ORDINARY, REVISIONARY, AND DIALECTICAL STRATEGIES IN PHILOSOPHY: A PLEA FOR THE RE-INTRODUCTION OF A LOGIC OF ASPECTS*

I shall start by expressing my gratitude for the honour done me in asking me to open the proceedings of this very remarkable conference. I consider that the selection of topics having a mediaeval Islamic, Jewish and Christian flavour, and their confrontation with corresponding contemporary treatments, is very timely: it represents the intricately interlaced thought of the metaphysical age into which we seem to be moving, after the bright, brittle, fragmented thinking of the age which is passing. As one whose Bibles are the Platonic Timaeus, the Plotinian Enneads and the Logic of Hegel, I welcome the new phase with rapture. And I shall try to help in its inauguration by discussing the connection between three types of philosophical approach: the austerely analytical, the speculatively systematic and the iridescent or dialectical. I believe that all these modes of thought-approach represent essential sides of philosophy, which we must try to practise conjointly. And I intend to relate my discussions to the special themes of this conference: the concept of Being and the concept of Causation. Some of the points I shall be making will repeat things that I said at the Hegel-Tage in Stuttgart last year, but to these I shall add quite a number of other remarks.

1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ORDINARY: MOORE

The analytic approach to basic philosophical concepts such as Being, Causation, Identity, Conscious Reference, Truth, Value, Temporality, Freedom etc. has been fairly long in command of the situation in the English-speaking world. I propose to consider it in connection with two philosophers both of whom I personally knew and whom I greatly admire: G. E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Both of these philosophers have a view of philosophy which is above all loyal to what is ordinary, the former to ordinary concepts and the ordinary certainties in
which their working is displayed, the latter to ordinary language performances, which have to be understood rather than bettered. As to what exactly the ordinary is, and why it has such transcendent merits, neither philosopher succeeds in making wholly plain. For their analyses or ordinary concepts and certainties and linguistic usages are as astonishingly unordinary as the wildest theories of speculative metaphysicians. It is we, rather than the philosophers in question, who must try to determine what the ordinary is for these philosophers, and what merits they see, and what there really may be, in sticking close to it.

In the case of Moore it is fairly easy to determine what he thinks of as ordinary and why he adheres so closely to it. The ordinary represents what we certainly know, and this need not be what is abstractly evident or logically necessary, since Moore's most important certainties are in fact singular certainties on which more general certainties only depend, the certainties, e.g., that this is a pencil, that it is the same pencil I remember writing with a moment ago, that it is not going to vanish when I shut my eyes or turn my head, that it is visible to others as well as myself, and so on. These certainties are all known in the sense that they are far more certainly true than any premiss or proof that could be brought forward to discredit them, and also than any premiss or proof that could be brought forward to justify them. Moore thinks that there are a great number of these unshakeable certainties concerned with animate and inanimate bodies, with things in space, with happenings in the past or future, with our own and other people's conscious experiences and their objects, with what ought or ought not to be done etc., and that it is by meditating on the concepts of Material Object, Consciousness, Value etc., which function in these certainties, that we can hope to become clear what those concepts involve or cover, on what in other words their true analysis may be.

Now it is well known that Moore's views on a correct analysis of ordinary certainties are wildly unordinary: the entities that enter into a correct analysis, of e.g. sense-data, acts of consciousness etc., may be such that no ordinary man conceives them as Moore has conceived them, and Moore further thinks that ordinary language, while it is quite indispensable in pinning down the complex matters of fact that we want to analyse, may suggest quite wrong analyses of such complex matters, may misguide rather than guide philosophers in their analyses. Moore does not in fact rule out any degree of unordinariness in our analyses of ordinary