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Foundations Shaken but Not Stirred

Andrew Vincent

in The Nature of Political Theory

Examines the advent of logical positivism, the development of conceptual analysis, ordinary language philosophy, the so-called death of political theory, the impact of linguistic philosophy and the influence of Wittgenstein's thought on political theory, and particularly the idea of 'essential contestability'.

Introduction: Inheriting Austin

Martin Gustafsson

in The Philosophy of J. L. Austin

This introduction describes the background and legacy of Austin's thought, going beyond the standard picture of him as an effectively obsolete 'doyen of ordinary language philosophy'. It situates Austin's philosophy in its original intellectual milieu, focusing in particular on the significance of his immediate predecessors, G. E. Moore and H. A. Prichard. It then looks at the various ways in which Austin's ideas have been appropriated by speech act theorists (via Grice and Searle), by performativity theorists (via Derrida and Butler), in discussions of pornography and free speech (via Hornsby and Langton), and by others such as Quentin Skinner, H. L. A. Hart, Stanley Cavell, Charles Travis, and Mark Kaplan. Finally it provides an overview of the remaining chapters of the book.

The Philosophy of J. L. Austin

Martin Gustafsson and Richard Sørli (eds)

This is the first collection of essays on J. L. Austin's philosophy published by a major Anglophone press in nearly forty years. Rejecting the standard picture of him as an effectively obsolete "doyen of ordinary language philosophy", the contributors show how Austin's work can be brought to bear on issues that are on the top of today's philosophical agenda, such as scepticism and contextualism, the epistemology of testimony, the generality of the conceptual, the viability of the semantics/pragmatics distinction, and issues in philosophical methodology. The connections made between Austin's philosophy and current debates provide new interpretations of his views and aim to demonstrate that his work deserves a more central place in mainstream philosophical discussion than it currently has. The collection also contains a substantial introduction that situates Austin's thought in its original intellectual milieu and provides an overview of the many different ways in which his ideas have influenced later developments, in philosophy and elsewhere. Contributors are Avner Baz, Simon Glendinning, Martin Gustafsson, Mark Kaplan, Adam Leite, Benjamin McMyler, Jean-Philippe Narboux, and Charles Travis.

Philosophical Papers

J. L. Austin

J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (eds)

This text collects all Austin's published articles plus a new one, ch. 13, hitherto unpublished. The analysis of the ordinary language to clarify philosophical questions is the common element of the 13 papers. Chapters 2 and 4 discuss the nature of knowledge, focusing on 'performative utterances'. The doctrine of 'speech acts', i.e. a statement may be the pragmatic use of language, is discussed in Chs 6 and 10. Chapters 8, 9, and 12 reflect on the problems the language encounters in discussing actions and consider the cases of excuses, accusations, and freedom. The 'correspondence theory', i.e. a statement is truth when it corresponds to a fact, is presented in Chs 5 and 6. Finally,

Chs 1 and 3 study how a word may have different but related senses considering Aristotle's view. Chapters 11 and 13 illustrate the meaning of 'pretending' and a Plato's text respectively.

The False Prison Volume One

David Pears

This is the first of David Pears's acclaimed two-volume work on the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy, covering the pre-1929 writings. Part I of the first volume consists in a brief but eloquent overview of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole; Part II critically examines the earlier system, delineating and evaluating the central ideas (logical atomism, picture theory of meaning, and solipsism) with intellectual rigour and clarity. Pears succeeds in both offering an original realist interpretation of Wittgenstein's earlier thought, one that has found many followers, and in demarcating a structural framework that makes the internal organization of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole more accessible.

Tales of the Unknown: Austin and the Argument from Ignorance1

Mark Kaplan

in The Philosophy of J. L. Austin

Suppose you want to question my claim to know that the bird in my garden is a goldfinch. Austin held that you cannot legitimately demand that I do more than 'enough to show that (within reason, and for the present intents and purposes) it "can't" be anything else, there is no room for an alternative, competing, description of it', where it is understood that '[e]nough is enough […]. It does not mean, for example, enough to show it isn't a stuffed goldfinch'. But why not? This chapter argues that (i) the standard answers are not available to Austin, (ii) Austin's writings and methods (including his characteristic way of arguing for philosophical conclusions via appeal to what we would say when) make available a different and novel diagnosis of what goes wrong with scepticism based on arguments from ignorance, and (iii) these

methods—comprising Austin's 'ordinary language philosophy'—have been misunderstood, and their power underestimated.

Mind, Brain, and the Unconscious

Michael Moore

in Placing Blame: A Theory of the Criminal Law

The chapter explores the general nature of mental states such as belief, desire, and intentions, and their relation to brain states It does this through an extended analysis of the Freudian theory of the unconscious. Rightly conceived, the Freudian unconscious is seen as functionally characterized, sub-personal states of the brain that underlie the mental states of whole persons. The folk psychology on which the criminal law's culpability discriminations are built, is thus seen to be secure against the insights of a progressive, scientific psychology, be it Freudian, behaviourist, cognitive, neuroscientific, or other.

Ordinary Language and Philosophical Conversion

Andrew Norris

in Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell

This chapter evaluates Cavell's reception of Austin's ordinary language philosophy, showing it to be more critical than it has been understood to be. For Austin, the ordinary language philosopher speaks in the first-person plural to remind other philosophers of "what we say when" so as to correct the mistakes those philosophers have made in writing about ethics, epistemology, etc. But Austin cannot give a compelling explanation of why those other philosophers require such reminders: how can they have been wrong about their language and its implications, since they too are one of us who speak the language? On Cavell's account, we forget what we say when—or, what comes to the same thing, fail to mean what we say—because we evade ourselves. Ordinary language philosophy does not correct mistakes but addresses the uncanny nature of the ordinary, that it is not yet what it is.

Freedom

Alan Ryan

in The Making of Modern Liberalism

This chapter describes a method of doing philosophy, the method of "ordinary language" philosophy, or more appropriately, "piecemeal philosophical engineering." It then applies this method to three questions connected with the concept of freedom: What makes the problem of free will so difficuult to grasp, and hence so difficult to solve? What is the moral value of freedom, that is, does it have an "absolute" value rather than a "conditional" value? In what respects is freedom a "negative" concept? The chapter first considers reasons why we should avoid saying either that philosophy is or is not linguistic before explaining the use of "free from" as a verbal and adjectival phrase, along with adverbial freedom and adjectival freedom. It also looks at cases of the idiom "free to," plus a couple of sentences just involving "free" as a contrast, and concludes with an analysis of freedom as "trouser-word."

A Plea for Excuses 1

J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson, and G. J. Warnock

in Philosophical Papers

On the meta-level, 'A Plea for Excuses', sometimes regarded as the manifesto of ordinary language philosophy, illustrates Austin's method of approaching philosophical issues, by patiently analysing the subtleties of ordinary language, by example. On the object level, the key distinction with regard to human actions that appear to be worthy of blame, Austin holds to be between a justification, which denies that the performed action was wrong, and an excuse, which instead denies that the agent was responsible for performing it. Austin gives careful attention to particular cases of exculpatory speech, including precise word order and varying emphasis, etymological studies, and the special function of adverbial qualifying phrases, and shows how legal precedents and abnormal psychology may also be helpful in understanding why some efforts to excuse fail. In the final analysis, excuses are properly seen as

setting limits to the ascription of moral responsibility, by stating explicitly how they differ from the more usual cases.