LECTURE 1

A question of method

'Introduction to language-analytical philosophy' – that is ambiguous. From a lecture-course with this title one might expect a survey of a philosophical movement, an historical or systematic guide to the philosophical literature commonly called language-analytical. This is not what I shall be doing, particularly as such introductions to language-analytical philosophy already exist.[1] The title can also be interpreted in another sense, by understanding 'philosophy' in the sense of philosophical activity. The title would then denote an introduction to language-analytical *philosophizing.*

One introduces someone to a particular activity by demonstrating it to him by means of an example, so that he can imitate it. So I would have to demonstrate to you a characteristic language-analytical line of thought in a way that would enable you to follow it and stimulate you to carry out similar patterns of argument yourself. And indeed this is something I intend to do. But such a demonstration by means of an example cannot, taken by itself, suffice for an introduction if the activity in question is a way of doing philosophy.

A way of doing philosophy is not related to other ways of doing philosophy in the way that one form of dance is related to other forms. Forms of dance are not mutually exclusive or inclusive. On the same evening one can, with equal enthusiasm, dance a tango, a boogie and a rock'n'roll – and simply not bother with the waltz. But one cannot philosophize in one way without having rejected or incorporated the others. A dance can be out of date; but it is not on that account incorrect. In philosophy, on the other hand, as in every science, the concern is with

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1 cf. among others Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, Chaps. 9 and 15–18 (this can be especially recommended); Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis* (instructive for the beginnings but does not take in more recent developments); Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn* (a collection of programmatic papers with a detailed introduction); von Savigny, *Die Philosophie der normalen Sprache*; von Kutschera, *Sprachphilosophie*; Stegmüller, *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie* Vol. I, Chaps. 9–11, Vol. II, Chaps. 1 and 2.

truth. For this reason, although ways of doing philosophy can be modern or old-fashioned, worrying about this is the business not of the philosopher but of the historian. If I am asked why I do philosophy in this way rather than that I cannot answer: 'Because it is up to date', but only: 'Because it is the correct way.' But this implies an obligation to justify the claim to be correct. To introduce someone to a way of doing philosophy, therefore, involves relating it to other ways of doing philosophy and, by means of such a confrontation, demonstrating its correctness.

But this means that one must debate the idea of philosophy as such. If one's aim is to introduce someone to a particular way of doing philosophy one cannot simply presuppose the concept of philosophy. To introduce someone to a particular way of philosophizing is, hence, always also to introduce someone to philosophizing as such.

If it is true that one can only introduce someone to language-analytical philosophy, or any other sort of philosophy, by contrasting it with other ways of doing philosophy, then this affects the question of which line of thought is to be chosen to illustrate it. We cannot be content with just any example. In confronting language-analytical philosophy with other ways of philosophizing we are not just confronting methods. The important philosophical positions of the past always took as their starting-point certain fundamental substantive questions around which the whole field of possible philosophical questions was organized. In the case of language-analytical philosophy it may be less clear what its central substantive question is, indeed whether it has one. But then we may expect that it might be precisely in the confrontation with earlier philosophical positions that language-analytical philosophy will find its own central question. And this means that it is only in this confrontation that it will find itself.

If this is correct we cannot assume that language-analytical philosophy is already a fixed quantity which we can first introduce and then contrast with earlier positions in an appendix. Nowhere is it laid down what language-analytical philosophy is. If we sought to arrive at a definition of 'language-analytical philosophy' by a process of induction and abstraction from the existing philosophical literature which is described as language-analytical, then at best we would achieve an empty characterization; it could not serve as the basis for a concrete way of philosophizing.

So do I want to introduce you to something which does not yet exist? In the case of philosophy this is not as absurd as it sounds. A philosophy is only constituted in philosophizing. It follows from this that philosophizing, and a way of philosophizing, is an activity which only becomes what it is in the process of being introduced.

But in that case we must abandon yet another prejudice: if what is being introduced does not exist prior to its introduction then clearly the person who wishes to introduce others to this activity cannot himself have it at his disposal. He can only introduce others by at the same time introducing himself.

Perhaps these reflections strike you as incredible and as a poor pedagogical trick. Does not the pretension of seeking to introduce someone to something which does not yet exist, and is first constituted in the introduction, remind one of Münchhausen's attempt to pull himself up by his own bootstraps? Can I seriously wish to assert that I want to introduce you to something with which I am myself not yet acquainted? Obviously one cannot look for something of which one does not already have a vague preliminary conception (*Vorbegriff*). And obviously I do have a vague preliminary conception of linguistic analysis. But then no doubt so do you. On the other hand, it is unclear to us, and in general, in what linguistic analysis, as a philosophical position, really consists. We cannot expect to remove this unclarity by getting an answer from somewhere, but only by deepening the existing preliminary conception. And it may not be implausible to expect that precisely from a confrontation of linguistic analysis – initially on the basis of the vague preliminary conception we have of it – with important earlier philosophical positions there will emerge its own substantive fundamental question. To arrive at this fundamental question is the aim of the introductory part of these lectures (Lectures 1–7). In the main part which follows we shall, by analysing the predicative statement-form, take a first step in answering this question.

Let us begin, then, with that vague preliminary understanding (*Vorverständnis*) which everyone can be assumed to have, inasmuch as it is simply an explication of its designation. Clearly 'language-analytical philosophy' refers to a way of doing philosophy which involves the belief that the problems of philosophy can be solved, or must be solved, by means of an analysis of language.

Immediately the question arises: by means of what sort of an analysis of language? The analysis of language would seem to be the task of linguistics. Does this mean, then, that philosophy, if it is understood as linguistic analysis, becomes linguistics or a part of linguistics? Or is the analysis of language carried out in philosophy different from that carried out in linguistics? And, if so, how is the difference to be characterized? Notice how, from the very beginning, our enterprise becomes more complicated. Language-analytical philosophy finds itself confronted, not only with a demand to legitimate itself vis-à-vis other

conceptions of philosophy, but also with the demand to define its rela-
tionship to a closely connected empirical science.

We have here a specific instance of a difficulty philosophy has always
faced when trying to define itself: how is it to define its relationship to the
sciences? It is characteristic of modern philosophy that this question arises
not just in general in relation to all sciences, but in a special way in relation
to one particular science. For classical modern philosophy, particularly
since Kant, this science was psychology. Now it is linguistics. Perhaps
there is another way of doing philosophy for which sociology occupies a
corresponding position. In modern philosophy this peculiar collision with
a specific empirical science results from what is called its *reflective* charac-
ter. It conceives of its enquiries as consisting not in the direct thematization
of such and such objects but in simultaneous reflection on how these
objects can be given to us, how they become accessible to us.

In classical modern philosophy the field of givenness reflected upon was
conceived as consciousness, a dimension of representations or ideas;
whereas in the new conception of philosophy it is conceived as the sphere
of the understanding of our linguistic expressions. In every instance phil-
osophy finds its sphere of reflection already occupied by a particular
empirical science. And so each time the question arises: how is this sphere,
if, from the point of view of philosophy, it is not just one sphere among
others, accessible to a specifically philosophical mode of study?

I know of no satisfactory answer to the question of how language-
analytical philosophy is to be distinguished from the empirical science of
linguistics. Such an answer can certainly not be given with the aid of
traditional distinctions between philosophy and science, since this answer
would have to depend essentially on the new conception of philosophy.
Anyway at the present stage of this introduction we clearly lack all the
presuppositions for meaningfully tackling this question. All one can really
say at present is: language-analytical philosophy differs from the empirical
science of linguistics in that it has to justify itself as philosophy, and,
hence, finds itself confronted by other philosophical positions.

I return to the nominal definition of 'language-analytical philosophy' as
a philosophy which seeks to solve the problems of philosophy by means of
an analysis of language. How can we get further if we start from this first
preliminary understanding? We can turn to the person who hears this
definition for the first time and see what his initial reaction is.

If he is a thinking person he will immediately raise the following objec-
tion (it is the standard objection that is always brought against the
language-analytical conception of philosophy). 'It is clear,' he will say,

'that verbal explanations belong to philosophy. They have always done so.
But they represent only a preliminary stage and serve merely to remove
the unclarity and ambiguity in the use of philosophical terms. This can
only be a transitional stage on the way to the things with which we are
concerned. After all, language is only a medium, and if a philosophy
regards the analysis of linguistic usage as not just a preliminary task, but
as its real task, then it has clearly lost contact with the substantial ques-
tions, the things themselves.'

We begin then with the negative in which the idea of a language-
analytical philosophy first appears to an outsider. However, the objection
just raised only remains on the periphery. It speaks of things in contrast to
words without saying what sort of things it means, and where they are
to be found. Only when we get our thinking person to explain what he
means will we have taken a first step into the real field of dispute.

In which extra-linguistic sphere, we will ask him, are the things them-
selves to which he refers to be sought? If he is not a philosopher, but
simply a thinking person, then he will most likely reply: 'The things
themselves? Clearly they are given to us by experience. And the appeal
not to remain with mere words had this meaning: to reach knowledge one
must have recourse to experience.'

With reference to empirical knowledge the objection, thus interpreted,
seems plausible, indeed conclusive. Precisely what it says is true of an
empirical science: explanations of words are necessary, but they constitute
only a transitional stage in research. Here the things themselves are the
facts of a sphere of scientific experience. But if the objection is put forward
as an objection to a conception of *philosophy*, then this can only mean either
(a) that one denies that philosophy is a specific dimension of enquiry
which is not reducible to the empirical sciences (in which case it is not
an objection specifically to language-analytical philosophy, but to philoso-
phy as such) or (b) that one supposes that philosophy has its own, and
hence non-empirical, mode of experience. If the objection is not simply
from a thinking person, but from a philosopher, then the second of these
alternatives must be the one he has in mind.

The justification of the above objection cannot, therefore, be rationally
discussed without going into the question of the specific subject-matter of
philosophy, and what it is about this subject-matter which distinguishes
philosophy from the empirical sciences. A dominant, though not undis-
puted, view of philosophy in the history of philosophy is that it has to
do, not with empirical knowledge, but with *a priori* knowledge, that its
propositions are valid *a priori*, i.e. they cannot be verified, or falsified, by

(sensory) experience. Of course, this description applies equally to logic and mathematics; so it cannot be used to define philosophy. Moreover, such an external description remains unsatisfactory so long as one does not ask on what essential feature of philosophy it is grounded.

Those who have described the subject-matter of philosophy as *a priori* (Plato was the first) have done so because they believed that all understanding contains presuppositions we normally do not attend to, but which when attended to appear as something we know, for we cannot conceive that it could be different. But when we want to express this knowledge we become perplexed. A classical example of this (used again by Wittgenstein[2]) is St Augustine's remark about time. 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know.'[3] Here then we seem to have a sphere of knowledge where our ignorance rests not on inadequate experience but on the fact that we are dealing with aspects of our understanding which are too close to us and too obvious. What we are here striving for is not the explanation of something that is not yet understood, but the clarification of what is already understood. And this clarification can only be achieved by reflection on our understanding itself, not by experience.

This explication of the subject-matter of philosophy (though still, of course, wholly abstract and thesis-like) also enables one to see how philosophy differs from other *a priori* forms of knowledge. Logic and mathematics are also *a priori*, but they do not seek to articulate something we already know; rather they ask about what is implied by things which we already know, or which we can hypothetically assume. St Augustine's remark about time is not applicable to the sentences of logic and mathematics.

Since Kant the analytic and the synthetic *a priori* have been distinguished. Sentences are called analytic *a priori* if their truth or falsity rests solely on the meaning of the linguistic expressions contained in them. Thus we arrive at analytic *a priori* sentences by linguistic analysis or, more precisely, by the analysis of the meaning of our linguistic expressions. By contrast, sentences would be synthetic *a priori* if, though not empirical, their truth did not rest simply on the meaning of the expressions contained in them.

So it now becomes clear both which conception of philosophy underlies the language-analytical position and which alternative the objection raised

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2   *Philosophical Investigations,* §89.   3   *Confessions* XI, 14.

to it boils down to. Language-analytical philosophy corresponds to the traditional conception of philosophy as an *a priori* form of knowledge and interprets the *a priori* as an analytic *a priori.* With reference to the explanation of the subject-matter of philosophy just given this means that the knowledge presupposed in all understanding is to be understood as knowledge of the meaning of the linguistic expressions in which understanding is articulated. And the objection to the language-analytical position, as now becomes apparent, comes down to the alternative: either deny that there is an *a priori* subject-matter or claim that there is a synthetic *a priori.*

In the objection as it was first abstractly formulated were combined (though at first this was not noticed) two diametrically opposed positions, one empirical and the other metaphysical. The only proper way of dealing with the objection is to discuss each of them separately. Against the empiricist the linguistic analyst can argue that in language we actually have a sphere of the *a priori* as this was just described: we know what our linguistic expressions mean without always being able to articulate what we thus know; where we succeed there result analytic statements.

But on what should a synthetic *a priori* rest? It seems that one must conceive, in the sphere of the *a priori*, an analogue of sense-experience. In this way there arises the idea of a non-empirical experience, a spiritual seeing, an intellectual intuition. Plato and Aristotle called this intellectual intuition *nous;* and in Latin this was translated as *intuitus.* More or less explicitly this idea of an intellectual intuition plays an important role in large parts of the philosophical tradition. In our time it has been taken up and theoretically developed by phenomenology. The language-analytical thesis that there is only an analytic, only a linguistic *a priori* can therefore be seen as a counter-thesis to the idea of an intellectual intuition.

There is of course another conception of a synthetic *a priori* which does not involve an appeal to intellectual intuition. This is the Kantian conception. Kant rejected the idea of a non-empirical experience, an intellectual intuition. He also related all non-analytic knowledge to empirical experience. However, he believed that one can know synthetic propositions *a priori* relating to experience. Their validity is not apprehended in an intellectual intuition but rests on the fact that they formulate the conditions of the possibility of experience. However, it is doubtful whether Kant's attempt to find an alternative to the analytical and intuitive conceptions of philosophy is successful. The propositions which Kant represents as conditions of the possibility of experience can also be interpreted as analytic. To the 'conditions of the possibility' of experience belongs

precisely what is analytically contained in the meaning of 'experience'. Thus one can say that what Kant has done is to analyse a certain concept of experience.

Summarizing we can say: supposing (a) that the critique of the Kantian conception of a synthetic *a priori* (which I have here merely hinted at) had been carried through and (b) that the idea of an intellectual intuition had been refuted, then the language-analytical conception of doing philosophy would have been shown to be the correct, because only possible, way of doing philosophy. Assuming, that is, that the *a priori* is characteristic of philosophy.

In one's first confrontation with the specifically philosophical, *a priori* subject-matter one is easily misled into transferring to it the structures which are familiar from scientific or even pre-scientific knowledge. This is why one points away from words to things without considering that philosophy does not relate to things in the way the sciences do. And even when this is admitted there is a temptation to distinguish the things of philosophy and their mode of availability from empirical things but nonetheless to conceive of them by analogy with empirical things. The philosophical subject-matter is not surrendered in the language-analytical conception; it is merely freed from a naive misunderstanding.

For philosophy the demand that we should turn our attention to the things can only mean: that we should conceive of the *a priori* subject-matter in connection with experience. The danger of losing contact with the things (and that means: with experience) arises precisely when a philosophy constructs in the *a priori* sphere its own fictitious world of things with its own non-empirical mode of access. Precisely if experience is the only subject-matter for philosophy then what is specifically philosophical can only be linguistic analysis.

The last reflection serves to draw our attention to a questionable assumption which the line of thought pursued so far shares with the traditional conception of philosophy. Even if the existence of an *a priori* and its distinction from the empirical seems undeniable, it does not follow that it is meaningful to set the sphere of the *a priori* over against the sphere of the empirical as a self-contained sphere of knowledge. Nor does it follow that it is meaningful to distinguish from the empirical sciences an exclusively *a priori* enquiry and subject-matter called philosophy.

This however is to touch on a question which points ahead and which one is unlikely to make progress with in the confrontation with earlier philosophical positions. And at the present stage of our argument it cannot be tackled at all, for we do not yet possess a unitary conception of

philosophy. Only on the basis of such a conception could it be decided in what way *a priori* and empirical enquiry are to be combined.

We must not disregard this question, though it must be borne in mind as a question that has yet to be decided. The primary aim of the line of thought pursued so far has been to make us realize that we have not yet arrived at a definite conception of philosophy (even if we do not question the presupposition of a purely *a priori* conception of philosophy). For even if we exclude, in the way previously indicated, the sphere of logic and mathematics, the remaining sphere of the *a priori* does not amount to a unified subject-matter. We clearly do not want to regard all analytic statements which rest on some definition or other (e.g. 'A bachelor is unmarried') as belonging to philosophy.

So apriority is at best a generic feature of philosophy; it does not suffice for its specific definition. Nor did earlier conceptions of philosophy consist simply of the idea that philosophical knowledge is *a priori.* Similarly, the notions of meaning-analysis and analyticity do not suffice to provide the language-analytical conception with a unitary concept of philosophy. If one looks at the language-analytical literature one notices that it is not just any words whose meaning is investigated. But from where does language-analytical philosophy get its criteria for deciding which words, types of word, and linguistic structures are to be analysed? Obviously to a large extent from its orientation towards traditional philosophical disciplines and problems. In so far as this is so the objection that the language-analytical position is only a method and does not possess a unified central question of its own appears justified. However, the objection only applies to the existing language-analytical literature. We have yet to see whether in the very idea of a language-analytical philosophy there may not be contained a unitary fundamental question.

LECTURE 2

A philosopher in search of a conception of philosophy

The confrontation with earlier conceptions of philosophy with which I am beginning the introduction to language-analytical philosophy not only has the aim of justifying this way of doing philosophy; it is also intended as a way of finding its own central question. The first thrust remained on the periphery. We merely inferred what language-analytical philosophy is from the definition of the name. And the idea that philosophy is *a priori* was simply taken over from the tradition. Nonetheless we did succeed in taking a first step towards justification: the apparently superficial idea that the method of philosophy consists in an analysis of our linguistic under-standing was shown to be the defensible core of the traditional conception of the *a priori* character of philosophy. With this first step we have reached the current self-understanding of language-analytical philosophers. How-ever, this self-understanding is not adequate, for, as we have seen, it provides no criterion for distinguishing the philosophically relevant words, or what is philosophically relevant in language, from what is philosophically irrelevant. For this we clearly need a definition of the subject-matter of philosophy, something which is not given simply by saying that the subject-matter of philosophy is *a priori.*

How should one proceed? One could try to make distinctions within the sphere of the *a priori*, to distinguish different species of the analytic. One could, for example, exclude empirical expressions which can be defined in terms of a combination of properties. For example, the sentence 'Bachelors are unmarried' is analytic because 'bachelor' is defined as 'unmarried man'. One could try to delimit a class of expressions which one feels are not empirical in this sense and which may be thought to be somehow (I am deliberately expressing myself in this vague way) philosophically relevant: words such as 'good', 'true', 'action', 'belief', 'experience', 'time', 'object', 'meaning'.

I shall not take this path, though it seems to me promising and has yet to be developed. Even if by following this path one succeeded in arriving at useful distinctions one would still lack orientation with respect to the