

II.—ORDINARY LANGUAGE, COMMON SENSE, AND THE TIME-LAG ARGUMENT

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" . . . though you see the sun now, the physical object to be inferred from your seeing existed eight minutes ago ; if, in the intervening minutes, the sun had gone out, you would still be seeing exactly what you are seeing. We cannot therefore identify the physical sun with what we see. " Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge*, p. 204.

" The supposition of common sense and naive realism, that we see the actual physical object, is very hard to reconcile with the scientific view that our perception occurs somewhat later than the emission of light by the object. . . . " Russell, *The Analysis of Matter*, p. 155.

1. ONE who is impressed, as I am, by the value of some kinds of ' appeal to ordinary language ' as steps toward the solution of philosophical problems will probably feel, as I do, that there is a pretty clear distinction between an appeal to ordinary language and an appeal to a commonly held belief. When Bertrand Russell castigated the ' ordinary language philosophers ' by remarking that it was once commonly believed that no one could stand at the antipodes, that the earth does not rotate, and that the sun is smaller than the Peloponnesus—and concluded scathingly that he did not know at what date common sense became all-wise¹—we felt that he had simply missed the point. *Of course* common sense is not and never has been all-wise—what-ever that means. Nor did even G. E. Moore ever say that it was. But it does not seem to me that anyone has dealt quite adequately with the difference between insisting that ordinary language cannot be incorrect language and insisting that commonly held beliefs cannot be mistaken. In this paper, I try to help clarify that distinction.

I shall proceed by discussing an argument about perception, which is of some interest in itself. I shall first try to make the argument look good and then try to make it look bad—the latter being the way it really looks, which is to say, the way it looks from the right angle and in a proper light. Thus I have two aims : to refute the argument about perception, and to show, as I do so,

¹ " The Cult of Common Usage ", *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, iii (1952-53), 305. As Malcolm has somewhere remarked, the phrase ' common sense ' does not at all mean ' what is commonly believed ', although philosophers (like Russell, in this quotation), have often talked as if it did. I am really concerned, in this article, with what is commonly believed rather than with common sense.

that there really is a difference between appeals to ordinary language and appeals to very widely held beliefs.

In the main, I am persuaded that Norman Malcolm was right in saying, some years ago, that "ordinary language is correct language",¹ and this paper is in part a defense of that thesis. But it may be well to list here and explicitly deny some theses which Malcolm's critics seem to have confused with that one, and to reply to some superficial criticisms of what I shall refer to, with qualms, as the ordinary language philosophy. (1) One such thesis as indicated above, is that (most or all) very widely held beliefs must be true. Since one main purpose of this paper is to distinguish that thesis from Malcolm's, I shall pause here only to say that I have not the slightest reason to suppose that Malcolm has ever held such a view; and in fact, in "Moore and Ordinary Language", as he tried to make his own position clear, he explicitly contrasted this view with his own.² (2) Malcolm and other defenders of ordinary language have also been attacked for thinking that *unordinary* language (under which heading I suppose one might lump technical and metaphorical language, and linguistic innovation in general) is incorrect language.³ But I am not aware that any "ordinary language philosopher" has claimed that unordinary language is in general incorrect language, and it would be flatly fallacious to infer this straw-thesis from what Malcolm did say. Of course he and others have objected to some cases and kinds of deviation from ordinary language; so do I object to some kinds of Englishmen (*e.g.* the murderous ones)—but I am not *ipso facto* an Anglophobe. (3) It has also been alleged, on no grounds that I can discover, that the defenders of ordinary language think that there is at most one correct locution in any given situation and that, if they were serious, they would undertake appropriate research to discover the "most ordinary" way of talking in any given kind of situation and confine themselves to that.⁴ This strikes me as a bizarre interpretation of what Malcolm, Ryle, Baier, and other defenders of ordinary language have said when they were talking about philosophy or working on specific philosophical problems, and Malcolm has explicitly denied

¹ "Moore and Ordinary Language", in Schilpp, Paul (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, pp. 357, 362.

² *Op. cit.* pp. 356-357.

³ F. Waismann: "Analytic-Synthetic", *Analysis*, xiii. 2, 5-10; Russell, *op. cit.* p. 303; P. L. Heath: "The Appeal to Ordinary Language", *Philosophical Quarterly*, ii (1952), 2-4.

⁴ Waismann, *op. cit.* *Analysis*, xi. 122; Heath, *op. cit.* pp. 2-3; J. Passmore: "Reflections on Logic and Language", *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, xxx (1952), 176.

holding any such view.¹ (4) It is a much more serious question, persuasively argued by Fodor and Katz against Cavell,² whether the ordinary language philosophy is necessarily involved in lexicography of a sort that can be adequately performed only with the appropriate tools of empirical linguistics. This is too large and intricate a question to be dealt with here; but some light may be thrown on it, as on the two preceding objections, by noting briefly the context and point of Malcolm's original claim that ordinary language is correct language. Malcolm was engaged in interpreting certain philosophical moves made by Moore and the philosophers to whom Moore was replying. As Malcolm saw it, these philosophers were claiming that certain ordinary ways of talking had always to issue in false statements, no matter how the facts of the particular case might vary. Thus a certain class of philosophical theses which Moore opposed could be summarized as holding that a considerable body of ordinary language is incorrect language, in the sense that it can never be used in the normal circumstances of its use to make true assertions. It was in opposition to such claims as this that Malcolm argued that ordinary language is correct language.

I offer this brief reminder of the setting of Malcolm's remark for two reasons: (i) I can imagine someone's saying "I can see that the theses discussed in (2) and (3) above do not follow from what Malcolm said; but if he did not mean to suggest something like them, why bother to *say* that ordinary language is correct language?" I have replied that Malcolm said it in opposition to the view that certain important bits of ordinary language must be incorrect. (ii) In connection with criticism (4) above, it is worth noting that many of the philosophical paradoxes Malcolm discussed in that early article involve such radical attacks on ordinary language that it would be absurd to raise the question whether Malcolm had done his research carefully enough to be sure of the facts about our use of language. There can be no serious question that it is part of ordinary language to say "I see" followed by a phrase referring to some object outside my skin, as in "I see the cat" (rather than "I see a cat-shaped something in my brain") or "It's certain" followed by a grammatically suitable form of some

¹ "Moore's Use of 'Know'", *MIND*, lx (1951), 243.

² This discussion began in *Inquiry*, 1:3 (1958), with an article by Benson Mates, "On the Verification of Statements about Ordinary Language". Stanley Cavell replied in the same number, with "Must We Mean What We Say?". J. A. Fodor and J. J. Katz criticize Cavell in "The Availability of What We Say", *Philosophical Review*, lxxii (1963), 57-71. My reply to Fodor and Katz, entitled "What We Say", is in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. ii (1965).

empirical statement, as in "It's certain that I filled the canteens." This is no refutation of Katz and Fodor : other cases in the ordinary language corpus are not so obvious (see Austin on "in saying so-and-so" and "by saying so-and-so", for instance).¹ But Malcolm was discussing certain philosophical paradoxes, and these very often consist of such radical attacks on ordinary language that a request for empirical research as to whose language is ordinary would be ridiculous.

2. So much for the preliminaries. Now the word 'blue' is a colour word (although of course it has other uses as well) ; it is correct to use it as a colour word, and as the word for that colour for which we do use it rather than for others, simply because it is conventionally so used by people who speak the language in which it occurs. If all uses of words were as simple as that of the word 'blue', perhaps no one would object to the claim that ordinary language is correct language. (In fact, if all uses of words were as simple as that, no one would be able even to formulate the claim that ordinary language is correct language.) But not all uses of words are that simple. An account of the uses of some words, at least, involves the description (to employ some convenient jargon) of various pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic relationships ; and when this is the case, it seems at least a logical possibility that some conflict may exist between these various features. An obvious suggestion as to a possible source of such conflict is that various words acquired their syntactical and semantical properties when the people who speak our language were very much more ignorant of the facts of nature than they are now. Thus there might be two features of the use of some word which cannot both be compatible with some fact of nature. It is fruitless to discuss this question in the abstract ; I shall discuss a specific case at some length. I will propose an argument which in this formulation is my own, but which is based on considerations invoked by Bertrand Russell. The argument seems to show that an important feature of our use of 'see' is incorrect ; specifically, it seems to show that we can never see anything except what is in, or part of, our own brains. Curiously, although Russell makes some such claim in a number of his books,² he never fully formulates the argument which leads to this conclusion : that is why I have had to reconstruct the argument. I hope my reconstruction is fair to Russell.

¹ John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 108 ff.

² In addition to the passages quoted at the beginning of this paper, see e.g. *The Analysis of Matter*, pp. 382-383 ; *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, pp. 15, 339-340 ; "Reply to My Critics" in Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, pp. 702-706.

I call it the 'time-lag' argument and state it—with concessions to idiom, but quite strictly—as follows :

- (1) We see things happen when they happen, and not later ; we see things in the states in which they are, at the time when we see them. (In this respect, seeing differs from, *e.g.* hearing about. We can hear about a murder after it is committed, but we cannot see it committed after it is committed.)
- (2) Light and neural conduction have each a finite velocity.
- (3) It is a causal (or logical?—the difference is irrelevant to the argument) condition of seeing, that light travel from the event or object which we (think that we) see to the eye, and that certain neural impulses then be transmitted to the brain. Only when these impulses reach the brain does seeing take place. Therefore,
- (4) Nothing which is at a distance from the brain can be seen when it happens. (from (2) and (3).)
- (5) But then (from (1) and (4)) nothing which is at a distance from the brain can be seen at all : for whatever we see must satisfy a condition which nothing at a distance from the brain can satisfy.
- (6) Every event which we should ordinarily claim to see (the closing of a door, the firing of a gun) takes place at a distance from the subject's brain.
- (7) No event which we should ordinarily claim to see is really seen at all. (from (5) and (6).)
- (8) Whatever we see is in, or part of, our own brains (a paraphrase of (5).)

Now the very reflexes of an ordinary language philosopher are such that he will object that such an argument *must* be wrong. It is ordinary, and therefore cannot be incorrect, language to say "I see the cat", not "I see my own brain". One could see one's own brain only under improbable surgical conditions, involving among other things a reflector apparatus. And since the paradoxical philosopher is not claiming that really we always *are* looking into such an apparatus while some invisible surgeon has peeled away our skulls, his contention is not a factual one at all : it is simply a violation of a convention governing the correct use of the word 'see'.

But the defender of this Russellian argument (whom I shall call "the sceptic") may be expected to reply that even when we are lying we *say* what we do because we *believe* what we do : everyone has in the past been wrong about the facts of perception, or too lazy to accommodate their speech to the implications of the facts about perception, so it is scarcely surprising that ordinary

language should be wrong about it. The old way of speaking had some justification as long as we did not know that light takes time to travel : but now that we do know it, we should either abandon the old way of talking or at least remind ourselves, while doing philosophy, that it is really inaccurate. His conclusion, he may say, certainly is a factual one, based on the fundamental fact that light does have a finite velocity. His opponent's appeal to 'ordinary language' is at bottom an appeal to the false beliefs of our ancestors, which have spawned a bad linguistic habit.

These, then, are the battlelines. Now the first question I want to discuss is this : how can we decide whether or not the appeal to ordinary language is merely an appeal to a very common belief? How can we decide whether the sceptic (*i.e.* the philosopher of paradox) is simply misusing language or correcting some widespread belief?

The first important step, I think, is to point out that the sceptic's own argument pivots on an assumption about a feature of the ordinary use of the word 'see'. Where else could he have learned what he offers as step (1) in the time-lag argument? He could not have inferred it from the (alleged) fact that whatever we see is in our own brains, because that is the *conclusion* of the time-lag argument.

Suppose the cat knocks the fish bowl on the floor, and I mention seeing her commit this misdeed. If I am asked how long after the event I first saw the broken fish bowl, I shall know I have been misunderstood : I didn't just see the wreck after it was wrecked, I saw it happen. If I am then asked (i) "And how long after it fell was it before you *saw* it fall?" I shall be quite baffled. I might even find the question eery—it suggests a crystal ball (unhappily lacking something in utility because it is oriented to the past rather than to the future). Again, if one has seen the suspect enter the bank, one does not think of giving different answers to the questions (ii) "When did he enter the bank?" and (iii) "When did you see him enter the bank?"

I offer these cases because I think they give some support to the notion that—in a sense to be further examined—we see things happen when they happen. And a little reflection will show that this proposition (premise (1)) can plausibly be regarded as expressing a linguistic rule. This interpretation of it is perhaps suggested by the very oddity of question (i) above, or of insisting on different answers to questions (ii) and (iii). But of course these things would not in all contexts be odd. A physics teacher might give a student the distance between the witness and the bank door and ask him for different answers to (ii) and (iii) as a way of asking

how long a time it would take light to travel that distance. But in such a situation as this, where seeing an occurrence is regarded as an event which can be dated as subsequent to the occurrence itself, one is clearly assuming the falsity of premise (1). This is of considerable importance: it brings out the fact that if one regarded (1) as a factual statement, it would be natural to conclude in short order that it is false. It would be natural to think that since one cannot see something until the light from that something reaches the eye, and since light is not propagated instantaneously, we must, in the words of Russell Brain,¹ see "the immediate past" of whatever we are looking at—or as regards happenings, we must see them after they happen. Now if I am right that it would be natural to think (1) false if one regarded it as an empirical statement, there is that much more reason to think that Russell's unstated assumption that it is true shows that he is not regarding it as an empirical fact, but as a feature of the meaning of 'see'. Russell does not seem to realize that there is a choice to be made, between surrendering the notion that what we see is outside our own heads and surrendering the notion that seeing is simultaneous with what is seen. The ease with which he surrenders the former reinforces my suggestion that the latter—premise (1) of the time-lag argument—has for him the privileged status of a definitional truth: expresses, in effect, a linguistic rule.

In the present case, then, we seem to have a conflict in the logic of 'see'; i.e. we seem to find that two features of our ordinary use of 'see' are incompatible, when supplemented by certain empirical facts. If we decide to cling to the feature of 'see' which is stated in step (1) of the time-lag argument, it seems to be an empirical fact that we cannot see physical objects at a distance from our brains. On the other hand, if we decide to cling to another feature of our use of 'see', namely that physical objects at a finite distance before our eyes are the very prototypes of the sorts of things we see,² then it becomes empirically false that we always see our own brains, and highly improbable that one will ever see his own brain. But, while the sceptic's contention is thus empirically false if we reject his explication of 'see', to say merely that it is empirically false is to miss the point of what he is doing. What we should say about whether his contention is an empirical or merely a verbal one is this: that *once we have decided* on the use

¹*Mind, Perception and Science*, p. 16.

²Is it a feature of the use of 'see' that certain sorts of things are the prototypes of what we see? In some important sense of 'use', yes. Compare 'see', 'sing', and 'solve': it is not just an empirical matter that we see rather than sing sunsets, sing rather than solve arias, and solve rather than see quadratic equations.

of 'see', his thesis will become an empirical one, true or false depending (in part) on which analysis of 'see' we take ; but the crucial problem is that of making this decision, and the question which analysis is right is a question about language.

It is quite right to say, then, that the time-lag argument is 'linguistic', if that means "Whether the sceptic's conclusion is true or false cannot be determined until we decide how to use—or how we *do* use—the word 'see'". This calls attention to the fact that an apparent conflict in the use of 'see' underlies the whole argument, while allowing for the fact that, once that conflict has been resolved, the truth or falsity of the conclusion will be determined by empirical considerations. The person who says that the conclusion of the time-lag argument is *not* merely verbal, but factual, has already (perhaps without explicit consideration) made that verbal decision which is at the root of the argument. And he is also quite right in his way, if unperceptive : right in that, once the decision has been made, the conclusion is a factual statement ; unperceptive in that he fails to see that the verbal decision is the key to the dispute.

Now what I have been saying for these last two paragraphs is based on the assumption that there is a genuine conflict in the use of 'see'. I have indicated above that I do not really believe that there is such a conflict, and I shall argue that point shortly. But even if there is no such conflict in this case, there may be in others, where the sceptic and the ordinary language philosopher do battle. What should we say about the position of the ordinary language man, in such a case?

First, it would be unfair to picture him as an arch-conservative, resisting the march of science in defense of the beliefs of his forebears. If the issue is one, at bottom, of deciding which of two features of the use of an expression to surrender, it is a misrepresentation to look on either side as the erudite voice of science or as the homely spokesman of "just plain Bill". But second, it would be mistaken to represent him as the unique defender of ordinary language : for our present assumption is that the positions of both parties are rooted in some feature(s) of the ordinary use of 'see'. On one important count, his opponent would of course be ahead : if at least one feature of the ordinary use of 'see' had to be abandoned, ordinary language could not *all* be correct language (or anyhow not all at once).

3. But if it could be shown that there is not really such an incompatibility in ordinary language as the time-lag argument seems to show, this conclusion would not follow. In that case, the sceptic's argument must have rested not on a feature of

ordinary language, but on a misconstruction of some such feature : and the ordinary language philosopher would be quite right in saying that the sceptic has misunderstood and misused ordinary expressions and is wrong. I shall now try to show that in the time-lag argument this is the case.

Let us take the time-lag argument as tending to show, then, that at least one feature of our use of 'see' must be abandoned. We then construe step (1) as a statement of an implicit linguistic rule concerning the use of 'see'. We can understand it—and thus we can see what does and does not follow from it—by seeing what contrasts it draws. I suggest two such contrasts, either of which would suffice to give (1) a sense, and which give it the same sense. Statement (1) of the time-lag argument is to be understood, I think, as distinguishing between questions (a) and (b) on the one hand, and (c) on the other. (a) and (b) clearly make sense, while (c) is problematic.

(a) "How long was it after that wonderful field goal when you first heard about it?"

(b) "How long was it after that field goal when you first saw it (in a newsreel, or on a television delayed pick-up)?"

(c) "How long was it after that field goal when you saw it (there at Palmer Stadium, the day it was kicked)?"

If someone asked you how long after that historic field goal you first saw it, you would know that he thought you had seen it only in a moving picture of some sort ; and you would in effect be rejecting his question (though also, in a way, answering it) if you said "Why, I was there : I saw it when it happened."

But an interesting consequence follows : if "see it when it happens" gets its sense from the contrasts I have suggested—that is, if "seeing when" is to be interpreted as "seeing on the original occasion"—then the people at Palmer Stadium did see the field goal and they did see it *when it happened*, and so proposition (4) of the time-lag argument is false.

But someone will surely object that people's seeing of the field goal did, as a matter of cold empirical fact, take place shortly after the field goal. This fact can be brought out, they will tell us, by considering a case where the time interval is more striking and by then noting that there is only a difference of degree between the more striking case and the case of the field goal. They will offer us something like

(A) "That star exploded seventy-five years ago, and we saw the explosion only yesterday."

They will point out to us, then, that if we saw the star explode seventy-five years after it exploded, we really saw the field goal a fraction of a second after *it* happened. The interval may be negligible in the case of the kick, but that does not affect the soundness of the time-lag argument—it merely helps to explain why people persist in the mistake which the time-lag argument corrects.

But surely I have misstated my opponent's case in (A). What he meant must have been

(B) "That star exploded seventy-five years ago, and what we call 'seeing the explosion' happened only yesterday."

As (A) is stated, it has two related difficulties: (i) It grants that we *do* see the star explode rather than just seeing a causal consequence of the explosion in our brains.¹ (ii) It grants that (1) is false. If (A) makes sense, it cannot be a feature of our use of the word 'see' that we see things happen only *when* they happen; it seems that on occasion we see things happen as much as seventy-five years after they happen. On this interpretation of (1) then, it is simply false; and thus the philosopher has so far no reason for asserting steps (5) through (8). If, then, he insists that (A) must be reformulated as (B) and that (1) expresses a factual truth (even though, for all he cares, (A) is "ordinary language"), we shall wonder where he got the fact expressed in (1). I have already remarked (p. 8) that if one approached the question whether (1) is true as an empirical one, it would be natural to decide in short order that it is false. And indeed, if we take "when it happens" to mean "strictly simultaneously with its happening", I see no reason, in the facts or in how we talk, for thinking that (1) is true. Only if (1) is interpreted as "we see things happen on the occasion of their happening" does it appear to be true; and on this interpretation, as we have remarked, (4) turns out to be false.

In short, proposition (A), which offers support for (4), turns out to show the falsity of (1)—so that if (A) is true or even makes sense, then the argument must fail. But it would be only the success of this argument (or—of course—of some other argument to the same end) that would give positive reason for thinking that *what we call* seeing something happen differs from seeing it happen; and so it would be only the success of the argument that would give reason to think that there is a real difference in meaning between propositions (A) and (B). There may, of course, be

¹ Note Russell's words in the quotation at the head of this paper: "Though you *see the sun* now. . . ."

adequate independent arguments for making the distinction between what we call seeing something happen and seeing it happen. But surely the burden of proof to this effect is on the opposition; my point is that the present argument has not succeeded in making that distinction.

A final twist may deserve consideration: suppose my opponent asks "But why do I need any special justification for reformulating (A) as (B)? Suppose I don't make the slip of saying (A) in the first place—and when I say (B) I am not begging the question; on the contrary, as I say (B) I leave it an open question whether seeing the explosion differs from what we call seeing the explosion." Two replies would be in order. First, it could not in general be an open question whether what we call so-and-so is really so-and-so. (If it were, one case of it would be "Is what we call calling something so-and-so really calling it so-and-so?" And so on indefinitely.) Such a question can be opened, of course, but only for some good reason; and if the time-lag argument fails, we are as yet without a reason in this case. But second, the sole advantage of (B) over (A), for a defender of the time-lag argument, is that (B) does not *contradict* any part of the argument: the switch to (B) does not turn the time-lag argument into a sound one.

4. So much for the first of my two aims in this paper. What about the second and more important, that of showing how an appeal to ordinary language differs from an appeal to very widely held beliefs?

Some beliefs—*e.g.* the belief that there are lots of beings capable of holding beliefs—must be true if they are widely held.¹ In general, though, I have claimed that an "ordinary language philosopher" is not committed to a defense of any given belief simply on the ground that it is widely held. In his use of the time-lag argument, Russell seems to feel that by simply arguing from admitted facts of science, one comes to see that widely held beliefs about the objects of vision are mistaken. My counter-thesis has been essentially that he has failed to realize that the key to the dispute is not the fact that light has a finite velocity (a fact which no language philosopher, however ordinary, need deny), but rather the status of premise (1); and further, that this is a question about how language is or ought to be used, rather than a question of non-linguistic fact; and further, that in this case, one need not surrender any feature of the ordinary use of 'see' in order to accommodate the empirical facts cited in the argument.

If a commonly held factual belief is mistaken, a rational person

¹ See G. E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense" in Muirhead (ed.), *Contemporary British Philosophy*, esp. pp. 202-207.

can be shown that it is so when he is shown the appropriate empirical evidence and arguments, *not* including, generally, arguments about the meanings of the words in which the belief or the evidence is formulated. The considerations which persuade us that the sun is larger than the Peloponnesus or that the earth is roughly spherical do not include any arguments which aim to correct our use of 'larger than' or 'spherical': nor were such arguments involved even in the time of Galileo. Typical philosophical 'demonstrations', *e.g.* that we see sense-data rather than trees and people, or that we never act freely, or that we never know any empirical generalizations to be true—the arguments which have often elicited appeals to ordinary language—are of quite another kind. They do indeed employ factual premises; but they also employ or, as in Russell's truncated version of the time-lag argument, take for granted certain other premises which are 'linguistic'. The empirical premises are seldom the focus of debate: what is really at issue is the meaning (or the use or the criteria for the correct use) of 'see' or 'act freely' or 'know'. That this is so is not always made explicit: the crucial and only linguistic premise in the time-lag argument, premise (1) in my version, is not explicitly stated in Russell's several treatments of the argument, much less examined or argued for; and if so great a philosopher as Russell can do this, there should be no surprise in the barbarities committed (*e.g.*) by scientists who go on holiday to set philosophers straight. The appeal to ordinary language very often is part of a protest against these analyses of meaning or use. Only part of such a protest—for as A. G. N. Flew has said, in a general defense of the ordinary language philosophy, "no one has asked to be excused from dealing with whatever arguments may be deployed in support of such philosophers' misuses".¹

So how can we tell whether someone is arguing from ordinary language or from a commonly held belief? To put it too briefly and baldly, one crucial question seems to be whether the attack on the "plain man's view" does or does not involve some tinkering with the meaning or criteria for the use of some expression. One sort of case in which the maxim that ordinary language is correct language can be salutary is that in which it encourages us to set limits to such tinkering: one who uses it thus, and tries to show in a given case that it is really that tinkering rather than the empirical evidence which seems to count against everyman, should probably be taken seriously when he claims that he is taking ordinary language rather than common belief as his touchstone.

¹ Page 13 of "Philosophy and Language" in Flew (ed.), *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*.

This touchstone has other virtues as well, I think ; but like other fabled philosophers' stones, its virtues may prove illusory in some cases. Particularly where an entire family of concepts is brought into question, such as those of witchcraft or theism—or perhaps of insanity—the recourse to ordinary language might, for all I can tell, hinder as much as it helps. But this kind of question requires another essay.

There are other and familiar tests, none of which perhaps can be made airtight, of whether a philosophical thesis is a denial of some common belief or whether it is 'merely verbal'. One test is whether the "new" view urged by the philosopher has, in principle, any different consequences from the old. As applied to what purports to be a factual claim, this is a vague appeal to some form of the verification principle, which notoriously has its difficulties. As applied to some other uses of language, it will perhaps have similar difficulties but is not wholly inapplicable. A moralist may urge a surprising and novel code of conduct, for instance, but it may turn out that he performs such redefinitions and reclassifications as to leave us with the same judgments as we had before on specific cases. (Consider some forms of self-realizationist ethics ; and the view that one should not under any circumstances tell a lie, when it is added that certain things that most people consider justifiable lies are not—since they are justifiable—really *lies* at all.)

Another test of whether a factual belief or an ordinary use of words is being attacked is whether it will prove necessary, if one adopts the new way of talking, to introduce neologisms or redefinitions of our present vocabulary so that we can go on making essentially the same distinctions, assertions, etc., as before : consider the assertions that all language is vague and that nothing is really solid, for instance. And of course a more basic test yet is involved in the question whether the proposed reform in our way of talking can be spelled out intelligibly in sufficient detail that it could really be a way of talking.¹ But all these questions can best be dealt with in connection with the particular philosophical move, as it occurs.

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¹ Notice what Professor C. A. Campbell once said about the philosophical adequacy of such a sentence as "I see a cat" : "For practical purposes, this expression serves very well to secure the desired behavior adjustments—much better, indeed, than the technical statement of the philosopher, which would certainly be cumbersome and probably be unintelligible. . . ." "Common Sense Propositions and Philosophical Paradoxes", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, xlv (1944-45), 15.