It was the revolution in method effected in Kant's formulation of the problem which first promised a way out of this dilemma... Now knowledge was saved from the peril of sceptical disintegration; but this salvation and liberation proved to be possible only through a shift in the aim of knowledge. Instead of a static relation between knowledge and object - as might be designated by the geometrical notion of a congruence between the two - a dynamic relation was sought and established. No longer does knowledge, whether as a whole or with a part of itself, 'reach over' or 'journey' into the transcendental world of objects. All these spatial images are now recognised as images. Knowledge is described neither as a part of being nor as its copy. However, its relation to being is by no means taken away from it but rather is grounded in a new point of view. For it is now the function of knowledge to build up and constitute the object, not as an absolute object but as a phenomenal object, conditioned by this very function.

(The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol.3, p4-5)

Even with Kant's 'Copernican Revolution', the framework within which knowledge might be said to occur was firmly fixed by the introduction of the Categories. Likewise, the founders of the Marburg school were interested primarily in scientific knowledge. They saw in that the prototype of all knowledge worthy of the name. However, Cassirer became convinced that traditional epistemology, in its usual acceptance of a scientific paradigm, was too narrow. With his interest in Geisteswissenschaften, or cultural sciences, he sought to provide epistemological justification for all types of knowledge. He realised that to do this the basic principles of epistemology had to be radically expanded, so that the achievements of the natural sciences did not prejudice the status of non-scientific activity. With this demand for a generalised epistemological basis for all knowledge, Cassirer makes a radical break from the position of orthodox neo-Kantianism but without abandoning the essence of Kantianism itself. In fact he creates ample room within the spirit of that tradition by speaking of man as a 'symbolic animal', drawing on the work of the biologist Uexkull. (Johannes von Uexkull, Theoretische Biologie (2nd ed. Berlin 1938; Umwelt und Innennatur der Tiere (1909, 2nd ed. Berlin 1921)

In the human world we find a new characteristic which appears to be the distinctive mark of human life: The function of knowledge has been quantitatively enlarged; it has also undergone a qualitative change. Man, as it were, discovered a new way of adapting himself to his environment, between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be found in all animal species, we find in man a third link which we may describe as the symbolic system. This new acquisition transforms the whole of human life. As compared with the other animals man lives not merely in a broader reality, he lives, so speak, in a new dimension of reality. There is an unmistakable difference between organic reactions and human responses. In the first case a direct and immediate answer is given to an outward stimulus; in the second case the answer is delayed. It is interrupted and retarded by a slow and complicated process of thought... No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the truly phenomenal web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality...
immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face... Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium.

(An Essay on Man, pp24-25)

As the basic concepts of science are obtained by a synthesising act of the mind, so, Cassirer goes on to argue, that synthesising activity of the mind determines all types of knowledge. Our concepts, in whatever field, are man-created intellectual symbols by means of which experiential contexts are established.

Natorp of the Marburg school had stressed that particulars do not remain isolated but are merged into a context determined and defined by causal interrelations. Cassirer extends this, holding that the causal mode of integration is but one of many possible modes. 'Objectification' is achieved and the particular is fused into a context by many means other than logical concepts and laws of logical relations. Art, mythology and religion are all held by Cassirer to exemplify those other possible types of integration - but they do not merely reflect an empirically defined 'given'. All constitute their 'objects', their 'world' in conformity with some independent principle of integration. Each creates its own symbolic forms, forms which are not of the same type as the symbols of science but which, nevertheless, are epistemologically equivalent to them, coming as they do from the same sources. No one of these differing types of symbols can be fully represented by any other, nor can it be translated into or derived from any other. These types of symbols are not to be regarded as different ways in which the one and same 'thing-in-itself' reveals itself to us - rather, they are modes whereby the mind achieves its 'objectification' of experience. Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' then, has to be extended to all spheres. The validity of each approach cannot be derived from an object, for that object presupposes the symbolic activity and is constituted by it. There is no realm of absolute fact serving as an immutable datum. What we call fact is always theoretically orientated in some way, seen in regard to some context and implicitly determined thereby. Theoretical elements do not somehow become added to a 'merely factual' but they enter into the constitution of the factual itself.

Cassirer published a number of works on the history of philosophy, notably those on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and in his more systematic works he makes extensive forays into the history of philosophy. Criticism has been levelled at Cassirer on the lines that his approach to the history of philosophy is limited by his overriding concern for the idea of symbolic form. Such criticism is certainly justified about his last work, The Myth of the State, written in 1945, in which Cassirer tried to offer some critical light on the theories that allowed the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the '30s. Here, Cassirer's concern with man's symbolic activity shapes his whole analysis of political thought. He argues that man by his symbolic activity creates his world, and that any attempts to regard symbolic worlds as absolute realities, beyond critical discussion and change, constitutes a denial and evasion of man's proper freedom. If The Myth of the State is seen as a history of political thought then there are obvious and demonstrable limits to Cassirer's fundamental concern: to show what is offered as 'fact' or 'reality' is but one of many possibilities, and that symbolic thought endows man with the ability to constantly reshape his human universe.

Bibliographical Note

Cassirer's most important work is the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. The English translation has a useful introduction to the work of Cassirer by C.W. Heldel (in vol.1). Cassirer also write An Essay on Man (New Haven, 1944) as an introduction to his thought for English readers. For a full bibliography consult H.J. Paton and R. Klibansky (eds), Philosophy and History, Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer, NY, 1964. For a more comprehensive and critical appreciation of the significance of his work consult P.A. Schilpp (ed), The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, NY, 1949.

## Ordinary Language and Radical Philosophy

Vincent di Norcia

Prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them.

Mao Tse-Tung

The debate provoked in RP8 by the relatively innocuous editorial comments in RP6 on the problem of 'orthodox English-language philosophy' surprised me. It has seemed unable to sort out the complex relations between radical philosophy and common sense. Some fundamental distinctions are not being made. And they must be made, if one is to develop an emancipatory philosophy and not an ideological one. Sayers, in his zeal to reject ordinary language philosophy (or OLP) tends to see only ideology in ordinary language. Of course, Cassirer has represented a propaganda victory of upper class talk over the levelling realism of plain people's language. But both usages are part of ordinary language.

The RP editorial itself started with the tradition of moral polarization of Moore's common (?) sense to Russell's logicist scientism. While the debate between ordinary and ideal language models is a historical fact, philosophically it constitutes a pseudo-problem. There is no real dilemma. The choice presented is not between two and only two alternatives. Moreover, the two alternatives presented are not what they appear to be. Russell and company did not provide us with a genuine logic of empirical knowledge or scientific inquiry. Moore and friends gave us at best pedantic reflections on the smart talk of an Oxonian common room (without even the homosexual intimations which would have given it life). So through these portals the philosophical problems which common sense and science actually raise cannot enter.

The Russell/Moore debate is really between variants of an imperial ideology. The underlying and unspoken issues involved in it are: (1) whether the King's English is the proper model for all common sense. Does it only too 'properly' screen reality through the silken nets of language? Nets woven and mended by the Oxford mandarins of ordinary language philo-

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1 Quoted in RP6, p46
2 See Ernst Gellner's Words and Things (Penguin, 1968), p266