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CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF

BY

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CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PHILOSOPHY

By MICHAEL FOSTER, M.A.

SYNOPSIS

Contemporary British philosophy repudiates allegiance to a " school ", but certain traits seem characteristic of it. It sees the task of philosophy as " analysis ", i.e. as clarification, rather than as the attaining of new knowledge. It marks itself off from Logical Positivism, in that it does not restrict the claim to be meaningful to the factual and verifiable statements of science, history and common-sense, nor write off ethical, aesthetic and theological propositions as nonsense. (But though it concedes *meaningfulness* to these latter classes, it is questionable whether it concedes to them the capacity of being *true*.)

In considering the relation of contemporary philosophy to Christian faith, two standpoints are possible. (1) One may examine the statements of Christian faith or theology from the point of view of contemporary philosophy. The debate has hitherto been conducted, both by Christians and others, mainly from this standpoint. From this point of view a main question concerns the validity (in respect both of meaning and of truth) of theological propositions. Or (2) one may attempt to see contemporary philosophy in the light of Christian faith. An attempt at this is made in the paper. From this point of view a main question is whether the demand for clarity, in the form in which contemporary philosophy makes it, is not contrary to a belief in mystery which Christianity must hold.

Philosophy on a theological basis is an alternative to the existing contemporary philosophy.

In writing this paper I have drawn largely on Chapter 1 of my book *Mystery and Philosophy*, which is to be published shortly by the S.C.M. Press.

1. *Historical*

A GREAT change has come over British academic philosophy in the last forty years. Up to the first World War, British universities were still dominated by the idealist philosophy of T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, B. Bosanquet, the Cairds etc. This dominant position has now been taken over by a different philosophy which originated largely in Cambridge, but has now its chief centre in Oxford and has spread rapidly among universities in many parts of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian world, though as far as I know not yet much outside these areas.

Professor B. Blanshard[1] has brought the features of the new philosophical scene into relief by contrasting the Oxford philosophy of the 1950's with that which he remembers of the Oxford of the period from

[1] B. Blanshard, a lecture *The Philosophy of Analysis*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 1952.

1913 when he studied there, and Mr. J. O. Urmson has written a brilliant and authoritative account of the development of the new movement between the two World Wars.[1]

The movement has historical roots in the tradition of British Empiricism. Hume is an important figure in its ancestry. Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, both of Cambridge, broke away from the prevailing idealism (to which both had been originally attached) in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, and the new movement is very largely derived from them, with additional influences from the Viennese Logical Positivists (whose philosophy was introduced to English readers by A. J. Ayer in 1936), and an original genius, L. Wittgenstein. Among its representatives in England are J. Wisdom of Cambridge,[2] G. Ryle,[3] J. L. Austin, Stuart Hampshire,[4] P. F. Strawson,[5] D. L. Pears, G. J. Warnock,[6] G. A. Paul, R. M. Hare,[7] T. D. Weldon[8] and P. H. Nowell Smith[9] of Oxford.[10]

2. *Characteristics: Repudiation of Allegiance to a School*

What *is* this philosophy? What are the tenets which its representatives hold in common? This is not a question which contemporary philosophers themselves would regard as legitimate, because they do not regard themselves as belonging to a school, or as subscribing to any common tenets. "There is no official doctrine of modern philosophy. Modern philosophy is a common pursuit of illumination in certain fields."[11] "I suggest that what is new and genuinely original in contemporary philosophy, or in the best of it, is just the fact that it offers not yet another new method or system, but (almost for the first time) a cultivated absence of method or system."[12] Whatever it may look like to an outsider, contemporary philosophers themselves regard themselves as pursuing not a certain kind of philosophy, but philosophy. They are more conscious of the differences which divide them from one another than of common characteristics. If there is any delimitation which they could accept, it would perhaps be

[1] *Philosophical Analysis, its Development between the two World Wars*, Oxford 1956.
[2] His writings are collected in two volumes, *Other Minds* and *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, Blackwell, Oxford (1952 and 1953).
[3] *The Concept of Mind*, London, 1949. *Dilemmas*, Cambridge, 1954.
[4] *Spinoza*. Pelican, 1951. [5] *Introduction to Logical Theory*, 1952.
[6] *Berkeley*. Pelican, 1953. [7] *The Language of Morals*, Oxford, 1952.
[8] *States and Morals*, 1946. *The Vocabulary of Politics*, Pelican, 1953.
[9] *Ethics*, Pelican, 1954.
[10] Further examples of the writings of many of the authors named will be found in the two volumes *Logic and Language*, ed. A. G. N. Flew, Blackwell, Oxford, 1951 and 1953.
[11] G. J. Warnock in a broadcast talk in 1955.
[12] Stuart Hampshire, "Changing Methods in Philosophy," *Philosophy*, April, 1951, p. 144.

the characteristic of being *contemporary*. Thus a volume of essays by some of the younger contemporary philosophers bears the title *Revolution in Philosophy*. This implies a clear consciousness of distinction between this philosophy and philosophy as it has been pursued, or mis-pursued, in the past: but not a consciousness that there could be alternative methods which would be legitimate in the present.

Nevertheless, my purpose in this paper is to do what contemporary philosophers themselves are reluctant to do, namely to identify in contemporary philosophy, if not common tenets, a common spirit, and to try to understand its significance as a whole.

3. " *Analysis* "

In spite of the reluctance to adopt a common label, sheer pressure of practical convenience favoured the introduction of a title which should be a little more informative than " contemporary " is, and the name which has been most commonly accepted for the new movement is Philosophy of Analysis.[1]

Writers who have used this term have warned against treating it as more than a name.[2] Nevertheless, it does seem to indicate correctly some of the common features of the new philosophy, and we may start by using it as a clue.

4. *Rejection of Metaphysics*

The name " Analysis " gives a clue especially to some things the new philosophy is not. It rejects the notion that philosophy is to be thought of as a means of knowing which is parallel and additional to the empirical knowledge of the sciences, history and common sense. E.g. that while science can discover truths about the world of the senses, philosophy can discover truths about a super-sensible world. Or that, while science is concerned with the explanation of particular happenings within the natural universe, the explanation of the universe *as a whole* is something

[1] Cf. the titles of the following works: *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. H. Feigl and W. Sellars, New York, 1949; *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Max Black, Ithaca, New York, 1950; *Philosophical Analysis, its development between the two World Wars*, J. O. Urmson, Oxford, 1956; *The Philosophy of Analysis*, lecture by B. Blanshard, Proceedings of the British Academy, 1952; and of the periodical *Analysis*, which appeared first in 1932.

[2] Thus Professor Max Black wrote in the introduction to his *Philosophical Analysis* (1950) " Instead of trying, where so many have failed, to analyse analysis, I shall confine myself to some informal comments upon the work of Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein; these may serve to recall the complexity of the recent historical background and act as a deterrent against treating ' Philosophical Analysis ' as a ' school ' having well-defined articles of association ", and Margaret Macdonald in her introduction to *Philosophy and Analysis* (1954) wrote that the phrase " philosophical analysis " was " introduced as a technical philosophical term for the work of Moore and Russell. It was later extended to that of Wittgenstein, and is now applied to the work of any philosopher which resembles, or shows the influence of, one of these models ".

which falls outside the scope of science and in that of philosophy.[1] In these and similar conceptions philosophy is thought of as though it were a sort of super-science, pursuing truth and attaining knowledge in the same way as the sciences do, but somehow freed from the limitation of a science, in not being confined to a special field, or in not being subject to empirical tests.

The conception of Analysis involves a fundamentally different view of philosophy from this. According to it, the task of philosophy is not to inform, but to clarify; not to give new knowledge, by means of some faculty of speculation or intuition, but to enable me to know in a new way what I knew already. An early statement (or foreshadowing) of this view was given by G. E. Moore in his famous paper " The Philosophy of Common Sense " which was published in 1925.[2]

There are two senses in which we can be said to " understand what we mean ". In one sense, I understand what I mean by a sentence if I can use it correctly, though I may never have reflected philosophically. E.g. a competent scientist who uses the phrase: " the light causes a blackening of the photographic plate," and a competent historian who writes: " the religious struggles culminating in the Thirty Years War had caused a widespread demand for religious toleration," certainly understand what they mean, without the need of a philosopher to tell them. And yet the philosophical analysis of the concept of cause, while not doing or undoing the work of the scientist or the historian, gives a new understanding of what they were meaning all the time.

Analysis, according to this view, is what philosophers in the past always have been doing, without realizing it, except in so far as their performance of their task has been distorted by their own misconceptions of what the task of philosophy is.

5. *Linguistic Analysis*

What does philosophy analyse? Moore says it analyses Common

[1] This is a view which G. E. Moore held in 1910. See his *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 1–2. " It seems to me that the most important and interesting thing which philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the *whole* of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we *know* to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely *know* to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another. I will call all this for short, ' Giving a general description of the *whole* Universe ', and hence will say that the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the *whole* Universe."

[2] In *Contemporary British Philosophy*, ed. Muirhead, Second Series. Moore writes: " I am not at all sceptical as to the *truth* of such propositions as ' The earth has existed for many years past ', ' Many human bodies have each lived for many years upon it ', i.e. propositions which assert the existence of material things: on the contrary, I hold that we all know, with certainty, many such propositions to be true. But I am very sceptical as to what, in certain respects, the correct *analysis* of such propositions is," p. 216.

Sense. But how do I get access to the datum which is to be analysed? An older English tradition would have said: By looking into my own mind and consulting my own consciousness. Locke appeals to this datum in the following words: " I ask anyone, whether he be not invincibly conscious to himself of a different perception when he looks on the sun by day, and thinks on it by night,"[1] and the use of the term Common Sense still as it is used by Moore implies this possibility of consulting an inward authority. But modern philosophers deny such access to an inward oracle. In their view my only access to a man's meaning is through what he *says*, i.e. the datum of analysis is *language*, and this is what philosophy is concerned with.

6. *Logical Empiricism and Ordinary Language*

To think of philosophy as concerned with the meaning of words is not entirely an innovation. Socrates, who founded the tradition of European philosophy, devoted his inquiry to the search for definitions, asking such questions as: " What is justice? " " What is virtue? " But he assumed that each word had a single true meaning, if one could discover it, and that the philosopher's business was to elucidate this, transcending the varied and confused versions of it current among ordinary men. The modern analyst renounces this ideal. He sees it as his business to elucidate not " the true " meaning of words, but the meaning which language actually has in the mouths of those who use it. If common usage fluctuates, let him trace the fluctuations; it is not his business to establish for a word[2] a single unchanging meaning (which in fact in actual use it never has!) but to analyse the meanings which it has in actual use.[3]

Hence " ordinary language ", instead of being thought of as something imperfect, which philosophy supersedes, remains as the datum which philosophy has to analyse.[4]

7. *Therapeutic Clarification*

It would be wrong to think that this is necessarily a matter of trivial importance (though, as with other philosophies, it is possible to pursue

[1] *Essay concerning Human Understanding.* Bk. IV, ch. ii.

[2] Actually analytical philosophers are concerned rather with the meanings of sentences than of single words. This is another characteristic, which I mention only in passing.

[3] This empirical attitude is expressed in Wittgenstein's famous directive, " Don't look for the meaning, look for the use ". " Don't look for the meaning "—otherwise you will fall under the influence of the old Socratic assumption that there is something which can be called *the* meaning of a word; " look for the use "—i.e. for the ways in which it is actually used.

[4] Analysis of ordinary language is one of the directions which contemporary philosophy takes, and is that with which this paper is principally concerned. Another is the attempt of formal logicians to construct a logically perfect language.

it in a trivial spirit). Logical analysis has been compared[1] to the task of the psycho-analyst. It is the work of revealing a man to himself. The gain to be derived from this may be thought of in terms of an increase in intellectual mastery. The tools are sharpened, and mistakes made in the past may be avoided in the future. Perhaps most contemporary philosophers tend to see it like this. But it can be seen differently. It may be part of the task of enabling a man to face and accept what it is that he believes, liberating him from dogmas which he could no longer wholly accept, but which haunted him because he had not faced them.[2]

8. *Philosophy of Analysis and Logical Positivism*

Contemporary philosophy is identified in the popular mind with "Logical Positivism". This is the name given to the philosophy of a group of Austrian philosophers (the "Vienna Circle"), which was introduced to the English-reading public by A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* in 1936. Its basic doctrine is that (apart from the tautological statements of logic and mathematics), a statement can have literal meaning only if it is empirically verifiable. This implies that the statements of logic, mathematics, natural science and history are to be accepted as meaningful: but that aesthetic, ethical, metaphysical and theological "statements", whatever emotional value they may have, are to be regarded as being literally nonsense.

Contemporary philosophers hotly repudiate the identification of their philosophy with Logical Positivism, and for a critic to fail to distinguish them from it is to forfeit at the outset any claim to be taken seriously by them. "I am not," said Mr. G. J. Warnock in a broadcast talk in 1955, "nor is any philosopher of my acquaintance, a Logical Positivist". What is repudiated in Logical Positivism is its "restrictive iconoclasm"; its *restriction* of meaning to empirically verifiable statements and its pejorative designation of other classes of statements as nonsensical. The contemporary philosopher is catholic, while the Logical Positivist discriminated. He accepts *every* use of language as worthy of unprejudiced examination. Each will be shown to exhibit a logic of its own, which it is the philosopher's business to elicit, and ethical statements (e.g.) in being *different* from scientific statements are not therefore *worse*.

I confess, for myself, that I think nevertheless that "Logical Positivism" would be not at all a bad name for contemporary British Philosophy. "Positivism" seems to me to indicate its distinctive feature better than "Analysis" does, and the difference which I have just been describing could be safeguarded by distinguishing British

[1] By Professor H. A. Hodges.

[2] As Professor Ryle was haunted by the dogma of the "ghost in the machine". See *The Concept of Mind*, p. 9.

Positivism from the earlier Viennese form (in a somewhat similar way to that in which J. S. Mill distinguished his form of Utilitarianism from his father's and Bentham's without discarding the name). It is true that Oxford has broken through the Viennese restriction in respect of *meaning* (it does not confine meaning within the limits marked by the Verification Principle), but has it broken through the parallel restriction in respect of *truth?* Does it admit as *true* any statement outside those classes of statement which the Viennese philosophers marked off as meaningful?[1] But I shall continue in this paper to use Logical Positivism of the Viennese doctrine and Philosophy of Analysis of the contemporary one.

9. *Christian Faith in the Light of Contemporary Philosophy*

This philosophy clearly presents problems to Christian believers. To some students who come to the university from a Christian environment in home or school it can present itself as a challenge to their faith itself.

The challenge of Logical Positivism is obvious. If its division of statements into the meaningless and the nonsensical is accepted, theological statements will fall into the latter class. The challenge of the philosophy of analysis (or " Logical Empiricism ") is more subtle and perhaps more penetrating. Starting from a recognition of the *difference* which separates theological from scientific statements, it inquires (or at least invites inquiry) into the peculiar character of the former. This is a new inquiry, because it is a new[2] idea, to believers as well as to unbelievers, that theological statements have any *peculiar* character at all. Archbishop Ussher, e.g. in *dating* the Creation in 4004 B.C. assumed that it was an historical event, i.e. that the logic of the statement " God created the world " is the same as that of the statement " Julius Caesar invaded Britain ". Is this not perhaps a lesson which Christians are to learn from the new philosophy: viz. that a statement of faith is something different from an historical statement or a scientific one, and different again from a metaphysical one in the sense which metaphysics bears in the tradition of European philosophy? If Christian philosophers have been forced to ask: What then is the special nature of statements of faith?[3] have they not been forced into a reflection which is salutary and was needed from a Christian point of view?

The debate which has so far proceeded between philosophers of analysis and Christian philosophers and theologians has started from the basis which I have tried to indicate: on the side of the philosophers of analysis

[1] I return to this question later in this paper. See p. 49 below.

[2] I don't mean *brand* new. Classical Christian theology has recognized it, as the doctrine of " Analogy " bears witness. But perhaps we needed to have it brought home to us afresh.

[3] Usually referred to in philosophical discussions as " theological statements ". This term is correct enough, but can be dangerous if it misleads us into thinking that the problem is only that of elucidating the (professional) *theologian's* use of language.

there is the new willingness to investigate the logic of theological statements without prejudging them to be meaningless, on the side of the Christian philosopher there is, or surely ought to be, a desire to discover the logical nature of the statements in which he expresses his faith. Some documents of this debate are collected in Flew and McIntyre's book *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955); the best critical appreciation of the state of the discussion which I know is that of Mr. B. G. Mitchell in his paper " Christianity and Modern Empiricism ", which was given to this Institute in April, 1953; The most enlightening contribution to it from the Christian standpoint which I know is Mr. I. M. Crombie's Socratic paper on " Theology and Falsification ".[1]

It is not my main purpose in this paper to continue this debate, but I venture to offer two suggestions before I pass on from it.

(i) From all that has been said so far, it might seem that there is no necessity, nor even possibility, of conflict between Christian belief and contemporary philosophy. If contemporary philosophy does not claim to set up a " world-view " (as, e.g. the materialist philosophies of nature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did) which is incompatible with that of Christianity, nor set up a standard of reason by which to judge theological argument, nor a standard of meaning by which to condemn it as meaningless; if it contents itself with examining the logic of what believers and theologians in fact say, without questioning their right to say it, how can there be any conflict between them? The conclusion that there can be no conflict here is commonly acceptable to the analytic philosopher, but is baffling to the Christian, who feels obscurely that there ought to be a point of conflict, but is unable to locate it.

On this I should like to press a point which has been made already by Mr. Mitchell,[2] but which analytical philosophers, so far as I know, are slow to take up. These philosophers assume that when they have conceded meaningfulness to theological statements they have conceded everything which can be demanded. But a Christian has to claim for his statements of faith not only that they are meaningful but that they are *true*. If he insists on following out what is involved in *this* conviction, I suspect that he will find that the situation of conflict has been restored.

(ii) Mr. Mitchell rejects on this ground (rightly, in my opinion) the philosophies which would interpret theological statements as something other than assertions—e.g. as expressions of attitudes to life, policies for living, presuppositions. If they were any of *these* things they would not be capable of being falsified nor verified, i.e. would not be the sort of statements which are capable of being true. Mr. Mitchell therefore himself wishes to revert to the position that they are assertions in the ordinary

[1] Published in " The Socratic " No. 5, Oxford (Blackwell), 1952: reprinted in Flew & McIntyre, op. cit., pp. 109 ff.

[2] In the paper cited, p. 89.

sense—i.e. in the sense in which the assertions of science and history are so; while he safeguards the distinction between theological statements and factual statements of these other kinds by appealing to the principle of the doctrine of analogy, according to which predicates *change their sense* when they are applied to God.

I would like to see what is perhaps in some respects the same fundamental truth expressed in a different idiom. The doctrine of analogy thinks of theological statements as statements which we make about God. This is consonant with the Greek conception of theology, according to which theology is that part of philosophy which is directed towards God, or the divine, as its object (as " geology " is the study of the earth, " physiology " the study of nature, etc.[1]). Etymologically this meaning is embedded in the Greek-derived words " theology ", " theological ", which we still use. But their meaning has changed (though perhaps we are not wholly conscious of the change) under the impact of influences which are other than Greek. " Theology " is for us no longer a branch of philosophy, but is a study contrasted with philosophy. To call an argument or inquiry " theological " no longer means that it has God as its object; it means that it is based upon divine revelation, not solely upon reason. If we are clear that *this* is what theological statements are, then the task of logic in respect to theology will be conceived differently. It will no longer investigate the logic of statements about God, but that of *revelatory* statements. Mr. David Jenkins of Oxford has suggested in some unpublished talks that the task of logical analysis should be conceived in these terms, and this seems to me the proper approach.

10. *Contemporary Philosophy in the Light of Christian Faith*

Though it is salutary and may be good training to bat on the opponents' wicket, the basic question for a Christian must be, not " What does Christian doctrine look like when seen from the point of view of contemporary philosophy? " but, " How is contemporary philosophy to be understood in the light of Christian faith? "

There is a difficulty here, which I do not know how to remove. How can a writer, though a Christian, claim that *his* point of view is the view of the Christian faith? Must not such an identification reduce Christian philosophy to a school or philosophy among other schools? Whereas in fact must we not expect that Christians who philosophize will fall into a great variety of schools? In face of these considerations, it seems that Christians too must follow the example of contemporary philosophers of Analysis in renouncing attachment to a school. What will distinguish them will be an allegiance of faith which is compatible with a variety (though not of course with all varieties) of schools.

[1] Newman was presumably using the word in this sense when he said " Theology is science of God ".

The question will then arise: Is another allegiance discernible in the writings of contemporary philosophers and underlying the variety of opinions which is in conflict with that of Christian faith? Such an allegiance need not be consistently maintained, nor maintained in conscious opposition to Christian faith, since it will probably never have been recognized as being a position to which, within philosophy, an alternative exists.

It seems to me that there is such another allegiance, that there is a spirit abroad which inspires many at least of the diverse manifestations of contemporary philosophy. I shall try to delineate it, and shall illustrate what I say by quotations from contemporary philosophers; but I shall not assert that any of them is wholly to be identified with it, nor claim that any of us is wholly free from it.

This spirit shows itself in a demand for clarity, and in the assumption that this demand can always be met. Or rather (since all philosophy has been in a sense a search for clarity, and has assumed that it is to be had) the distinctive character of contemporary philosophy, is its demand for clarity of a particular kind. It demands a clarity from which the mysterious has been excluded, and assumes " that nothing is really puzzling and that therefore there cannot be anything unclear that we can legitimately want to say ".[1]

" Nothing is really puzzling " means " Nothing is really mysterious ". Just as in the realm of science " mystery " designates only what has *not yet* been explained, and it is assumed that the mystery will be eliminated as science advances, so in philosophy mystery is only obscurity which has not yet been clarified.

The following are examples of this demand and this assumption. " There is no unfathomable mystery in the world."[2] Professor Margaret Macdonald said of the periodical *Analysis* that it is " hospitable to many points of view, *so long as they are definite and clearly stated* ".[3] As long ago as 1903 G. E. Moore wrote in his preface to *Principia Ethica:* " It appears to me that in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause; namely, to the attempt to answer questions without first discovering *what* question it is that you desire to answer."

This passage was cited both by Professor John Wisdom and by Susan Stebbing in their contributions *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore.*[4] Professor Stebbing's comment is especially apt to my present purpose; she writes,

[1] This sentence is quoted from a letter of Mr. I. M. Crombie. It was he who made plain to me that clarity (not analysis) is the distinguishing characteristic of the contemporary philosophical spirit with which I am here concerned.

[2] M. Schlick, " Meaning and Verification," in Feigl and Sellars, *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, p. 156.

[3] *Philosophy and Analysis.* Introduction, p. 1, my italics.

[4] Ed. P. Schilp; Wisdom, p. 421, Stebbing, pp. 518–19.

" To think is to be asking oneself questions and seeking to find the answers to them: hence to think clearly it is necessary to see exactly *what* the question is to which one wants an answer ".

If thinking is this, thought must end in the elimination of mystery. This is to demand that the answer shall be cast in terms which we have specified beforehand, and this implies that the truth of the matter is not such as to exceed the measure of our understanding. It is to claim a mastery of the human intellect over the subject of investigation.

A similar mastery over nature was claimed when the experimental method was introduced into natural science at the beginning of the modern period. The essence of this method is that by it nature is compelled to answer questions *framed by man*. This is the meaning of Bacon's famous phrase about " putting nature to the question ", as Kant saw and explained 150 years later.[1] The method of experiment distinguishes modern science from the contemplative study of nature conceived by the Greeks and medieval scholastics. It is a means to man's achievement of mastery over nature in the technical sense,[2] but in a subtler sense the application of the method itself, even apart from the practical application of its results in technology, is a claim of mastery for the human intellect over the processes of nature. It is a claim that there is nothing ultimately mysterious in nature, no truth in it to be revealed which would exceed the possibility of being expressed in terms of the answer to a question framed by man beforehand.[3]

If I am right, the philosophical spirit which we are considering is parallel to this spirit of natural science.[4] It rests on similar claims for human reason, and is inspired by a similar ambition for human dominion.

11. *An Alternative Conception of Philosophy*

To deny mystery is not to deny the existence of anything which is beyond the comprehension of human intellect. It is to deny the possibility of *saying* anything about what exceeds the comprehension of human intellect. " What can be said at all can be said clearly; and

[1] *Critique of Pure Reason.* Preface to Second Edition; B xii–xiii, E. Tr. Kemp Smith, pp. 19–20; though Kant, characteristically, speaks of " reason " not of " man " as putting questions to nature. For a modern statement of this characteristic of natural science cf. Mary Hesse, *Science and the Human Imagination*, pp. 35–6.

[2] As the prophets of this movement proclaimed. Bacon said knowledge is power, and the principal part of his *Novum Organum* bears the title *Aphorismi de Interpretatione Naturae et Regno Hominis.* Descartes claimed to introduce a new physic which would make men " the lords and possessors of nature ". (*Discourse on Method*, Pt. VI, Everyman, ed. p. 49.)

[3] It may be that some recent developments in physics are bringing about a modification of their claim within science itself (Quantum mechanics, Indeterminacy Principle). I have no competence to assess their significance. But they do not reintroduce mystery into nature in the old sense of those for whom nature was divine.

[4] I would not be taken to imply that this method in natural science is wrong. Man is commanded to subdue the earth in Genesis 1; cf. Psalm 8.

whereof one cannot speak, thereof must one be silent."[1] This is to deny not God, but Revelation; or more accurately, it is to deny that language can be the vehicle of revealed truth.

Revelation is of mystery, but mystery revealed is not eliminated, but remains mysterious. It remains object of wonder, which is dispelled when mystery is eliminated. There is no method by which revelation can be commanded: " it is " (in the Bible) " not a thing to be procured from God by any technique ".[2] That is to say, it is not subject to human mastery.

I have argued elsewhere[3] that *Greek* philosophy, in its main tradition, was a philosophy of revelation. It was based on the assumption that Nature or Being, which was itself divine, disclosed itself to the contemplating intellect.[4] Hence philosophy on the Greek conception not only originates in wonder (as both Plato and Aristotle say it does), but ends in wonder.

The notion of philosophy as revelational excludes the notion which we found to be assumed in contemporary philosophy, that philosophical doctrines are to be thought of as answers to questions or solutions of problems.[5] Revelation is *prevenient* to our problems. The truth here is similar to that expressed by Karl Jaspers, as quoted by Mr. Mitchell: " A proved God is no God. Accordingly, only he who starts from God can seek him. A certainty of the Existence of God, however rudimentary and intangible it may be, is a premise, not a result of philosophical activity."[6]

Revelation is of a mystery. A question which specifies the terms in which an answer is to be given, determines in advance that it shall not be mysterious, because mystery, when revealed, exceeds what we could have anticipated.

Gabriel Marcel has distinguished between " problems " and " mysteries ": science for him is concerned with problems, metaphysics with mysteries. It is a mistake to try to turn mystery into problem.

[1] Wittgenstein, in the Preface to *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1921; E. Tr. 1922). Cf. ibid., 6.522: " Everything which can be known, can be expressed in the propositions of science. Besides that, there is the mystical, which is inexpressible."

[2] *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson, s.v. " Reveal ".

[3] In the book already mentioned, ch. 2.

[4] " Aletheia," the Greek term meaning " truth ", is used to denote this character of Being, the character, namely, of disclosing itself fully. The word is derived etymologically from roots meaning " not remaining hidden ". M. Heidegger paraphrases it as " Die Unverborgenheit des Seienden " (" the unhiddenness of the real ").

[5] As examples of this assumption, compare the following: " All philosophers must take account of the same facts; of particularity and repetition, physical objects and minds, moral and aesthetic values, necessary and contingent truth, etc. What is important is whether they satisfactorily explain these facts, or such of them as they consider; *whether they solve philosophical problems*, not whether they use one trick, or wave one banner, rather than another." Margaret Macdonald, *Philosophy and Analysis*, Introduction, p. 7. My italics.

[6] Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, p. 36; quoted by B.G. Mitchell, loc. cit., p. 93.

Problems are solved by the application of technique, whereas a mystery trascends every conceivable technique. The sphere of techniques is the sphere of man's achievement, whereas mysteries are subjects of revelation.[1]

The conception of philosophy against which contemporary British philosophy is in revolt is a conception of philosophy as revelation. In the case of the continental idealist philosophers, it is obvious that they conceived their role in this way. The pictures and interpretations of the universe which they give differ from religious revelations only in the claim that they have been received through the vehicle of reason. But this revelational exercise of reason was not confined to those Rationalist philosophers, who produced metaphysical speculations on the grand scale. It extended also to the sober philosophers of the British Empiricist tradition. Thus Locke says, " Reason is natural revelation ".[2]

This claimed *revelatory* function of reason—this seems to be essentially what contemporary philosophy rejects; and I cannot defend it (although I was myself brought up in a philosophy based upon it, of which no doubt I bear the traces still). In this paper I wish to defend the idea of a philosophy based upon revelation, but not of a philosophy based upon *natural* revelation. Natural revelation is open to attack from two sides, not from one only; not only from the side of those who reject revelation as a means of knowledge, but from the view-point of a different conception of revelation.

This different view-point is expressed in the words of Canon T. R. Milford, in the preface to his book *Foolishness to the Greeks*.[3]

" This book expounds a definite point of view, which might be called " Christian Realism ", in the sense in which Kraemer speaks of Biblical Realism. It tries to interpret life and the world from a position inside the historical body whose centre is Christ. It invites others to stand where we stand and to see if they can see what we see."

" It invites others to stand where we stand, and to see if they can see what we see." Yes; but it does not assume that what can be seen from here must be equally visible to others from where they at present are. Such thinking will be theological, not in the etymological sense of that word, but in the sense which it has now come most commonly to bear:[4] the sense, namely, of *apocalyptological*, or " based on revelation ", where it is assumed that the revelation is communicated, not universally to all men through their reason, but through the Spirit indwelling a certain community. " Arm-chair revelation " is suspect from this point of view, as much as arm-chair speculation is from the point of view of the scientist.

[1] For all this see Marcel *The Philosophy of Existence* and *Being and Having;* in the latter volume especially the " Metaphysical Diary " (which was written between 1928 and 1933).

[2] *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, ch. xix, §4.

[3] London, 1953.

[4] See p. 50 above.

Wittgenstein is said once to have described what he did as " one of the heirs of the subject which used to be called philosophy ".[1] It is as though different elements which were held in solution in the traditional philosophy have now been precipitated. Perhaps natural science is one, and linguistic analysis another. Certainly theology is another such element, and if it did not already enjoy a better title, could put in its own claim to be " one of the heirs ".

[1] Quoted by M. Macdonald, *Philosophy and Analysis*, p. 11.