



Freedom
and Resentment and
Other Essays

P.F. Strawson

Freedom and Resentment

'Prime philosopher of Oxford's golden age, and champion of both the richness of ordinary language and of natural beliefs' *The Guardian*

'Distinguished Oxford philosopher whose spare, elegant work made sense of Kant's metaphysics' *The Independent*

'A stimulating and wide-ranging book.' *A.J. Ayer, New Statesman*

'... this collection enabled one to appreciate the great versatility Professor Strawson has. We have here, under one cover, valuable contributions to the most diverse and broad ranging problems in philosophy.'
Philosophical Books

At the time of his death in 2006, Sir Peter Strawson was regarded as one of the world's most distinguished philosophers. First published thirty years ago but long since unavailable, *Freedom and Resentment* collects some of Strawson's most important work.

Broadly conceived as analytical philosophy, the essays in this collection demonstrate the vitality of Strawson's thinking on such topics as the philosophy of language, metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics. Beginning with the title essay, *Freedom and Resentment*, which has been called the most influential philosophical article of the twentieth century, this invaluable collection demonstrates the great range of Strawson's thought as he discusses free will, ethics and morality, logic, the mind-body problem and aesthetics.

This reissue includes a substantial new foreword by Paul Snowden and a fascinating intellectual autobiography by Strawson, which together form an excellent introduction to his life and work.

Freedom and Resentment
And other essays

P.F.

Strawson

First published in 1974
by Methuen & Co Ltd.

This edition published 2008
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

© 1974, 2008 P.F. Strawson

© 2008 Foreword Paul Snowdon

‘Intellectual Autobiography’ by P.F. Strawson first published by Open Court in *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson* (1999). Reprinted with kind permission.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-88256-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-44850-6 (pbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-44850-5 (pbk)

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY PAUL SNOWDON	vi
INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY P.F. STRAWSON	xvi
PREFACE	xl
1 Freedom and Resentment	1
2 Social Morality and Individual Ideal	29
3 Imagination and Perception	50
4 Causation in Perception	73
5 Perception and Identification	94
6 Categories	119
7 Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations'	147
8 Self, Mind and Body	186
9 Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art	196
10 Is Existence Never a Predicate?	208
11 On Understanding the Structure of One's Language	218
INDEX	229

FOREWORD

By Paul Snowdon
University College London, UK

Strawson published two collections of papers in the 1970s. *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* was the second of these collections, coming out in 1974. The first, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, contained many of Strawson's most famous papers on the philosophy of language.¹ This second collection covers a broad range of topics: moral philosophy, perception, philosophy of language, aesthetics, the metaphysics of mind, and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Further, one paper about perception deals with Kant, and the essay on mind engages with Descartes. The collection, therefore, exemplifies one of the striking aspects of Strawson's philosophical output – its breadth. His writing touched virtually every branch of philosophy. The collection also reveals two other aspects of his writings. Each essay contains and develops a bold and novel hypothesis (not necessarily only one). Strawson's originality stands out. In each, also, the ideas are developed, without exception, with intelligence, subtlety and care. One can liken reading these papers to listening to a succession of performances by a virtuoso of pieces of contrasting complexity, but where the control and the quality are always manifest. The most important paper in this collection is undoubtedly 'Freedom and Resentment', which gives its name to the volume itself, and I shall

talk about it at the end of this foreword. Before that I wish to introduce the other papers.

STRAWSON ON WITTGENSTEIN

It was a measure of Strawson's status in Oxford in the early 1950s, that Ryle chose him to review *Philosophical Investigations* for the journal *Mind*. Strawson's deeply considered review contains a perspicuous division into a number of areas of the topics covered by Wittgenstein. The chief characteristic of the review is balance. It attempts to formulate the leading ideas sympathetically but also to maintain a critical distance, and it is in the critical responses that I feel there is most to learn. I shall select one example. Wittgenstein thought that the role of proper philosophy is basically negative, to eliminate philosophical errors, arising, as he thought, from misuse of language. On his conception this is to be done by basically re-acquainting the thinker with his or her language. This is sometimes called philosophy as *therapy*. About this Strawson points out that if one's dominant purpose is the elimination of traditional error and this is the most effective method by which to do it, then there may be some justification to limit one's own procedures as a philosopher to regenerating such acquaintance. But it is quite another matter to claim that this is the sole purpose of good philosophy.

Moreover, no reason has yet been given to suppose there are no general interesting truths discoverable by philosophical methods. As Strawson puts it, 'could not the activities we call "doing philosophy" also form a family?'² In these few remarks, I believe, Strawson brings out as well as anyone the sheer arbitrariness of Wittgenstein's official philosophy of philosophy. Similarly, when engaging with Wittgenstein's thought on language and most other matters Strawson's touch is sure. The only point on which it is less sure is when he considers Wittgenstein's approach to the idea of private experience. Strawson's interpretation of these famous passages is that Wittgenstein is saying, amongst other things, that 'no words name sensations (or private experiences); and in particular the word "pain" does not'. It seems better to think that

Wittgenstein himself would agree that 'pain' designates pain, and so names a sensation. Wittgenstein's purpose is, rather, to uproot a *misconception*, as he saw it, of what sensations, including pain, are. This misconception is supposed to be captured in talk of pain as *essentially private*. Strawson is right, though, to suggest that when Wittgenstein develops his supposedly myth-free conception of sensations he says much that is hard to accept and, indeed, to understand.

STRAWSON ON DESCARTES

Strawson sought to define his conception of persons by, as it were, bouncing off the conception provided by Descartes. Descartes thought that each of us is an individual, non-spatial ego, which is causally linked to a body in space. As Strawson puts this approach, '... the history of a human being is not the history of one two-sided thing, it is the history of two one-sided things.'³ In 'Self, Mind and Body' Strawson highlights an anti-Cartesian objection, different from the famous one in Chapter 3 of *Individuals*. The central problem is that the Cartesian hypothesis requires that we can understand the notion of a single enduring consciousness, an ego, including such aspects as the contrast between one and another at a time, and of a single one continuing over time. Strawson suggests that no such understanding can exist once we cut our understanding of subjects of consciousness from our normal conception of ourselves as physical and embodied persons. The question raised, though, is not whether such an understanding is required – it obviously is – but by what *standards* it can be shown that the Cartesian notion is *not* intelligible.

Earlier in the paper Strawson develops another anti-Cartesian problem. His idea is that the analysis of our lives into the lives of two different substances, the ego and the body, requires that statements about us must be reducible to statements about the body conjoined with statements about the ego. Strawson suggests that 'there might be very considerable difficulties in effecting' such a reduction.⁴ Strawson himself suspects this impossibility might reflect inadequacies in extant language, and so he discounts the

objection. But there is another weakness. Surely, a chair, for example, consists of a seat plus back, but the property of being a *comfortable* chair can hardly be reduced to a conjunction of claims about the seat and others about the back. It depends rather on the relation between seat and back. Similarly, if people are egos with bodies, properties of people do not have to be analysable into conjunctions.

Whatever the merits of these objections, one of Strawson's greatest achievements is to have characterized how we *do* think of ourselves, and that is, as he says, as a 'human being, a man, a type of thing to which predicates of all those various classes I distinguished earlier can be ascribed'.⁵

STRAWSON ON PERCEPTION

Three of the essays discuss perception. In the first one, 'Imagination and Perception', Strawson combines two tasks. One is historical, to make as much sense as one can of the tendency to appeal to imagination in theorizing about perception, as evidenced in the writings of Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein. But that task is linked to another – to specify, and explain the real character of perceptual experience. Strawson's claim is that it is impossible to characterize normal perceptual experience without employing objective concepts. Thus, I have to say something like: my visual experience is as of a *rock on a beach*. Strawson, himself, puts it by saying that 'the actual occurrent perception . . . is, as it were, soaked with or animated by, or infused with . . .' such concepts.⁶ Strawson's examination of the historical figures is exemplary and his assertions about the objectivity of perception have proved very influential, but the question that remains is: wherein precisely is the link?

In 'Causation in Perception' Strawson asks: what is required for a physical object to be perceived? Strawson accepts and argues for the view propounded by H. P. Grice that the object must cause an experience in the subject.⁷ Strawson endorses Grice's argument but, importantly, he suggests that it is also implied by the knowledge-giving role of perception. What else is required? Which

causal chains qualify? Grice's answer is, in a nutshell, causal chains of this (indicated) sort, and not of that (indicated) sort. Strawson objects that this leaves the concept of perceiving quite unilluminated. Strawson instead invokes certain requirements relating to the 'spatial and temporal positioning' of the subject and object. This is highly ingenious and has attracted considerable discussion.⁸

The third paper on perception and identification is a response to one by Hampshire. Hampshire was concerned with cases where a percipient cannot make out what he is seeing and gives a non-committal description, such as 'I can see a black patch.' Hampshire's point seems to have been that the existence of such cases does not mean that such a phenomenal description describes something that is omnipresent in perception, and Strawson, of course, agrees. He argues, though, that given how Hampshire defines 'non-committal', such descriptions are possible only of visual experience. The other issue can be introduced by asking whether, when the subject who discriminates the black patch is in fact seeing a dark island, we should say that the black patch *is* the island, or that there is the island *and* the black patch. Strawson proposes that we can say either. Again, this is interesting, but as Michael Hinton later argued, in an important paper directly inspired by Strawson's, we may not quite have that much freedom.⁹

ESSAYS ON LANGUAGE

Three of the essays can be counted as about language. In 'Is Existence Never a Predicate?' Strawson aims to support the answer 'No'. At the time he wrote this essay, most philosophers held that the answer is 'Yes' because of some supposed paradoxes the idea of existence as a property of an individual raised.¹⁰ Strawson identifies two contexts in which it seems that 'exists' is a predicate of individuals. Others after him attempted to tear up the orthodox root and branch, which they did so successfully that the orthodox answer nowadays would be 'certainly it is a predicate'.¹¹ The essay 'Categories' can also be counted as being about language. Gilbert Ryle talked often about category mistakes without giving a general

explanation of them. Strawson proposes that given, roughly, the ideas of picking out an object in an adequate way and of *a priori* derivations from such modes of reference, the notion has a chance of being explained. Significantly, despite this, it is not a notion employed nowadays. The third essay about language, 'On Understanding the Structure of One's Language', raises, it seems to me, a very important question. In a certain way of thinking about natural language, associated with Davidson, the attempt is made to say what the words of ordinary language are doing, by assigning them a logical form. The assignment is effected by pairing ordinary language sentences with formulae in the predicate calculus. What does it mean to propose that a certain formal sentence 'gives the logical form' of a natural language sentence? Strawson shows that to answer this is not straightforward, and his discussion of alternatives is highly illuminating.

Eventually he suggests a satisfactory account can be given. However, what that leaves is the question as to why we should accept such proposals. Strawson's idea is that such a proposal, which reads into the relatively simple grammar of English a highly complex semantic structure, needs a strong reason to be accepted. Strawson suggests that there is no evident reason that forces us to accept it. Obviously Strawson is not able to survey all possible replies to his question, but his paper forces anyone inclined to play the logical form assignment game in this way to justify their practice.

VALUES – AESTHETIC AND MORAL

Two of the essays might be said to relate to issues in the general theory of value. In 'Social Morality and Individual Ideal', Strawson develops a distinction between two aspects of the ethical. The first is the way in which forms of life or pursuit strike individuals as attractive or even compulsory – say, the life of the artist or the soldier or the great lover – attractions which can change within a single life, and attractions which may or may not lead to action. The second is the idea of the moral, the idea of constraints and obligations acknowledged in our social lives. Strawson's approach

is not to attempt to establish value claims but rather to illuminate the social and psychological sources of moral thought, the aim being to contribute to an understanding of moral thought as we have it and not to justify it. What is, for me, particularly impressive about the essay is the vividness of his description of ideals and the tensions that one can feel under their influence, conveying a strong sense that Strawson's description reflects aspects of his own inner life. Whether the perspective he adopts in thinking about morality is the most illuminating one is, perhaps, the main question the essay prompts.

The second essay about value is 'Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art'. Strawson's question is whether there is a way to capture what is distinctive of aesthetic appraisal (as opposed to other sorts of appraisal). Strawson's answer is that with aesthetic appraisal there are no such things as properties which make the work good or bad – there are no such things as 'aesthetic merit conferring properties'. By contrast, with moral evaluation we can locate such properties, say cruelty or kindness. This claim about the aesthetic certainly has the ring of truth. One might push the question further and ask why there are no such properties. One might also ask whether the absence of such properties is unique to aesthetic appraisal. And, indeed, whether it is the sole mark of aesthetic evaluation.

FREEDOM AND RESENTMENT

Delivered as a lecture to the British Academy in 1962 'Freedom and Resentment' has become one of Strawson's most discussed papers. Strawson's goal is to resolve a debate where the two sides are simply jammed. What implications does the possible truth of determinism have for our status as agents susceptible of moral evaluation? Strawson calls one side which claims that determinism does not impugn that status the 'optimists', the other side, which thinks it does, or would, the 'pessimists'. The aim of the reconciliation is to defend optimism, avoiding any temptation to endorse what Strawson calls the 'obscure and panicky metaphysics' of libertarianism, while at the same time providing a

better characterization of our moral attitudes than optimists normally manage. How does Strawson try to do this? He initially focuses on certain participant reactive attitudes that are central to human life. Examples are resentment and gratitude. As Strawson characterizes them, these are feelings we get in response to our sense of the attitudes towards ourselves of those around us. We feel resentment if we think that in their actions they wish us harm or display no concern. Gratitude is felt where we sense their actions are expressions of liking or regard. Strawson's idea is that such responses can be moderated and affected by excuses and justifications, and, moreover, it is in our power to suspend such reactions where the agents are perceived as under a mental abnormality, say excessive stress, or if they are, in virtue of their nature, unfit for such responses. However, it is, according to Strawson, impossible to maintain such an objective attitude towards normal people most of the time, since these attitudes are inevitable and central. This would remain impossible even if we were convinced of determinism. Moreover, our involvement with such reactions clearly does not flow from any general metaphysical belief in the falsity of determinism. Strawson concludes that it cannot be said that the rationality of such attitudes depends on the falsity of determinism. He then isolates certain parallel reactions which are moral and vicarious, rather than participant, such as the disgust or anger one feels on hearing of the slaughter of innocents. Strawson notes that such responses are like the participant ones in that they can be modified by excuses and justifications, and that they can be suspended in special cases, and also towards certain people who are abnormal or immature in certain ways. His claim is, though, that the same impossibility of a general suspension applies here, and there is a similar lack of dependence of such responses on a rejection of determinism. Determinism similarly cannot impugn their rationality either. Now, this is significant because these attitudes and feelings are constitutive of our moral views and they are what blaming and punishing and praising are expressive of. Strawson is stressing two things. First, that there is no rational dependence of our responses on the falsity of determinism. Second, that in recognizing our moral attitudes for

what they are, and our practices as expressive of them, we avoid treating our practice of holding responsible as simply instruments of control, justified by their efficacy. This attitude towards our moral attitudes which optimists often appeal to, fails to give an account of their true character, and is what pessimists sense as inadequate in the optimists' defence. Strawson's account avoids that distortion. Strawson hopes that this offering of a more realistic account of our thinking will remove the problems that pessimists have with optimism.

Why has Strawson's proposal attracted such attention? I conjecture that it is because the attitude that Strawson calls 'optimism' and which he is defending is the attitude that most of us wish to believe in. Strawson is right, surely, that social life as we know it must include what we might describe as living and regarding others as living under the idea of responsibility for their actions. It would, therefore, be highly inconvenient should it be true that falling under the idea of responsibility requires something that we lack. Naturally, a novel attempt to ground optimism attracts attention. Further, there is considerable interest in Strawson's attempt because, although he does not put it this way, the framework of his approach is the idea of morality and moralizing as essentially sentiment and feeling involving. That conception is one that has considerable appeal and lasting attractions.

Despite these attractions the crucial question is whether Strawson has done enough to really persuade us that the pessimist is wrong. What precisely does Strawson offer? The crucial page is 19. Strawson points out, first, that when we do suspend moral attitudes to an individual it is never because we think of them as simply determined in their behaviour. The pessimist will reply that my claim is not that people already do this, but that in fact if we are determined then we do not qualify as responsible. Strawson next points out that we cannot envisage abandoning holding each other responsible. The pessimist will reply that this simply means that we are bound to treat each other in ways that are not merited, but why is that impossible? Finally, Strawson remarks that if the psychological necessities he identifies do obtain then it is simply *useless* to pursue the philosophical issue about determinism. It remains

unclear though quite what this uselessness means as far as the pessimist's programme is concerned. That is the fundamental question.

My aim has been to highlight some of the features of, and issues raised by, Strawson's essays as I see them. My response is a personal one and quite other aspects would have been highlighted by others. But what anyone would share is a sense that more or less all of Strawson's essays remain as important and as relevant for the subject now as they were when published in the 1970s.

NOTES

- 1 Strawson used to say that the best title for it would have been 'Language, Truth and Logic', but unfortunately that had already been taken. Part of the point of this joke was, I believe, to imply or insinuate, with some justice, that the title was not quite such a good one for Ayer's famous book!
- 2 F & R p. 158.
- 3 F & R p. 187.
- 4 F & R p. 189.
- 5 F & R p. 188.
- 6 F & R p. 59.
- 7 Grice's famous paper is reprinted in (ed.) J. Dancy, *Perceptual Knowledge* (Oxford: OUP, 1988) pp. 66–78.
- 8 For critical discussion see Christopher Peacocke *Holistic Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) pp. 95–9, and P. Snowdon 'Strawson on the Concept of Perception' in (ed.) L. E. Hahn *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998) pp. 293–310. See also Strawson's reply to the latter paper in the Hahn volume, pp. 311–14.
- 9 See Michael Hinton 'Perception and Identification' in *Philosophical Review* Vol. LXXVI 1967, pp. 421–35.
- 10 A very clear exposition of the orthodox view is D. F. Pears, 'Is Existence a Predicate?' in (ed.) P. F. Strawson *Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: OUP, 1967) pp. 97–102.
- 11 Opponents of the view that Strawson in a smaller way opposed have been Saul Kripke, in his unpublished John Locke Lectures, Gareth Evans, in *Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) ch. 9, and Michael Woods in 'Existence and Tense' in (eds) Evans and McDowell, *Truth and Meaning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) pp. 248–62.

I NTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY TAKEN FROM *THE PHILOSOPHY OF P. F. STRAWSON*

The Library of Living Philosophers Volume XXVI
Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn

I was born, on 23 November 1919, in one London suburb, Ealing, and was brought up in another, Finchley. I was the second child, with two brothers and one much younger sister. My parents were both school teachers, though my mother gave up teaching on marriage. They had met when studying English literature at Goldsmith's College, London. My mother retained an excellent memory for verse, which I inherited. My father's parents came from Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, my mother's from Hampshire and Gloucestershire. Unlike many English people, I know of no Scottish, Welsh, or Irish ancestry. After my first year's secondary education at the Finchley County School my parents transferred me to the boys-only Christ's College, Finchley (motto: '*Usque proficiens*'), where academic standards were higher and where my elder brother, four years my senior, was already being educated. Unlike him, I declined to join the Cadet Corps. I still feel grateful to the French teacher (Miss Jacobi) at the earlier school, who required us to learn the phonetic alphabet and strove to inculcate a correct pronunciation of the language she taught.

At Christ's College I had good teachers and flourished academically. When the time came to choose specialist subjects for what was then called 'Higher Certificate' (modern 'A-Level') I chose

English, French, Latin, and History, to the disapproval of my maths master who claimed, incorrectly, that mathematics was my best subject. In fact, my best subjects were the literary ones, and especially English, in which an excellent teacher, J. H. Taylor, gave me much encouragement. I developed a liking for grammar and a devotion to English poetry and prose, neither of which has left me. With Mr Taylor's support I entered for and won an open scholarship in English at St. John's College, Oxford. My Higher Certificate examination results had additionally secured for me a State Scholarship, and an anonymous benefactor had undertaken to supplement my undergraduate income. So I went up to Oxford in October 1937, at the age of 17, with adequate financial provision. This was necessary, since my father's salary, as Headmaster of a poor London school, had been modest, and his early death in 1936 – he had suffered bad health ever since the 1914–18 war – had left my mother a widow. So we were rather poor.

Before I joined my college, I had decided to change my course, if possible, from the Honour School of English to that of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE); and when I arrived in Oxford I succeeded, against some mild resistance, in persuading the Fellows to allow me to do this. My motives for wishing to change were various. One was the perhaps rather priggish thought that since, at that period, the political future and the civilization of Europe seemed threatened, I ought to be better equipped than I was with understanding of politics and economics. More important was the fact that I had already begun to feel the intellectual pull of philosophy. This was partly due to my having read Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* and been captivated by its combination of passion with what I then mistook for rigour; partly because I had already discovered in myself some capacity for argument and for detecting the flaws, confusions, and inconsistencies in the discourse of others; and partly to reading some popular books on philosophy (notably by the not contemptible C. E. M. Joad) and being taken with the irresistible fascination of the questions, problems, and theories there recorded. It was not that my love of literature had in any way diminished. On the contrary. I had read much, including modern, poetry (particularly T. S. Eliot); and I thought and continue

to think of great poetry as the greatest of human achievements. I had contributed poems myself to issues of an anthology of schoolboy verse, called *The Threshold*, published in the 1930s. I am, or was, a competent versifier, and if I had been able to choose my talents, I would have chosen to be a poet. But of course I could not, and am not. So it was rather the assurance, perhaps mistaken, that my enjoyment and appreciation of good writing would not be enhanced – might even be injured – by making a profession or a career of it.

After one preliminary term of eight weeks at Oxford, concluding with a simple examination, for which I read with enjoyment some Tacitus and Pliny, Tocqueville and Corneille, the serious work of the P.P.E. school began. Economics, I found, interested me hardly at all, the historical part of politics much more; philosophy I found congenial and absorbing from the start. Besides the required subjects of moral and ‘general’ philosophy I chose the only two options then allowed to P.P.E. students specializing in philosophy, viz. Logic (broadly understood to include what would now be called Philosophy of Language, and some metaphysical and epistemological questions) and the philosophy of Kant (*The Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Grundlegung*). My principal philosophy tutor throughout was J. D. Mabbott, a very reasonable, courteous, and helpful teacher, whose main interest was in moral and political philosophy and who subsequently became an excellent head of the college. But I also enjoyed one term’s tuition by H. P. Grice, the other philosophy tutor at St. John’s and one of the cleverest and most ingenious thinkers of our time. Tutorials with him regularly extended long beyond the customary hour, and from him I learned more of the difficulty and possibilities of philosophical argument than from anyone else. His resourcefulness seemed inexhaustible.

By the end of my three undergraduate years in Oxford I knew that, of all the world’s possible occupations, the one I most desired was that of a Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy in a college of that University. But the result of my final examination, though it did not greatly surprise me, was a disappointment both to myself and my tutors; so I had no very high hopes of achieving such an ambition.

In any case, by then, we were in the summer of 1940. The war was going badly. I was duly called up into the army (the Royal Artillery), and sent for basic training to a territorial searchlight battery in Sussex, where, in between learning to drill and to shoot I had an excellent view of the aerial Battle of Britain during the day, and, at night, of the red glow of the Northern sky where London was undergoing bombardment by the Luftwaffe. Fairly soon I was selected for instruction in the mysteries of radar and attended a number of courses, in London and elsewhere, at which I learned a great deal, now forgotten, about electronics. Having no difficulty with examinations in this subject, I was, to the reasonable surprise of senior NCOs, fairly rapidly promoted through the ranks, briefly commanded a small radar station near the Sussex shore, and in 1942 was commissioned in the newly formed corps of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

I eventually attained the rank of captain; but my military career was in no way distinguished. The only part of it in which I took much satisfaction was that of discharging the duty of defending officer at the courts martial of putatively delinquent soldiers, where, though I only once secured an acquittal (of a senior NCO charged with a serious offence of disobedience to orders) I flatter myself I may often have reduced the severity of sentences by the persuasive power of my 'pleas in mitigation'. In 1945, before being posted abroad to the occupying army in Italy, and then Austria, I had the great good fortune of persuading Grace Hall Martin, my girlfriend of some years' standing – whom I had renamed 'Ann' – to marry me: probably the most judicious action of my life.

In the summer of 1946, having unhesitatingly declined the bait of further promotion, I was demobilized. I had served for six years, thinking a little, but not much, about philosophy and devoting most of such private leisure as I had enjoyed to reading the greater French and English novelists. My ambitions, however, for a career as an academic philosopher, had not changed. I contemplated returning to Oxford to read for a further degree (a B.Phil. in philosophy); but there were difficulties in the way of that; and my future was in effect decided by the intervention of my former tutor, John Mabbott – in this my guardian angel – who suggested that I

apply for the post of Assistant Lecturer in Philosophy at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, where he himself had taught for a short time before becoming a Fellow of St. John's. It was no doubt largely due to his support that, when I did apply, I was elected on interview. So I set myself to some hard reading in subjects on which I was to lecture – particularly philosophy of logic (for which I read Russell, Moore, Ramsey, C. I. Lewis, and an introductory book by Susan Stebbing) and Kant's moral philosophy. In the course of my year at Bangor I also lectured on the philosophy of Leibniz (studied mainly in the Gerhardt edition) and on ethics in general; and wrote two papers, one an attempt to solve the problem of the 'paradoxes of entailment', the other an attack on ethical intuitionism. The first I submitted to *Mind*, where it appeared, as 'Necessary Propositions and Entailment Statements', my first published article, in 1948. Though it contained the germ of a fruitful idea, it also contained a serious mistake and so failed in its declared aim. The second was much too long and too involved, therefore tedious; so I later recast it in the crisper, dialogue form in which it appeared as 'Ethical Intuitionism' in *Philosophy* 1949.

During the same academic year I visited Oxford, where Ann and I shared a flat – she having entered St Anne's College to read English as an undergraduate – to take the competitive examination for the John Locke Scholarship, as it was then called. My success in winning this had two beneficial results: first, the prize of £80, then worth many times its present value, was extremely welcome to an impoverished couple; second, my papers sufficiently impressed Gilbert Ryle, one of the examiners, for him to recommend me to University College, then in need of a second teacher of philosophy. So, in 1947, I returned to Oxford as, in effect, a philosophy tutor, though bearing the inappropriate title of 'College Lecturer' until, in the following year, I was elected a Fellow. Ann and I were then fortunate enough to be able to leave our North Oxford flat and take up residence in an apartment in the College itself, where we lived until we moved, in 1950, on the birth of our first child, to an elegant College house of the 1840s.

Having thus achieved, at the age of 28, my prewar ambition, I set

seriously to work at the two tasks of tutorial teaching and of thinking my own thoughts. They are not unconnected tasks, for the first is of immense benefit to the second, as the second is to the first. Indeed I think there is no better or more mutually profitable method of philosophical instruction than the one-to-one tutorial exchange. The pupil, who brings and reads to his tutor a weekly essay, prepared on the basis of recommended reading, gains from the attention and criticism of his more experienced listener. The tutor, striving to understand and clarify his pupil's thoughts, will frequently succeed in clarifying his own. This admirable system, like many good things, is under threat.

My colleague, George Paul, and I divided the tutorial teaching between us in a way satisfactory to both. He undertook the teaching of moral and political and ancient philosophy (Plato and Aristotle), while logic and general modern philosophy from Descartes onwards fell to me. The questions which at the time most seriously engaged my attention were questions in the philosophy of logic and the philosophy of language. While still at Bangor, lecturing on these matters, I had become deeply concerned with the matter of singular reference and predication, and their objects – a topic which has remained central in my thought throughout my working life. Now in Oxford I proceeded, beginning in 1948, to supplement my college teaching with a series of University lectures under the title 'Names and Descriptions', in which I referred to and criticized the work of Russell, Moore, Kneale, and some few others. From these I extracted two lectures, given to an American Summer School, in which I concentrated on my critique of Russell's Theory of Descriptions; and the report of these induced Gilbert Ryle, then editor of *Mind*, to say, bluntly, that he wanted them as an article for that journal. Hence 'On Referring' (*Mind*, 1950), which remains, probably, the best known of my writings.

Russell's theory, elegant and ingenious as it is – a 'paradigm of philosophy' according to F. P. Ramsey – seemed to me then, and still does, to misrepresent the true character and function of singular definite descriptive phrases, as, for the most part, we actually use and understand them. It does so by overlooking or

neglecting the pragmatic, contextual, and communicative aspects of their use. To the objection that this is to introduce merely pragmatic considerations into what is essentially a semantic question, the answer must be that no serious semantic theory can afford to ignore the points – and their consequences – to which I drew attention. I think my view, with variations, is now generally accepted by linguists, though the issue remains, to some extent, controversial among philosophers. I should add that I had not at the time read Frege and was, regrettably enough, completely ignorant of the work of that great figure; so subsequent references to the ‘Frege-Strawson’ view of the matter I found, at first, surprising, though in no way disturbing.

I had, after all, jumped straight, with six years military service intervening, from undergraduate to university teacher; so serious gaps in my knowledge were perhaps pardonable. My major influences remained Russell and Moore, whom I viewed, and still view, as the founding fathers of contemporary analytical philosophy. Other influences, of course, were soon to be added: locally Ryle, whose verve and brilliance might excuse, if they sometimes masked, a certain lack of rigour in thought, and Austin, consistently clear, precise, witty, and formidable; more remotely, Wittgenstein, whose Blue and Brown Books began to circulate in pirated copies at the beginning of the 1950s, at once breathtakingly impressive and profoundly enigmatic; and Frege himself, whose articles on Sense and Reference and Concept and Object were made available in English translation by Geach and Black in 1952. Nor should I fail to mention A. J. Ayer whose *Language, Truth and Logic* I had read, enthralled, in the gardens of St. John’s as an undergraduate – even though, by now, I no longer found satisfying his undiluted classical empiricism.

Austin did me the honour of proposing that I should reply to his paper on Truth at the Joint Session of the Mind and Aristotelian Society in 1950. I was already convinced that Ramsey had got the matter essentially right a long time ago, and hence thought that Austin had got it essentially wrong. Though I tried to convey as much in my reply, I also spoiled the effect, and diverted general attention, with a gratuitous flourish of my own, which was itself due

in part to Austin's own observation of the 'performatory' function of speech. That little flourish had itself formed the substance of a short article in *Analysis* the year before (*à propos* of which I remember fatuously announcing to George Paul that I had a new theory of truth; to which he sensibly and characteristically replied: 'Come on now, which of the old ones is it?'). The issue, of course, persists; and, much later, I was able to make my considered position clear and to finalize my critique of Austin in the two articles 'A Problem about Truth: A Reply to Mr. Warnock' (1964) and 'Truth: A Reconsideration of Austin's Views' (1965), both of which were reprinted in *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (1971).

Meanwhile, I had been invited to give regular introductory lectures on logic in the University for the benefit of undergraduates studying for the Preliminary Examination in PPE. This I did, and as a result was further invited by a publisher, again, I think, at Ryle's prompting, to write a book on the subject. It duly appeared as *Introduction to Logical Theory* in 1952 and received the accolade of a lengthy review in *Mind* by Quine, in which he deplored my use of the notion of analyticity but pleased me by his slightly ironical reference to my 'lucid vernacular'. My double concern in the book was to explain the nature of standard elementary logic while at the same time emphasizing the point that, perspicuous, powerful, and elegant as it is, modern formal logic is not an adequate instrument for revealing clearly all the structural features of language as we use it. Rather, it is an idealized abstraction of great power and beauty, an indispensable tool indeed for clarifying much of our thought, but not, as some are tempted to suppose, the unique and sufficient key to the functioning of language and thought in general.

The early 1950s in general were a busy and productive time. For a few years in the first half of the decade Grice and I together held a graduate seminar at which we took it in turn to read papers, some of them (e.g. that which surfaced later as 'In Defence of a Dogma' (1954)) actually produced in collaboration. Among those at different times attending the seminar were a number of senior members, including, on his first visit to Oxford, Quine. At about this time I was charged by Ryle with the task of reviewing Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* for *Mind*, a task to which I devoted a

considerable amount of time and effort, with results (1954) which, though they recorded my sense of the work's genius, also recorded some perplexity, even dissatisfaction, and was accordingly not received with entire approval by the committed disciples. It might not be quite coincidental that Norman Malcolm, as an epigraph to his own review, quoted Lichtenberg: 'Ein Buch ist ein Spiegel. Wenn ein Affe hineinguckt, dann kann freilich kein Apostel heraussehen'.

The birth of my daughter, Julia, in 1950 was followed by the birth of my two sons, Galen (named after his uncle who was named after his) in 1952, and Robert in 1954. Soon after the publication of 'Logical Theory' I ceased to give the introductory lectures on formal logic and began instead to think and lecture on the lines which led, ultimately, to *Individuals*. This was a natural development from my already established concern with the operation, fundamental in thought and speech, of reference and predication; an operation fundamental also, as many, from Aristotle to Quine, have thought and stressed, in ontology or metaphysics. So it was natural to address the question of what the most basic or primitive or fundamental objects of reference, or subjects of predication, are. In the first part of *Individuals* I argued that they are – and necessarily are – relatively enduring space-occupying individuals, falling under substance-concepts. Here was an at least partial echo of Aristotle. In the same part I speculated on the theoretical possibility of reproducing the essential structure of our scheme with a greatly attenuated ontology (sounds); sought, perhaps by then unnecessarily, to deliver a *coup de grâce* to Cartesianism and to dispose of the pseudo-problem of other minds; and concluded by examining the brilliantly conceived and finally impossible Leibnizian ontology of monads.

All of this and more I made the topic of one of the seminars I conducted at Duke University, North Carolina, throughout the fall semester of 1955. This was my first visit to the United States. The other seminar I conducted there was devoted to a series of papers in the philosophy of logic and language: on such topics as reference again, propositions, the constants of logic and their analogues in natural language, necessity, etc. While at Duke, I had the opportunity of visiting and reading papers at a number of other

American Universities, on the West and East coasts and in between. The visit which stays most vividly in my mind, and that for a bizarre reason, is the one I paid to Seattle, Washington State. The paper I read there contained the substance of what became the chapter on Persons in *Individuals*; and one member of my audience stood throughout, with his back turned to me, evidently more willing to hear what I had to say than to contemplate the sight of me saying it.

Another event which occurred, I think, earlier in the 1950s was an assembly of French and Anglophone philosophers at one of the Colloques de Royaumont, which was designed to bring about a meeting of minds between representatives of the continental and analytical traditions. Whether this desirable result was actually achieved remains uncertain. But Austin at least made an impression with his paper, delivered in French on 'Performatifs'. In a paper entitled 'Analysis, Science and Metaphysics' I gave an account of the relations between these three, as I then conceived of them; and this, later published in French in *La Philosophie Analytique* (Cahiers de Royaumont, 1962), appeared later still in English in *The Linguistic Turn* edited by Rorty in 1967. At about this time I wrote my contribution to the Schilpp volume on Carnap, under the title 'Carnap's Views on Constructed Systems versus Natural Languages in Analytical Philosophy'. Completed to a deadline in 1954, it did not appear until the volume was published, nine years later, in 1963.

Philosophical disagreements with Quine – which have in no way impaired a personal friendship of some forty years' standing – surfaced again in 'Propositions, Concepts and Logical Truth' (1957). The disagreements, both then and later, turn on my more than permissive attitude towards a whole range of intensional notions which Quine is unable to countenance; and of which, I then argued, his own account of truths of logic compelled recognition. My next major undertaking was that of getting my lectures on *Individuals* into shape as a book. This did not take me very long, since the lectures were already pretty complete; but I did rewrite the first chapter and add an introduction about the general character of the enterprise, in which I introduced the term 'descriptive

metaphysics'. In the second part of the lectures and of the book I sought both to explain the basic association of two distinctions – the logical or grammatical distinction between subject and predicate (reference and predication) on the one hand and the ontological distinction between spatio-temporal particular and universal on the other – and at the same time to show that and why this association, though fundamental, is not exclusive. Particulars indeed can never be predicated, but universals, and abstract and intensional objects generally, can certainly be objects of reference or subjects of predication; and given the acknowledged connection between being an object of reference and being an entity, we should abandon, if we suffer from them, any natural but ill-founded nominalistic anxieties and recognize such objects in our ontology.

Individuals was published in 1959, and in the same year A. J. Ayer was elected to the Wykeham Chair of Logic, for which I too, encouraged by colleagues, had applied. The result of the election, so far from being a disappointment to me, was a profound relief. I did not yet feel ready for an Oxford Chair, and was perfectly satisfied to continue with undergraduate tutorial teaching. The weekly discussion group for selected dons which Ayer established replaced, in a totally different but equally stimulating style, the Saturday morning meetings over which Austin, before his untimely and much lamented death, had so brilliantly presided. With Austin, proceedings were informal and no standard philosophical issues were tackled head-on; instead, particular specific concepts or concept-groups (words or word-groups), and the conditions of their use, were examined in detail, with results that were always fascinating, and often philosophically suggestive or illuminating. With Ayer, a different member of the group each week would read a paper on a philosophical topic of his choice; then drinks would be served by the host for the term and discussion, usually spirited, never acrimonious, would begin. 'Freddie's Group', as it was and is called, survived and survives the death of its founder.

1960 was a full year. I was elected to the British Academy and delivered there a lecture, 'Freedom and Resentment', which is one of my very few ventures into moral philosophy. Another such venture, written about the same time, and published in 1961 (the

year of the birth of my younger daughter, Virginia), I entitled 'Social Morality and Individual Ideal'. Between them, these two papers effectively embody all I have thought or have to say in a philosophical area which, important as I recognize it to be, I have never found as intellectually gripping as those to which I have given more attention. The 1961 paper I had previously given as a public lecture in Princeton University, where I had been invited for the fall semester of 1960. There I conducted a seminar attended by some extremely able graduates and, from time to time, by such teachers as Hempel, Benacerraf, and Vlastos. My subjects were, again, generally in the region of philosophy of logic and language, e.g. singular reference and predication, logical constants and logical form. Colleagues and students were friendly and the standard of discussion was high. While at Princeton I again visited and read papers at a number of other universities.

1960 also saw the publication, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, of a series of articles under the general heading, 'The British Imagination'. I contributed the article on philosophy. It was given the title 'The Post-Linguistic Thaw' – a title not chosen by me and which I deplored. The title was not without point in that, as I indicated in the article, concentration on the actual use of words in ordinary linguistic practice – a philosophical method largely inspired by Austin and cultivated by at least a substantial minority of British, and especially Oxford, philosophers in the postwar period – was already, before 1960, beginning to loosen its grip in favour of more systematic and 'theoretical' approaches. Yet the title metaphor was objectionable in its suggestion of emergence from a period of frozen sterility; whereas in fact the gains and advances in philosophical understanding made in that period were probably as great as any that have been made in a comparably short time in the history of the subject; and the intellectual pleasure and excitement of living through it were correspondingly intense.

In the immediately succeeding years, besides lecturing and writing papers in the philosophy of language – on truth, reference, speech-acts, etc. – I began to lecture on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, a book on which I had regularly tutored those undergraduates, or supervised those graduates, who had chosen to