

Casimir Lewy: Themes & Work

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I WISH to make some remarks on Mr. A. E. Duncan-Jones's paper called " Does Philosophy analyse Common Sense ? " which was read before the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association at Bristol, 1937, and published in the 16th Supplementary Volume of the Aristotelian Society.

I. Mr. Duncan-Jones starts with the remark (which seems to me to be of some importance) that " all philosophical analyses and all accounts of the process of analysing, have a certain general pattern in common " (p. 140).

All analyses attempt " either to reduce the number of objects in the world or the number of words in our vocabulary ". I am not at all clear as to what is meant by this. I am not at all clear how a philosopher can by his philosophical activities " reduce the number of objects in the world ". Whatever does this mean?

Wisdom says (op. cit. p. 463) that " statements about propositions and characteristics such as ' He asserted the proposition that Africa is hot ', ' She is chic ', can be turned into statements about words ' He uttered the sentence. " Africa is hot " ', ' She is what the French call " chic " ', if, and only if the verbal statements are so used that we say that a man understands them only if he understands not merely the expression ' the sentence " Africa is hot "' but also understands that sentence and similarly understands the word ' chic'

Some notes on assertion (Analysis 1939)

I take Mr. Russell's argument to be an instance of a certain kind of "senseless lament."

The genus to which Mr. Russell's lament belongs is :

" Empirical premises do not really justify their conclusions"

A Note on Empirical Propositions (Analysis, 1938, but
submitted Nov. 1937)

Finally I wish to emphasize that I do not hold any theory about the nature of a priori propositions. My position is roughly this: say if you like that a priori propositions are rules of grammar, but if you say this be careful, etc., and say if you like that a priori propositions are empirical generalizations about how words are used, but if you say this, be careful, etc.

Or else, if you say a priori propositions are rules of grammar, I am going to say they are empirical generalizations, and if you say they are empirical generalizations I am going to say they are rules of grammar.

For they are what they are; "Everything is what it is, and not another thing."

Necessary Propositions THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW
1940

I owe an enormous debt, which it would be difficult to exaggerate, to Professor G.E. Moore, to Mr John Wisdom, and to Professor L. Wittgenstein. I want to emphasize especially my debt to Mr Wisdom: for it was he who, as my supervisor, has taught me how to do philosophy, and who has taught me, if I may use the words of Cardinal Newman, not only to think, but to think for myself.

The reader cannot fail to notice that I attack strongly certain views expressed by Professor John Wisdom. In all probability, he no longer holds those views himself; and in any case, I am concerned *solely* with the question of their truth or falsity. In fact, my debt to Wisdom is very considerable for he was my supervisor when I was an undergraduate, and I remember with deep gratitude the *immense* amount of trouble which he took in teaching me. I do not think that our weekly supervision, which was supposed to last one hour, *ever* lasted less than two!

I also studied under Professor Quine.

Now, what follows from all this as to whether the supposition that I may exist with a different body is or is not self-contradictory? I think it obviously follows that it is not definitely correct that the supposition is not self-contradictory and also, of course, that it is not definitely correct that it is self-contradictory. For we do not know whether in the described circumstances (and in other similar ones) people would or would not call the person in question "Lewy". Should we therefore say that it is neither correct that the supposition is self-contradictory nor correct that it is not? I think that, like in the previous case, we should best express the actual position by saying that it is nearly correct that the supposition is not self-contradictory, and nearly incorrect that it is self-contradictory. For it seems to me that in certain situations, like the one I had described, we might very well say that I exist with a different body; in other words, it seems to me that this is the description which, under certain circumstances, we are very likely to adopt.

These considerations, which, I am afraid, I have not succeeded in setting out as clearly as I should like, incline me to think that the proposition "I am dreaming now" is self-contradictory. But I am by no means certain that this is so. And I should like to discuss now the sort of considerations which make me doubtful about it, and which incline me to say that it is not self-contradictory.

Now, what makes me doubtful is partly that I suspect there are several confusions in what I have said hitherto, and partly certain considerations of a different sort, which would remain even if what I have said hitherto were correct.

By far the most interesting of those numerous papers, during the period of Moore's editorship, were, I think, John Wisdom's 'Metaphysics and Verification' (vol. 47, 1938) and his series on 'Other Minds' (vols. 49-52, 1940-3). But these papers of Wisdom's were in no sense mere imitations of Wittgenstein: they shewed considerable independence.

Wittgenstein once said to me (in 1945) that he did not think his philosophy could be continued although it might perhaps be applied.

Mind Under Moore (1976)

There was also of course logical positivism. I share Broad's opinion that Vienna contributed more notably to culture by its Schnitzel than by its Kreis, and I can do no more than record a few events in the movement's happily brief life in England.

In his writing Lewy exhibits the virtues that one associates with Moore: clarity, vigor, attention to detail, and a painstaking determination to say things just right. These are not inconsiderable virtues and they are supplemented by a nice feel for where the important philosophical problems lie. Lewy is by no means a sympathetic critic-he is severe in his judgments of views with which he disagrees-and contentions and arguments that he regards as "clear," "conclusive," "demonstrable," "indisputable," or "absolutely certain" are often less sharply defined than he allows. Doubtless the book has other shortcomings, but I think one cannot read it without being impressed by how much good philosophy it contains.

Herbert Heidelberger *Nous* 1980