

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

In his witty review of Professor Urban's *Language and Reality* Mr. Ryle remarks that not all words are names and that most propositions are not simple singular attributive ones. "If all words were names in the same way," he says, ". . . 'unless to-day is Thursday, I am mistaken,' would be an inventory of entities." Now—to simplify the example and avoid supposition—proposition complications—is "to-day is Thursday" divisible into three words? A word means what you mean by it only in its context, as Professor Urban stresses, so that, as Signor Gentile maintains, it is your whole utterance, poem, oration, book, which forms a single word. The words taken in isolation are meaningless, as happens when some public speaker in an effort to make himself clear speaks so slowly that his words become disconnected.

To divide a proposition into separate words is to treat it grammatically, for grammar just is the study which treats thought as an object, splits it up into separate entities standing by themselves, and sets them out as parts or turns of speech in grammar books or lists of words in dictionaries and lexicons. The dictionaries supply examples, i.e. words in a context, when the context is dubious. Thus you expect to find examples given under the word "walk," but you would not take it amiss if you found no examples under the word "amoeba," where the background is without doubt protozoic.

Similarly with the proposition. If you treat it grammatically you first detect the noun at the beginning, call that the subject, draw a line marking off the rest of the words and call them the predicate. If you wish to determine the predicate further, you see whether there is an adjective after the word "is," and that is the subject-attribute (-predicate) proposition. If you find instead a preposition or a verb governing a noun, then you have the relational proposition. If you find after the word "is" a common noun, that is the class-membership proposition. And so on.

Professor Urban, however, does not quite identify subject-attribute with subject-adjective, since he holds that in "A is to the west of B," "west of B" is the predicate of A, and interprets subject and predicate as something to talk about and something said about it. Others who hold the validity of metaphysics take subject-predicate as being existence-essence. In that case the distinction is purely ideal and no concrete example can be severed into two actual elements. Thus, in our previous example, "To-day is Thursday" is the subject and "To-day is Thursday" is the predicate. If you distinguish philosophy from grammar, and understand by "word" the complete utterance and by "subject-attribute" existence-essence, then every word is a "Fido"—Fido and every proposition is attributive (and on the same interpretation "singular" because a synthesis of particular and universal).

This appears to me to be worth emphasizing, because there is a danger of the opposing armies of those who deny and those who maintain that all words are names and all propositions attributive failing to engage in conflict at all, if it is thought that they both mean quite the same thing by "word" and "subject-attribute."

Yours faithfully,

ANGUS ARMSTRONG.

EDINBURGH,
April 1940.

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

In Professor Collingwood's article, "Fascism and Nazism," assertions are made which many of us would deny, and which may, I think, be criticized in relation to a principle he has himself expounded.

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Liberal and democratic ideas, Professor Collingwood says, are derived from Christianity and owe their emotional drive to Christianity as a religious system rich in superstitious or magical elements. The rejection of these elements has reduced liberalism to a mere intellectual habit, unable to withstand the onset of a movement having behind it the vitality of pre-Christian religion.

The assumption that I wish here especially to question is that the deep emotion religious in character, which alone can inspire and sustain men in action is necessarily superstitious, irrational.

In his extremely interesting *Autobiography*, Professor Collingwood has told us how philosophical problems, later to occupy him, revealed themselves even in childhood as somehow his business, and has described the growth of his later conviction that a logic of question and answer, problem and solution, should be substituted for a logic of propositions, in all researches historical or philosophical.

In my own thought I have realized the importance of Professor Collingwood's principle. The process he describes of being "burdened" with a problem that begins as a "formless disturbance" and takes shape gradually in urgent questions, is a matter of the emotional no less than of the intellectual life. Those of us who genuinely hold liberal or democratic principles hold them, I would maintain, neither as habit nor as merely "cerebral," unemotional thought. Rather they are involved in our intellectual and emotional struggle with problems so deeply rooted within our individual and social life as to be virtually religious in character. If our defence of these democratic principles is weak, the reason, I am convinced, is not because we have rejected superstitions—images, formulae—that once had emotional value but have grown dim and fallen away as our problem took distinctive shape. Our trouble, I believe, is rather that conflicts within ourselves and society obstruct and confuse this struggle of intellectual-emotional thought. We are divided as to how we should identify and estimate the factors of the terrifyingly complex, concrete situation we have to meet. Those who can accept unquestioningly some solution, however disastrously inadequate, imposed by a quasi-divine, paternal authority, escape this perplexity. They are free to pour into the collectively imposed solution the whole "drive" of those vital or spiritual needs which in us remain locked within the urgency of unanswered questions.

I would appeal to Professor Collingwood to reconsider the plight of the democratic thinker in terms of his own concept, of thought as problem solution. Perhaps within those terms he may offer us more effective help in the finding of answers to the questions set by both the intellect and the vital needs of our time.

Yours faithfully,

MAUD BODKIN.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY,
HERTS.
April 1940.