

THINKING AND MEANING

ENTRETIENS D'OXFORD

organisés par l'*Institut International de Philosophie*

(11-15 Septembre 1962)

Presidential Address — Prof. T. KOTARBINSKI

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a custom of the International Institute of Philosophy to hold its meetings each year in a different center of intellectual life — and experience has proved the advantage of this practice. In this way, in assembling to exchange opinions on problems of their specific interest, members of the Institute encounter the manifold cultural diversities provided by their gathering place, while, in their own subject, they are contacting new colleagues from the locality, in addition to members of the Institute.

Each annual meeting also leaves prized memories of the country and of the town in which it was organized. What a vivid picture we retain of sun-drenched California, where, in a spirit of cordial reciprocity, we discussed the essence and limits of toleration in the delightful campus of Santa Barbara University. And during the breaks between meetings how many friendly talks we held with our colleagues there — on the intellectual style of the university, on the highly - specialised research into the history of philosophy, and on many other issues of philosophical content.

We recall with much gratitude the open-hearted hospitality offered to us there. For many of us it was a special attraction that during the assembly we were allotted students rooms and lived almost student-fashion. How pleasant for us older ones was even so short a resurgence of youthful associations.

Some of us now here will in all probability be able to make a similar experiment, for we have come to a college and are living in rooms primarily intended for ephebi. But here, in comparison with last year, there are not only great similarities, but also significant differences — the differences which exist between the Old and the New World.

For the 25th Anniversary of our Institute, we are here in the temples of a university town with a centuries-old tradition, one of the most outstanding and one of the most ancient centres in which there have ever flourished the organised forms of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. Let us, then, who have come from other centres, pay homage to these venerable walls, reflecting with due deference, upon the imposing amount of scholarly thought which their inhabitants have accomplished throughout the ages.

And if we allow our reflections to take retrospective course to the beginnings, and to the earliest phases, there rises up the figure of the Oxford Scholar, William Occam, who advocated the keeping of entities to a minimum: *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*. This advice and these memories occur to mind now not only because we are led to them by their historical derivation, but also because the content of this counsel seems to be in harmony with the style of thought of contemporary Oxford and to characterize its circumspicuous style of culture in relation to ontological hypotheses.

Let us try to cast a glance over the manifold currents of contemporary philosophy and to take hypothetical bearings on the position of the present milieu in relation to them. The main trends were differentiated by Professor Ryle in his work, *Dilemmas*, published eight years ago. They are: dialectical materialism; phenomenology and existentialism; and analytical philosophy. If to this specification we add New-Thomism, I imagine that we get a schedule containing all the trends, with the proviso that we employ the terms loosely — if, for instance, we place the echo of Neo-Positivism under the heading of analytical philosophy.

The varieties of this trend are differentiated by Professor Urmson in the collective work *La philosophie analytique*, published last year in the series *Cahiers de Royaumont*. He compares the classical school of analytical philosophy with its variants. Each representative of that school tries, in his own way, to interpret language so that it shows that the only subjects described by it are entities of a defined ontological category, while all expressions which appear to refer to other entities are only, as it were, indirect, circuitous methods of expressing opinions on subjects of such an ontological category. It is said, however, that none of the adherents of this school has ever managed to realise his programme. Now, in any interpretation of Professor Urmson's views there are three non-classical forms of the analytical school, one of which is engaged in creating a precise, artificial language, free from the inaccuracies of natural languages, while the second is concerned with overcoming conflicts of views by enhancing the conscious

meaning of statements which are opposing, but which rise importunately in the mind. The third school is simply trying to educe, by analysis of natural language, the whole richness of instruction, the whole richness of theoretical philosophy and extra-philosophical achievement. This analysis is carried out for its direct value, not offering any special credentials in the form of proofs for the solution of disputes.

If the above summary expresses the thought of Professor Urmson and if the author has actually divined the essential variants of analytical philosophy, it is indeed an interesting issue which of these variants prevails here in Oxford. Trying to answer this question shall we not be nearer to the truth by assuming that we are within the aura of the two lastnamed varieties of philosophical analysis — of that which projects itself into dilemmas and of that which projects itself into language as such.

I am sure that the topic «Thinking and Meaning», on which we start exchanging opinions today, is in complete harmony with the character of the problems engaging the attention of the analytical school. It is certainly in accordance with the interests of all who have come here, for it is impossible to imagine a philosopher who does not experience a shiver of intellectual apprehension at the very sound of the word thinking and at the very sound of the word meaning — and what tremors must be felt when these two disquieting words resound in our ears one after the other.

Each participant will doubtless follow with undivided attention those points of discussion which he intends to take up for consideration. I hope that I shall be allowed, as a participant, to see if it is possible to maintain a synthesis of materialism and of analytical philosophy of a classical type — that is, under the watchword of somatism. This maintains that in statements free from substitutive and metaphorical elements, the only names which remain are those of physical objects, which I will allow myself to call, in a popular approximation — names of bodies.

To regard everything through the prism of materialism and at the same time through that of classical analysis is like trying simultaneously to regard from two different points of view. To some it must seem that this is a cross-eyed way of looking at things. Although it is a norm not of false but of healthy vision to obtain a properly-focussed picture by looking at an objective with two eyes.