, 'This sherry is sweet', but it will throw little or no light on the situation which this person describes. We need to inquire the reason for this if we are to grasp the nature of metaphysical philosophy and the difference between it and logic and mathematics. But that inquiry must be left for another time.

We must also leave for another time an inquiry into the difference and the connexion between metaphysical philosophy and another study which is also called philosophy and finds expression in such words as 'Continual disappointment can be avoided and contentment attained only by overcoming the will to live', 'Life is a tale told by an idiot', 'For goodness, growing to a plurisy, dies in his own too-much.'