Review of: C.W.K. Mundle, Critique of Linguistic Philosophy, 

---

1) Introduction

Contemporary British philosophy -- linguistic philosophy -- is in crisis. This style of philosophizing, which has dominated the English-speaking world since the end of the last Great War, is now a spent force: it has become increasingly academic and sterile. That linguistic philosophy is at a dead-end is now widely recognized among British philosophers, particularly the younger ones; but outside this small "club" there is little knowledge of the state of philosophy.

This ignorance on the part of the "layman" of what British philosophers are thinking has been carefully fostered by these philosophers themselves. They have worked to transform philosophy from being a matter of general intellectual concern into a Specialized Academic Subject -- a kind of parody of a Science practiced by a parody "Scientific Community" (1): the informal "club" of Professional Philosophers. Within this "Club" there has been remarkably little critical discussion of the nature and purpose of philosophy further than the enunciation of the Profession's shared and unexamined notion of the role of "The Philosopher". The few attempts there have been to look critically at the course of recent British philosophy have come from "outsiders" to the Profession, and they have not been kindly received. Either they have been derided or ignored (2).

The most recent attempt to discuss linguistic philosophy in general is the work now under review: C.W.K. Mundle's A Critique of Linguistic Philosophy; and its author -- not an "outsider" but Professor of Philosophy at Bangor in North Wales -- is very conscious of the way the Profession has reacted to previous such works. In particular he is mindful of the hostile reception of Gellner's pioneering attempt to discuss the course of recent British philosophy


"It is perilous" writes Mundle,

to do what Professor Gellner attempted in *Words and Things*, that is, to describe a single set of doctrines shared, and gambits used, by all linguistic philosophers. I shall not claim that there are any such doctrines shared by all works I shall criticize except the assertion or assumption that the subject-matter of philosophy is language. I shall therefore try to avoid making sweeping generalizations about linguistic philosophy. Linguistic philosophers will be considered one at a time, and each will be criticized for specific things that he has written." (p.12)

Unfortunately, this method of approach, while it may meet with the approval of the Profession, is incapable of generating anything like a critique of linguistic philosophy. Anyone wishing for a general critical review of recent British philosophy and lured by the title of this book will be disappointed. Mundle makes no attempt to give a general and over-all picture of recent British philosophy. The work of four recent philosophers (Ayer, Wittgenstein, Austin and Ryle) is discussed in detail, but there is no critique -- the word implies a systematic exposition and criticism of underlying assumptions -- there is merely a series of piecemeal and unrelated criticisms of greater or lesser significance, but whose significance is never established since they are not placed within any larger theoretical framework. Furthermore, only a single, isolated and, as such, superficial feature of linguistic philosophy is the

3. On its publication in 1959, Professor Ryle refused to have it reviewed in *Mind*, one of the main Professional Journals, and it has been ignored ever since. Incidentally, Mundle's fears have already proved justified: A.R. White, reviewing the book in *Philosophical Books*, 12 no.2, May 1971 (pp.20-2) writes: "This is another work in the Joad-Gellner tradition" (p.20); and also:

"Mundle's discussion of 'linguistic philosophy' is no attempt is made by White to defend the quotation marks -- which he takes to be an aberration -- proceeds by a caricatured consideration of particular, out of context, views expressed by Ayer, Austin, Ryle, Strawson, Warnock, Wittgenstein and the present reviewer. Partly Mundle is unable to see and partly unwilling to see what these philosophers are doing." (p.21)
"target" of criticism: "the assertion or assumption that the subject-matter of philosophy is language"; other fundamental assumptions of linguistic philosophy are shared by Mundle and left unexamined by him. This book is so far from being adequate to its title that it may well serve as an illustration of many of those distinctive features of recent British philosophy which stand so urgently in need of criticism: the piecemeal, abstract and unhistorical approach, the unfelt absence of a general theoretical framework and the taking of basic assumptions for granted.

Mundle has tried to criticize linguistic philosophy "from the inside". He says:

"Critics of linguistic philosophy, including Bertrand Russell, who have argued from premises no longer accepted by those whom they criticize have usually had their criticisms ignored... Using only... the premises and methods of argument which are employed by its practitioners, I hope to show that linguistic philosophy, in its diverse forms, has been a deviation from traditional philosophy and that some of its fruits have been absurd and educationally harmful." (p.11)

I share Mundle's dissatisfaction with the present state of philosophy in this country -- but just for this reason I am also critical of his book; and the main point I want to try to make in this review is that a critique of linguistic philosophy cannot be made "from within". It is absolutely impossible to understand the nature of linguistic philosophy and the reasons for its poverty in this way, because the perspective of linguistic philosophy has no theoretical tools with which to consider and analyze philosophical movements. This is particularly clear in Mundle's book: it is not merely that there is no general consideration of linguistic philosophy; even in his particular discussion of individual philosophers his approach is so piecemeal that he cannot see unity in an individual's thought. He is reduced to the desperate, although by now familiar, resort of enumerating (in lists) views those individuals hold and pointing to inconsistencies in them. Philosophy is regarded as a set of abstract "propositions" removed from all context. This way of looking at thought has become so conventional now as to go unquestioned among our contemporary philosophers; nevertheless, no philosophy, no thought, can be understood when regarded in this fashion. Linguistic philosophy, any philosophy for that matter, is invisible from within this sort of method.
The history of philosophy cannot be treated as if it were a series of abstract propositions so that, as has often been observed, Hume (for example) becomes as though our contemporary and, as is often ignored, we become pure consciousness magically removed from the world of Time.

However, this magically timeless consciousness which "The Philosopher" finds himself with is merely an illusion of his method of thought. In fact, his philosophy could hardly be more ideological. Again Mundle's work may illustrate this: the avowed purpose of his book is ideological — it is merely to reject linguistic philosophy; and the method by which Mundle accomplishes this task positively hinders any serious understanding of linguistic philosophy.

Mundle sums this method up in his "premise" that "contradictions are not allowed". I will quote the whole passage in which this phrase occurs because it gives the flavour of the book in concentrated form, and because I shall be discussing other aspects of it later:

"The premises from which I shall argue would, presumably, be accepted by linguistic philosophers. They are:
(1) Empiricism (to be defined later),
(2) that philosophy still includes the theory of knowledge,
(3) that contradictions are not allowed,
(4) a methodological principle distilled from Austin's work: that technical terms be not multiplied beyond necessity, but that when we need them we should define them and explain their function. (We might call this 'Austin's Razor'.)

If linguistic philosophers would reject any of these premises, I hope they will make this public." (p.11)

"Contradictions are not allowed": this may be a strangely childish way of putting things, but it does convey one of the major features of the method of contemporary British philosophy. The abstract propositions which are supposed to constitute a philosophy are investigated, and when they are found to be contradictory they are rejected and we move on to the next item on the list. Thus philosophical investigation comes to an end when a contradiction is reached, which is sufficient if what you want to do is to reject a philosophy, but not if you also want to understand it. For to understand the philosophy you must go on
to enquire why this thinker should have been contradictory in his ideas. Mundle never does this: he has ransacked the works of Ayer, Wittgenstein, Ryle and Austin to discover contradictions in what they have said; but when he has discovered these contradictions that is, for him, the end of the matter: he thinks he has refuted and disposed of them. This familiar method in the hands of linguistic philosophers has succeeded in making even the greatest thinkers look simple-mindedly "confused". In fact, what this method does is to make nonsense out of philosophy; and one of the first tasks of a critique of linguistic philosophy is surely to show that more is involved in serious philosophy than this sort of rooting out of contradictions.

Ideological rejection, as opposed to analysis and understanding, has predominated in most of the criticisms of linguistic philosophy which have appeared so far. And although ideological rejection is a necessary first step in freeing ourselves from this stultifying orthodoxy, Mundle's work adds little to what has gone before it. Dissatisfaction with linguistic philosophy is now widespread, and what is now needed is a genuine critique of linguistic philosophy.

2) What is linguistic philosophy?

What, then, is linguistic philosophy? Mundle answers this question with a definition:

"Critics of this book" he writes, "may want to say that they do not understand how I am using 'linguistic philosophy'. This has been a stock response to anyone who uses this term -- he is told that there is nothing common to the views and methods of the philosophers

4. Reading Charles Bettleheim's "On the Transition Between Capitalism and Socialism", Monthly Review, 20 no.10, March 1969 (pp.1-10) first made me aware of this important point. In this paper he criticizes Paul Sweezy as follows:

"You say that the term 'market socialism' is 'contradictory'. Formally this is obviously not an argument, since all reality is contradictory. The only problem then is to know whether the verbal expression of a reality and of the contradictions which characterize it is adequate or not -- i.e., whether these contradictions are analyzed in scientific terms or only shown in ideological terms" (p.4)

I do not, however, wish to suggest that there is any similarity between Sweezy's thought and Mundle's.
"to whom uninformed outsiders apply it. Whatever others may have meant by 'linguistic philosophy', I am using it, appropriately I think, to refer to philosophers' writings which assert or assume that the subject-matter of philosophy is language, or the uses of words (or of language), or grammar, or concepts, if talk about 'concepts' turns out, as it commonly does, to be talk about the uses of words." (p.11)

It seems to me that Mundle is right to brush aside the "stock response" that there is no such thing as linguistic philosophy -- when these philosophers are not having to defend themselves, they are (or at least were) happy to identify themselves by boasting of their "revolution in philosophy". Mundle defines linguistic philosophy in terms of its method. Linguistic philosophers have claimed to solve philosophical problems merely by reminding us of facts about the ordinary use of language; they have claimed that this sort of empirical investigation can be used to arrive at philosophically valuable conclusions. What Mundle shows is that, very frequently, these philosophers do not adhere to this programme in practice. He says:

"a good deal of linguistic philosophy has been done by the high a priori method. Like Rationalist metaphysicians, its practitioners have not let mere empirical facts cast doubt upon what they grasped as self-evident." (p.261)

While professing merely to be reminding us of the facts of ordinary usage, often these philosophers are practicing what he calls "a priori linguistics" and "legislative linguistics". By "a priori linguistics" Mundle means the inventing of rules of language which do not, in fact, apply to the common use of language. The most prominent example of this is the Verification Principle, an a priori linguistic rule about the meaning of "meaning". "Legislative linguistics", on the other hand, is the habit of making false assertions about "what we say" in order to support some philosophical theory. With the aid of a great number of illustrative examples, Mundle convincingly shows how commonly these a priori methods are used in linguistic philosophy: how often philosophical views are merely asserted and how linguistic "facts" and "rules" are invented to support them. Mundle thus points to a contradiction between the professed methods of linguistic philosophy and its actual practice. He even goes so far as to say that the professed method of linguistic philosophy could not provide any valuable philosophical results when he writes:

"No metaphysical questions can be settled by appealing to the current uses of English or any other language". (p.266)

And surely Mundle is right about this.
So Mundle has demonstrated the contradiction in linguistic philosophy and there he stops. He has shown that linguistic philosophy ought to be rejected; but notice that this has been accomplished by making nonsense of linguistic philosophy. It is shown to be contradictory, but no attempt is made to understand the reasons for this contradiction or its significance.

Mundle is too anxious to reject linguistic philosophy to bother to try to understand it; but even his own argument should have led him to question the adequacy of his characterization of linguistic philosophy at a more critical level. For if such linguistic reportage is incapable of producing philosophy, and if linguistic philosophy is indeed philosophy (as Mundle takes it to be), then obviously linguistic philosophy is not adequately understood purely in terms of its linguistic method. This definition purely in terms of linguistic method is; in fact, just how linguistic philosophers define themselves — it is nothing but their own ideology of what they are doing. Mundle's demonstration that the ideology and actual practice of these philosophers does not, and could not, square up is useful; but nevertheless it is important to see that he never really questions this ideology.

According to an optimistic version of this ideology, linguistic philosophers have accomplished a "revolution in philosophy". Mundle talks of linguistic philosophy as a "deviation" and an "aberration" from traditional philosophy, for example when he says:

"The assumption that language is the subject-matter of philosophy involves a drastic restriction in the scope of philosophy, and, surely, in its importance. Before Wittgenstein wrote during World War One that 'All philosophy is "Critique of Language"! no important philosopher would have accepted this narrow conception of his subject.' (p.12)

Mundle's idea is basically the same as theirs — a radical break with tradition — only the value judgment differs. However, linguistic philosophy cannot be understood in these terms. If he followed his ideas through, Mundle really ought to be saying not merely that linguistic philosophy is an "aberration" but, since its methods could not lead to any philosophy, that it is no philosophy at all. He does not say this, and quite rightly, since the whole point of his detailed criticisms is that linguistic philosophy has been bad philosophy: philosophy unaware of what it is doing, a priori philosophy, but philosophy nevertheless.
The trouble stems from the attempt to portray this philosophy merely as a "deviation" from traditional philosophy. Certainly, linguistic philosophy is a deviation from traditional philosophy, but it is also the continuation of a philosophical tradition. The great weakness of Mundle's work is that he is so eager to reject linguistic philosophy and return to tradition that he ignores this. The "revolution in philosophy" is a myth: a closer look at the rationale of the linguistic method reveals recognizable and perfectly traditional ideas about the nature of philosophy.

According to the linguistic conception, philosophy is, and always has been, a study of the ways in which men think about the world. On this view, philosophy is a "second-order" study: the critical reflection upon the kind of "first-order" studies which investigate reality directly; the standard example of such a first-order study is natural science. So philosophy, it is said, concerns itself with the study of thought about reality rather than with the direct study of reality itself. This has often been expressed in recent British philosophy by saying that philosophy concerns the study of "concepts" and not "facts". For example, Warnock sums up this idea of philosophy when he writes:

"Philosophy is the study of the concepts that we employ, and not of the facts, phenomena, cases or events to which these concepts might be or are applied. To investigate the latter is to raise political or moral or religious, but not philosophical problems or questions."

Furthermore, the argument goes, the concepts that a person has are displayed in the language that he uses; and therefore it is concluded that philosophy necessarily involves the study of the way language is used.

Mundle is aware of the inadequacies of this argument, and he attacks it at two points. First of all, he argues that the reduction of having concepts to using language presupposes the metaphysical theory of behaviourism, and he shows how very frequently behaviourism is simply presupposed in this manner. He thus argues that the rationale of the method itself presupposes one of the main doctrines that this method is so often subsequently used to "prove". Mundle's second dispute with this rationale is that it makes the distinction between

---

5. As do many of Mundle's predecessors — for example, Gellner, P.A. Lea in his A Defence of Philosophy, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1962; and even Marcuse to an extent.

philosophy and other subjects into an **absolute separation**. Again the underlying metaphysics is simply presupposed in either/or dichotomies of a logical rigidity between concepts/facts, second-order/first-order studies, philosophy/science, etc.. Thus he writes:

"It is a recent and, I think, an eccentric conception of philosophy which assumes that its subject-matter must be something not studied in other University departments: concepts and categories and the logic thereof. Philosophers who use 'the concept of A' would, presumably, if they are empiricists, cash this phrase as meaning 'the (or this) use of the term 'A' and of its synonyms, if any'. If its subject-matter were word-uses, philosophy would be a sub-department of linguistics. This would indeed be a revolutionary departure from the traditional conception of philosophy. But why should anyone think that philosophy excludes all other studies to which Universities have given names?" (p. 262)

Why indeed? Mundle does not answer his own question.

This isolation of philosophy from all other subjects cannot be understood just in terms of the rationalization which the Profession has given for it. The isolation of philosophy as a Specialized Academic Subject is a product of the Professionalization of learning which has been taking place over the last 100 years within an increasingly bureaucratic departmental university structure. The disastrous effects of this are clearer in philosophy than in many other subjects. Philosophy does not fit easily into this structure; but nevertheless, it has had to adapt itself not for metaphysical, but for practical reasons. Within the departmental university, knowledge has been parcelled up into discrete chunks and distributed among the Separate Academic Subjects; and each has thus become a separate specialization presided over by Professional specialists.

Philosophy, in particular, suffers under this regime. Previously the "Queen of the sciences", with all knowledge for her territory, now she is reduced to being a mere **subject** with her own specialized tools and skills and her own exclusive plot to work on. Philosophy, however, will not fit into this system: it has no particular area of knowledge to claim as its own; it has no specialized subject-matter which can be divided off in this way from all others.

Mundle is aware of the disastrous effects on philosophy of its isolation as a Separate Academic Subject; but he criticises only the ideology of this separation and not the underlying structures which are its real cause. He rejects the idea that the subject-matter of philosophy is language; and he
recognizes that philosophers, like any other thinkers, are engaged in what is essentially the same task — the attempt to understand reality. However, I am not sure how Mundle would characterize the difference between philosophers and scientists. It would be natural to continue the foregoing line of thought by saying that each concentrates the main part of his energy on one aspect only of the shared activity of understanding reality: the scientist on the more practical and concrete aspects of the task and the philosopher on the more theoretical and abstract. The division of the labour of understanding the world between them is dictated by practical necessities, and has no metaphysical justification; that is to say, it has no deeper theoretical reason than that it is expedient.

Some such view seems to underlie Mundle's ideas on philosophy, and yet he retains a very frigid notion of separate specialism and specialists. For example:

"Many (most?) branches of knowledge which are now pursued in autonomous University departments have originated from philosophers' observations, speculations and questions. But when the answers to philosophers' questions can, and can only adequately, be verified by systematic observation or experiment, it is time for philosophers to do what they have done in the past, namely to leave it to specialists to pursue their questions; without, however, losing interest in what the specialists discover." (p.262)

Despite Mundle's assurance, philosophers have not always been so complacent as to leave things to "the experts". Mundle himself observes that many of these specialisms have arisen out of philosophy: how could this ever have occurred in Mundle's scheme of things? How could a Specialized subject ever have been created from a philosophical beginning if people (including "philosophers") had not been prepared to develop philosophy into science, but had simply trusted "The Specialists"? This is a strange way of thinking! — and it occurs regardless of the tendency of Mundle's argument to question the legitimacy of these specialisms. Why shouldn't "the philosopher" himself do some systematic observation and even experiment if this is what is needed? Marx would have spent the rest of his life polishing up the 1844 Manuscripts if he had listened to this advice.

Despite criticisms of the isolation of philosophy in theory, Mundle seems all too willing to accept this isolation in practice; and this is yet another aspect of the Professional thinking he shares with his linguistic colleagues.
"Philosophers' business" and "psychologists' business" are, for Mundle, ultimately as isolated as over the most linguistic philosopher could wish. For example, Mundle writes:

"When 'Behaviourism' is used by philosophers to refer to a philosophical theory or thesis, presumably it is not being used to refer to a methodology for the practice of psychology. This is the psychologist's business." (p.48)

And later:

"Behaviourism is an example of a categorial scheme which cannot be accepted because it fails to accommodate empirical facts. (Unless Behaviourism is merely a methodology for the practice of psychology. Psychologists are free to limit their professional interests as they please.)" (p.269)

This is a philosophy of "professional interests" -- unhappily for Mundle though, knowledge of reality cannot as easily be divided up as the administration of a university.

3) Linguistic Philosophy and Empiricism

Mundle's attempt to see linguistic philosophy in terms of its method only, simply as a "deviation" from "traditional philosophy" will not do. Like the philosophers he is criticizing, Mundle lacks even the most rudimentary historical perspective; and thus he does not see that although linguistic philosophy may be a deviation from traditional philosophy, it is also a continuation of a particular philosophical tradition. That is to say, linguistic philosophy is a development of a particular tradition. An appreciation of this is essential to any attempt to analyze linguistic philosophy.

The particular tradition of philosophy which linguistic philosophy develops is, of course, empiricism. Mundle knows this well enough, but instead of discussing the place of linguistic philosophy within the empiricist tradition, he simply "presumes" it when he needs to:

"Presumably linguistic philosophers, or at least some of them, are still empiricists." (p.39)

Mundle's doubts about whether linguistic philosophy is empiricist are to some extent justified by the denials of linguistic philosophers.

As Mundle goes on to say:

"Some who take Wittgenstein's instructions most literally would perhaps want to maintain a discreet neutrality, or even dismiss Empiricism because it is a theory, and therefore to be banned from philosophy." (p.59)

This denial by linguistic philosophers that they have any theory is, however, invariably an illusion which often merely signifies that they are unconscious of what philosophy they do have. However, a more plausible reason which is sometimes given for saying that linguistic philosophy is not empiricist is that many of the doctrines central to traditional empiricism have been criticized and rejected in the work of linguistic philosophers. In particular, the traditional empiricist "theory of ideas", both as a theory of experience and as a theory of meaning. I certainly do not wish to underrate the significance of the criticisms which have come from the linguistic tradition of these, and other, empiricist doctrines (unlike Mundle who is a traditional empiricist); and yet I do not think that those criticisms provide a sufficient ground for denying that linguistic philosophy is, typically, empiricist.

It all depends upon how you think of empiricism. There are ways which make sense of it and ways which do not — Mundle's does not. Again Mundle provides a definition/list instead of investigation and discussion, which are once more "presumed". He says:

"The central theses of traditional British Empiricism have presumably been these:

(i) that all statements whose truth can be known a priori are analytic, their truth being determined by the meanings of the symbols in which they are expressed;

(ii) that the evidence for the truth or falsity of any non-analytic statement consists of the data of someone's observations and/or self-awareness;

(iii) that a person's evidence for the truth or falsity of any non-analytic statement consists of the data of his own observations and/or self-awareness, such data including, of course, testimony of other people;

(iv) that all of a person's ideas are derived from his own experience." (p.58)

The fundamental thing wrong with this "definition" is the very idea that a philosophical tradition like empiricism can be defined in this way: by listing a set of "central theses" which are abstract propositions; and exactly the same fault lies behind the linguistic philosopher's idea that he has transcended empiricism merely because he has criticized certain of its "central theses".
What Mundle has tried to do is to discover the abstract essence of empiricism, by finding and listing the common tenets of faith uniting Bacon and Locke with Ayer and Wittgenstein, by virtue of which they are all empiricists. Even if this sort of definition were possible we would still know very little about empiricism; but it is not. Mundle's definition will not do because it defines empiricism in terms which would have been incomprehensible to the early empiricists, from Bacon to Hume, since they have come into existence since their time (for example, analytic truth), as well as for other reasons which will soon emerge. The important general point, however, is that the identity of a tradition of thought, empiricism in this case, cannot be given like this. There is no abstract unchanging essence of empiricism, for empiricism has developed and changed with time while it has retained its identity. This is obvious really, and there is nothing mysterious about it, so long as we do not insist on thinking that a thing requires an unchanging essence to give it identity. Wittgenstein has criticized this type of essentialist thought; however, his own positive theory is sketchy and undeveloped and his thinking remains unhistorical; when it is inflated by Wittgenstein's Professional disciples into a "theory of family resemblances" it becomes positively mystifying. The essential thing to see is that all things have a history -- they develop and they change, and they preserve their identity through these changes.

Mundle's attempt, then, to specify the "central theses" of empiricism is bound to fail. His basic mistake is to try to define a tradition of thought by a few abstract propositions. Of course Mundle is correct to link empiricism with the view that knowledge is derived from, and must be based upon, experience; but the point is that the way empiricists have understood this central notion of experience and its relation to knowledge has developed as the empiricist tradition has developed. Empiricism has not always been identically the same philosophy: Bacon's empiricism is not Hume's is not Ayer's. Empiricism is an evolving philosophical tradition which runs continuously from Bacon's time to the present.

8. Mundle's criticism of Wittgenstein's discussion of "family resemblances" on pp.190-3 criticizes its sketchiness, although partly from a puritanical dislike of Wittgenstein's style, but fails to see its significance.

9. A point Mundle makes on pp.244-5.
Just consider the evolution of the central notion of experience in this tradition. For Bacon, who spoke for the revolutionary Bourgeoisie in ascendency, experience is an all-inclusive notion: the direct encounter of consciousness with reality. The history of the concept of experience in empiricism from his time is the history of the increasing restriction of this notion, and a concomitant blinkering of this philosophical vision. The restriction and systematization of the notion begins with Locke — his theory of ideas begins the process of defining and limiting the notion of experience as it is interpreted within the empiricist tradition (experience has begun the process of becoming private, subjective and mental), even though Locke's understanding of the term is still very broad. The theory of ideas is then progressively refined within the empiricist tradition, through Hume who already regards experience as fragmentary and momentary (10), until modern empiricists have reduced their notion of experience to the seeing of coloured patches ("sense-data"). Empiricism, then, is not simply the philosophy which holds that knowledge is based on experience, but a philosophical tradition in which this statement has been given a particular and changing interpretation through the theory of ideas and the sense-datum theory.

The notion of experience was central to classical empiricism. With Locke it was systematized in the theory of ideas which was developed into the more recent sense-datum theory. These theories have provided the metaphysics of traditional empiricism. That is to say, these evolving theories have provided the basic assumptions of empiricist philosophy, which has predominantly consisted of the working out of the consequences of these assumptions for particular kinds of knowledge (knowledge of existence, causality and continuity in the "external world", knowledge of self and others, etc..). The theory of experience has been so central a feature of classical empiricism that it seems plausible to regard the rejection of sense-data theory by linguistic philosophers (e.g. Wittgenstein, Austin and Ryle) as an indication that they have rejected empiricism. However, a more detailed look at linguistic philosophy and its genesis leads to the opposite conclusion. The development of the theory of experience is instructive here. In the evolution of empiricism we see the narrowing of the concept of experience, until by the early part of this Century the theory of

experience has changed from being the solution to the problems of empiricist epistemology to being its major problem. However, also in the early part of this Century, the work of Russell and the young Wittgenstein in particular had begun to show the way to preserving the essentials of empiricism by embodying its metaphysics in a theory of meaning rather than in the crisis-ridden theory of experience. This development gave empiricism a brief burst of new life which culminated in the logical positivism of the 1930s. Logical positivism explicitly replaced the traditional theory of ideas with a theory of meaning, the Verification Principle, as the embodiment of its metaphysics. However, the Verification Principle still required a theory of experience to supplement it, and desperate attempts were made to preserve some sort of experience from the disintegrating sense-datum theory so that there would be something by which verification could occur.

Wittgenstein in his later philosophy, however, attempted to entirely discard the theory of experience as underlying his philosophy and to rest it on an account of meaning; but he did not succeed. This was part of his project anyway, and this is why he starts with questions of language and subsequently struggles so hard with the questions of sensations and privacy (the reverse of the order traditional in empiricism). The fact that the locus of interest has now shifted from visual sensations to sensations of pain should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it is problems of experience which are still being discussed: the same problems which arose within sense-datum theory and which defeated it. I cannot now discuss Wittgenstein's philosophy in the detail it requires; the only point I want to make is that in his later work he deals with exactly those problems which had, by that time, become central to the empiricist tradition. His later work is still very much within the empiricist tradition: it deals with the problems which were bequeathed to him by this tradition (or rather, it deals with the problems which he bequeathed to himself when he became dissatisfied with his earlier work, the

11. This account is sketchy, partial and needs much more working out. Logical positivism had other intellectual roots as well, of course: the scientific philosophy of Mach in particular; and did not develop within the British tradition.
Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus; the later Philosophical Investigations is explicitly a critique of this earlier work\(^{(12)}\). But furthermore, Wittgenstein fails to transcend this tradition, of whose problems he more than anyone was aware, because with his quite conscious refusal to develop a theory, he failed to produce an alternative point of view which could generate a decisively new set of problems. Thus it is that the typically empiricist elements of verificationalism and behaviourism\(^{(13)}\) noted by Mundle through his later work, even if these elements do not exhaust his philosophy as some of his disciples would want to have it.

Wittgenstein's later philosophy and the linguistic philosophy to which it has given rise have developed empiricism through a new stage, therefore, but they have not transcended it. The problems of linguistic philosophy are the same as those of earlier empiricism, and like earlier empiricism it fails to resolve these and move beyond them. Furthermore, characteristic elements of empiricist metaphysics continue to dominate the thought of all the major linguistic philosophers: most noticeably, verificationalism and behaviourism.

4. **Empiricism and Science**

Linguistic philosophy is the last and lowest stage of empiricism. It has become pure ideology — and its continuity with traditional empiricism is to be seen most clearly when it is looked at as an ideology in its historical context. Linguistic philosophers are constantly talking about "what we would say" about this or that. The question is: who is this we that linguistic philosophy speaks for? And what, in concrete terms, is it advocating? — What is it for and what is it against?

---

12. In the Preface to the Philosophical Investigations (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Second Edition, 1958), Wittgenstein mentions that his initial plan for the book was that it should be a sort of corrective commentary on his previous work. He says:

"Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book ..., and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking" (p.\(x^{9}\)).

13. Or rather the typically empiricist mixture of behaviourism about the other (an other who is pure behaviour) in unresolved combination with an observing self who is pure consciousness.
Since the War, Professional philosophers have all but abandoned the attempt to understand the world and the ideological significance of their philosophy has become more and more explicit. Mandle knows "what they want" since he wants the same thing: "there is an awkwardness" he says,

"about professing Empiricism for those who have been persuaded to equate it with some form of the Verification Principle, yet have not managed to formulate this in any way which achieves what they want (i.e. to accommodate their own commonsense beliefs about the world plus respectable dread the thought they should be otherwise! scientific statements about unobservable entities while outlawing as nonsense the easiest way of dealing with them all other statements about unobservables especially those made by theologians the traditional enemy and philosophers the new enemy." (p.39)

Mandle puts things very simply: linguistic philosophy is indeed the ideology and science and common sense. Empiricism has always been a philosophy with a particularly close relationship to science. But how strange it is to find science in alliance with common sense. Science is supposed to be self-conscious and critical knowledge -- its results are often far from common sense. Its earliest modern Heroes were supported by the earliest empiricists -- Bacon and Locke -- in their battle against the feudal common sense and religious orthodoxy of their day. Now things are different.

Empiricism has always been a philosophy of scientific rationalism and of the individualistic utilitarian point of view. It is a bourgeois philosophy. Like modern science it arose with the bourgeoisie and its history follows theirs. It is not just a set of abstract propositions, but propositions put forward in particular historical conditions, for some things and against others, whose significance, therefore, changes as those conditions change. Empiricism is a bourgeois philosophy and it has retained this character throughout its history; but the significance of this has altered.

The philosophies of Bacon and Locke begin with powerful attacks on the conventional "common sense" of their day: particularly the religious orthodoxy and scholasticism(14). Bacon argues that knowledge is not gained by the methods

---

of scholasticism: book learning, logical disputes, games with words. To gain knowledge people must have experience of reality. As I have already indicated, Bacon's extremely wide notion of experience has suffered increasing restriction in the empiricist tradition, and along with this has gone a parallel restriction in the type of method of gaining knowledge which is advocated by this philosophy. "Experiment" for Bacon means the direct investigation of reality, and at this stage it is defined mainly negatively in opposition to the scholastic faith in the authority of traditional learning. But increasingly, within the empiricist tradition, "science" and "experiment" have come to have positive meanings in their own right, and their negative meanings (what they rule out in their real historical use) has changed too. The sciences and their experimental method have been defined in more and more restricted terms, by means of the ever narrowing theory of ideas, until the "scientific" and "experimental" method has come to consist of the repetition of ever more rigid rituals of "objective" observation and "data collection", use of "controls" etc., etc.. This process has been greatly accelerated by two factors: firstly, the enormously increased employment of scientists by industry and the consequent professionalization of science, and secondly the development of social science (particularly Marxism) on an actually or potentially anti-bourgeois, non-empiricist basis and its evident practical success.

Originally, then, empiricism was the philosophy of the rising bourgeoisie, whose science was conquering the heavens while they were conquering the earth. It was a revolutionary and a liberating philosophy, in revolt against the religious orthodoxy of its days, against the scholasticism and irrelevance to experience of the Learning of its day. But everything changes, and ultimately into its opposite.

The bourgeoisie has won power. Its fight against feudalism and its religious ideology has been successful both in practice and in theory. And the bourgeoisie of scientific rationalism has replaced religion as the conventional wisdom: it has become the "common sense" of our day. Like its predecessor it has developed through its stages until now it too has become bankrupt, bookish, abstract and verbal. It has changed into its opposite, so

that this empiricism, established by Bacon, has become a sort of New Scholasticism\(^{16}\) supporting the "New Religion" of science; and what Bacon wrote in criticism of the old feudal scholasticism applies equally to the new.

The battle against feudalism and its religious world-view has been won decisively by the bourgeoisie and its science. The enemy of empiricism is no longer religion: a new enemy has arisen to challenge the bourgeoisie and its empiricist rationality. Its ideological battle has become a defensive one now, aimed at preserving this conventional scientific and common sense rationality against any systematic consciousness and thought about the social and individual condition of man — especially Marxism and psycho-analysis. These tendencies are all the more clearly present in much modern British philosophy, which has ceased trying to understand the world, and functions merely as an anti-theoretical ideology to enforce a pseudo-scientific mystification, particularly in the "human sciences". It spreads darkness wherever it looks.

Mundle shares the ideological perspective of linguistic philosophy, even though he is critical of it and recommends a return to the "speculative metaphysics" of "traditional empiricism". Clearly this is a doomed suggestion\(^{17}\) the single positively valuable achievement of linguistic philosophy has been to free British thought from the more glaring contradictions of classical empiricist metaphysics, which had become more of a problem than a help to empiricist philosophers. British philosophers must move on, they cannot go back to such a disastrous past — this is no answer. On the contrary, a necessary condition for any way out of the crisis in which British philosophy is at present is that it free itself from the now almost unconscious vestiges of empiricist metaphysics which survive in it, and adopts a more living perspective. The scientific rationalism of empiricism cannot comprehend the modern world: science can no longer be regarded as the inevitable saviour of mankind, and the ritualized repetition of its recommended method can no longer be regarded as the inevitable path to knowledge. Scientific technology is not

---

16. Mundle also notices the Scholasticism of some linguistic philosophy (p.3), although his point is very different to mine here.

17. Linguistic philosophy has already drawn this sort of rearguard fire; see, for example, some of the papers in H.D. Lewis (ed.) *Clarity is Not Enough*, MacMillan, London, 1963.
inevitably triumphant as it was in the heroic days of bourgeois conquest. British philosophers must escape from the blinkering vision of this dying empiricism. It is essential now to critically evaluate this scientific-technological thinking, to demythologize the activity of science.

This job is a philosophical one, even if professional philosophers have so far evaded it. However, this philosophical work is already being begun in all areas of "human science" particularly by psychologists and sociologists who are aware, from their working experience, of the devastation which has been brought to their subjects by the uncritical scientific rationalism of latter-day empiricism. It is time now for us philosophers to begin this work too; and we can look forward to a re-integration of our efforts with those of other scientists. For too long, we have allowed the Profession to spread its ideology of blind conservatism and ignorance under the name of "philosophy".

Sean Sayors.

18. In an interview in 1946 Mao Tse-tung was asked what would happen if the United States used the atom bomb. He replied:

"The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the U.S. reactionaries use to scare people... Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by people, not by one or two types of weapon.
"Take the case of China. We have only millet plus rifles to rely on, but history will finally prove that our millet plus rifles is more powerful than Chiang Kai-shek's aeroplanes plus tanks.

Although the Chinese people still face many difficulties and will long suffer hardships from the joint attacks of U.S. imperialism and the Chinese reactionaries, the day will come when these reactionaries are defeated and we are victorious. The reason is simply this: the reactionaries represent reaction, we represent progress." (Mao Tse-Tung "Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong (August 1946)"; Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol.4, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961 pp.100-1 (considerably abridged).