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Alice Ambrose and early analytic philosophy

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Alice Ambrose and early analytic philosophy

Abstract: Alice Ambrose (1906-2001) is best known as Wittgenstein's student during the 1930s. Her association with probably the most famous philosopher of the 20th century contributes to her obscurity. Ambrose is referred to in historiography of this period as 'follower' or 'disciple' but never considered in her own right as a philosopher. The neglect of her place in the history of philosophy needs to be resisted. This paper explores some of Ambrose's most interesting ideas from the early 1950s, when she developed and expanded some of Wittgenstein's inchoate suggestions and contributed to on-going debates about how to do philosophy and the role of language in the discipline. By combining an analysis of the 1950 paper 'The Problem of Linguistic Inadequacy' and the 1952 paper 'Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems', it will be seen that Ambrose rejects the idea that ordinary language can be improved and begins to develop the view that philosophical language adapts to usage. Thus, Ambrose does not blindly follow Wittgenstein but breaks with his idea that there is something inherently wrong with the way philosophers communicate. The paper also seeks to show how marginalized philosophers become obscured in the history of the subject through the example of Ambrose.

Keywords: Alice Ambrose; linguistic turn; early analytic philosophy; vagueness; Ludwig Wittgenstein; Richard Rorty; Cambridge University.

Introduction

Alice Ambrose (1906-2001) is largely missing from historiographies of early analytic philosophy. Despite publishing many papers on themes in logic, philosophy of mathematics, linguistic philosophy and meta-philosophy, her work is very seldom cited. There are a number of possible reasons why her role has been obscured which current historiographies have not done enough to offset. One of these reasons is her association with Wittgenstein. Without her painstaking work, whereby she came close to sacrificing her own livelihood as a teacher and academic, there would be a great deal we would have lost in our knowledge of Wittgenstein's philosophical development. This paper will not be primarily concerned with her 'dictation' of Wittgenstein's ideas but will

concentrate rather on the development of her own theories in the philosophy of language (as we would call it now) and meta-philosophy.¹

While it may be important in some contexts to describe Ambrose as a Wittgensteinian, one must be careful not to use that epithet as an excuse to ignore her ideas, as if they were not her own, but came only from the great man himself.² Her work is not only significant in its content, describing and analysing contemporary trends in philosophy and explaining the ideas of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but also in its crisp and compelling philosophical style. It is worth emphasising that this was not Wittgenstein's own chosen medium; while he continued to disdain academic philosophy, Ambrose took it forward in many new and bold ways.

The paper begins with a brief overview of Ambrose's academic career. Section 2 will consider two articles published by Ambrose in the early 1950s, a key period for the development of analytic philosophy. The third section will then take a closer look at how Ambrose's ideas were systematically obscured. The final part of the paper posits that Ambrose was no mere follower but was a significant philosopher in her own right and how, despite obstacles both institutional and social, she helped to shape the discipline.

¹ There is still work to be done on how far Ambrose and other students contributed towards Wittgenstein's middle period philosophy. In the process that led to the *Brown Book*, both Ambrose and Francis Skinner asked questions and made suggestions as well as taking down what Wittgenstein said. 'Ambrose, far from merely performing a clerical task, took a much more active role' (De Pellegrin, "The Brown Book", 10). If Wittgenstein had been able to come up with these ideas on his own, he would have simply written them down by himself, as he did with the *Tractatus*. Ambrose herself describes the end of this work as follows: 'there was a break between Wittgenstein and me, and dictation of the Brown Book ceased. This was a grief to me... It was... a burden to feel responsible for the cessation of a piece of work. For it was evident throughout that year that a dependency existing involving Skinner and me... the magic circle was broken' (Ambrose, "A Portrait", 24).

² This is implied by Hacker, "The Linguistic Turn", which will be discussed in Section (3).

1. Brief overview of Ambrose's philosophical career

Alice Ambrose has the dubious honour of having been Ludwig Wittgenstein's first and last Cambridge PhD student. Ambrose already had a PhD from the University of Michigan which concentrated on Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. Ambrose describes this as the 'examination of two systems of symbolic logic and of the attempt in *Principia Mathematica* of A.N. Whitehead and Bertrand Russell to develop mathematics from one of them. Investigation of the nature of logic and mathematics and of the extensional logic basic to *Principia*, in light of their bearings for epistemology, went along concomitantly'.³ Having arrived at Newnham College as a visiting student in 1932, her stay was extended due to the combination of job scarcity during the depression,⁴ growing engagement with the school of Cambridge Analysis, and Ambrose's ability to secure the prestigious Marion Kennedy Fellowship at Newnham College. Wittgenstein, Moore and Braithwaite all wrote glowing recommendations. Ambrose would be the only philosopher to receive this award in the period of early analytic engagement; the applications of Margaret Braithwaite (née Masterman) and Elizabeth Anscombe were unsuccessful.⁵

Initially, Wittgenstein was assigned as her supervisor but dropped that role almost immediately and was replaced by G. E. Moore; Wittgenstein would remain as one of her examiners. Their relationship, personal and intellectual, ended badly. She is probably best known now for that historical fact. In short, Ambrose defied Wittgenstein's wishes regarding publication of her own work, which made tangential claims about his views. For Ray Monk, Wittgenstein merely 'tried hard to persuade her not to publish it' and broke off contact when he could not do so (*Duty of Genius*, 346). This elides the dire economic and professional straits that made publication essential for Ambrose. That the paper mentioned her understanding of Wittgenstein's views did not

³ From Newnham College Archives, PP Lazerowitz.

⁴ De Pellegrin, "The Brown Book", 3.

⁵ Records preserved in Newnham College Archives.

justify his attempt to ruin her career.⁶ Ambrose explains herself in the following: ‘This is a view which I understood Dr. L. Wittgenstein to put forward in his lectures and which but for them would never have occurred to me. It is only in this sense that any view which I have put forward can be said to have been “guided by suggestions made by him”. In stating on p. 188 of my last article that my views were so guided, this was all I meant to say. That is, I did not intend to claim either that I had understood him correctly or that inferences which I drew from what I understood him to mean would follow from his actual views. Any reader who finds mistakes or absurdities in my views must not suppose that he is responsible for them’.⁷

Returning to the US in 1935, Ambrose took up a temporary post at the University of Michigan, before later securing a permanent position at Smith College and successfully obtaining her PhD from Cambridge in 1938.⁸ Ambrose would also marry fellow philosopher, Morris Lazerowitz, in that year; both taught at Smith but she outshone her partner, becoming Professor in 1954 and, slightly later, editor of the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*.⁹

⁶ For correction of this story based on archival evidence see De Pellegrin, “The Brown Book” and Loner, “Life Unfettered”. Glock’s brief summary is more accurate: Wittgenstein ‘was paranoid’ and ‘tried to sabotage’ Ambrose’s publications (“Wittgenstein on American Philosophy”, 384).

⁷ Ambrose, “Finitism in Mathematics II”, 319 n.1.

⁸ There was no prospect of being employed in Cambridge; Susan Stebbing, one of the most accomplished analytic philosophers of the 1930s, was told not to bother applying for Moore’s chair in 1939 as her gender would make her appointment impossible (Chapman, *Susan Stebbing*, 126-7). The first woman to be hired to a permanent post in the Philosophy Faculty was G. E. M. Anscombe in 1970, followed by Jane Heal in 1986.

⁹ All her career details can be found in typewritten pages sent to Newnham College and are contained in the Newnham Archives as well as on the website for Smith College: <https://sophia.smith.edu/blog/smithipedia/faculty-staff/lazerowitz-alice-ambrose/>.

2. Ambrose's work in the early 1950s

In the early 1950s, Ambrose published two papers: 'The Problem of Linguistic Inadequacy' and 'Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems'. These papers give a good sense of Ambrose as a philosopher. The 1930s marked a period when she was still developing ideas in the philosophy of logic and mathematics and had been introduced to the school of Cambridge Analysis and to Wittgenstein. After securing a permanent post, Ambrose began to establish herself as part of the academic community in the US; in 1951 she was promoted to full Professor. While her time at Cambridge was formative, by the early 1950s there is no reason to think that Ambrose had simply been carrying around Wittgenstein's ideas for a dozen odd years. This section is broken down into an initial brief overview of the history of analytic philosophy before, during, and after the period at which Ambrose wrote the two papers discussed. The context for each will then be given before an analysis of their content. The section will also touch on the lack of response to these papers before suggesting several ways in which Ambrose's thoughts constitute a contribution to philosophy in this period.

2.1: Brief overview of periods in history of early analytic philosophy

The historiography of early analytic philosophy is fraught with difficulties. Even the term 'analytic philosophy' and its advent are much disputed.¹⁰ What we do know is that philosophy changed significantly from the early part of the 20th century and was in a considerable state of flux until the 1970s. One key factor was the advent of systemic logical languages, particularly those set out by Frege and developed by Russell and others. There was a general move away from concentration on constructing metaphysical systems, at odds with common sense, and toward 'analysis'.¹¹ Another key development in the 1920s and 30s was the involvement of the Vienna circle, the centre for logical empiricism (or logical positivism). Wittgenstein and others would

¹⁰ Glock, *What is Analytic Philosophy*, Beaney, "What is Analytic Philosophy", Frost-Arnold "The Rise".

¹¹ This term is also much disputed; see Beaney, "Analysis". For an interesting early account see Stebbing, "The Method", who posits two levels of analysis, one metaphysical and another grammatical. See also Janssen-Lauret, "Susan Stebbing's Metaphysics".

later develop ideas that led to a concentration on ‘linguistic’ philosophy, including many who worked in Oxford from the 1940s to 60s, sometimes known as ‘ordinary language philosophers’.

The following breakdown, which I take from Matt LaVine, gives a general sense of the periods within early analytic philosophy as they have been understood in recent historical narratives:

1898-1914: Moore and Russell’s attack on British Idealism

1914-1926: Russell and Wittgenstein on logical atomism

1926-1940: The *Tractatus*, logical empiricism (also known as logical positivism), Cambridge Analysis

1940-60: Ordinary language philosophy

1960-1970: Fragmentation and debate; responses to Quine.¹²

Alice Ambrose is active in the last three of La Vine’s phases. Although she came to Cambridge to learn about aspects of the *Tractatus*, Ambrose soon become more interested in the philosophical positions Wittgenstein was beginning to form in the 1930s, including language games and refutations of solipsism, which would be articulated more fully in the *Philosophical Investigations*.¹³

Another part of trying to understand early analytic philosophy is between what we might call the ‘great minds’ view versus the ‘intellectual milieu’ view. The first elicits lists of those considered to be the revolutionaries with the big ideas that cause and drive forward changes in philosophy.¹⁴ The second focuses on a broader context and set of influences. Although there were forceful figures whose writings and teaching had huge influence, there was also much to feed and develop these ideas. While a

¹² LaVine, *Gender, Race*, xxvi. While such periodization is of course questionable, I opt to use it as a compass point to situate Ambrose. It is hoped that in future such timelines will be nuanced as less well-known names and ideas are uncovered.

¹³ Ambrose’s writings discussed here came before the 1953 publication of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

¹⁴ A good example of this is Soames, “Analytic Philosophy in America”. At one point after listing all the philosophers employed by Harvard University in the 1950s and 60s, he declares these to be ‘as fine a collection of philosophers as could be found anywhere’ (459). Of course they were all men.

balance of great minds versus intellectual trends is important, it must also be acknowledged that there are further institutional and social factors which impact past and current perspectives on this history. These considerations are increasingly important when discussing marginalized figures, who were often excluded from meetings, publications and other aspects crucial to the types of career structure required to become well-known.¹⁵

Ambrose's experience as a professional philosopher was hemmed in by institutional and social factors. Her gender clearly affected her ability to make her mark early on in her career. The expectation for philosophical engagement became adversarial, with the teacher inviting the attentions of an argumentative acolyte. Russell and Wittgenstein represent the paradigm. Russell writes: 'My German, who seems to be rather good, was very argumentative' and 'My ferocious German (who is an Austrian I find) came and argued at me after my lecture'.¹⁶ Social roles led Ambrose to engage in such typically feminine activities as offering to make meals, doing needlework while waiting patiently, and befriending people's wives.¹⁷ Because she could not argue freely she also could not be the typical philosophical acolyte to the master. Her double-bind is plain to see.¹⁸

While it is not true that Ambrose could not succeed at all in the new philosophy, she had to take a different and more arduous path from her contemporaries who

¹⁵ See, for example, Siobhan Chapman's excellent study of Susan Stebbing's philosophical development and the ways in which it was curtailed by institutional factors. .

¹⁶ Letter from Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 25 October and 16 November 1912 (McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 89).

¹⁷ In her letters to Wittgenstein in 1934, Ambrose discusses what she will cook him (Ambrose to Wittgenstein 27.6.1934; in McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 230). One day, while she waits for Wittgenstein to be ready to discuss philosophy with her, she has to do needlework instead (Wittgenstein to Ambrose 17.1.1935; De Pellegrin, "The Brown Book", 28). Like Stebbing (Chapman, *Susan Stebbing*, 34), Ambrose befriends Moore's wife, Dorothy, with whom she has a voluminous correspondence).

¹⁸ On this phenomenon in contemporary philosophy see Antony "Different Voices", 238-9.

happened to be men. Like Susan Stebbing, Ambrose rises to Professor at a woman-only college after many years and she becomes established in that sense.¹⁹ However, she missed out on the attention that a more dramatic adversarial entry could have established; during her lifetime, her work is not just ignored but written out, erased by the imperative to answer only those who one is supposed to pay attention to. As with Stebbing who also worked at a women-only college, the legacy to her ideas was hampered as well by lack of disciples of her own.

2.2: Ambrose against the idea of linguistic inadequacy

The first paper I will discuss was published in 1950, the very first in a collection of 17 ‘fresh’ essays in the new analytic style, commissioned and edited by Max Black. A few years younger than Ambrose, Black studied in Cambridge, graduating in 1930. By late 1940s, he was Professor to Philosophy at Cornell University, focusing on philosophy of maths and logic.²⁰ The volume includes papers by those considered to be the leading Anglo-American philosophers of the day such as A. J. Ayer, O. K. Bouwsma, C. A. Mace, Norman Malcolm, Gilbert Ryle, Herbert Feigl and Roderick Chisholm. As well as Ambrose, there were two other women contributors, G. E. M. Anscombe and Margaret MacDonald. These papers are not for the general reader but ‘for the advanced student and the professional philosopher’.²¹

The paper by Ambrose, entitled ‘The Problem of Linguistic Inadequacy’ is rich and complex.²² The piece is characterised by a sharp and critical style of writing, taking quotations from contemporary philosophers and attacking the assumptions these viewpoints rest upon. The main goal is to show the difficulty of maintaining that

¹⁹Stebbing was ‘well-established in academic circles’ (Chapman, *Susan Stebbing*, 2). Both Stebbing and Ambrose experience extreme difficulties with initially finding jobs (ibid, 37-39). A letter from a friend at the University of Wisconsin refers to Ambrose as ‘Alicelookingforajob’ and remarks ‘there isn’t a thing in sight just now’ (Newnham College Archives, PP Lazerowitz, Witto to Ambrose 12 May 1933).

²⁰ Beaney, “Chronology”, 99.

²¹ Flew, “Review of Max Black”, 286.

²² The page numbering is from Ambrose’s edition of her own writings, *Essays in Analysis*.

language can be made better, or that it is possible to construct an artificial language which solves the problems of ordinary language, making the truths of metaphysics plainer to the speaker or listener. In this general way, Ambrose follows the views of the later Wittgenstein. The opposed ideas can be found in different forms in Whitehead, Carnap and Church, all of whom Ambrose cites or quotes. Whitehead is adamant that 'deficiencies of language' stand in the way of philosophical insight (157). Carnap and Church seek to quash ambiguity and vagueness by constructing better systems of communication. Carnap attempts to construct an 'ideal language' (165); Church is keen to follow suit specifically by resolving 'uncertainties, vaguenesses, and inconsistencies, which are found in the existing (pragmatic) usage...'.²³ Ambrose argues that dissatisfaction with ordinary language is the wrong impetus to pursue philosophical inquiries and leads to the dead-end of trying to construct a better language. Not only is this dissatisfaction wrong-headed ('a pseudo-complaint') but the supposed solution to it is futile, since no language will avoid the problems being attributed to ordinary languages. Thus, Ambrose hopes to show that (a) these philosophers' dissatisfaction with ordinary language is the wrong way to motivate a philosophical discussion; (b) the reasons given for this dissatisfaction are also applicable to artificial languages and that one cannot 'improve' language in the way imagined and (c) that language/s all have similar features, centred in their use and in human practice.

The richest aspect of the paper relates to (b) where Ambrose gives a detailed account of vagueness and the impossibility of conveying subjective experiences via language. As part of (c) Ambrose provides an extremely interesting way to use the metaphor of maps, an image also used (for different purposes) in Russell, Wittgenstein, Goodman and others.²⁴

I will begin with (a). Ambrose attacks the idea that language can be made better or needs to be improved in order for us make sense to each other. Alonzo Church (1903-1995), a Princeton based logician who would lay the basis for computer languages, engaged in the philosophical project of producing a 'logistic method' to rid us of the

²³ Church, "Carnap's Introduction", quoted by Ambrose, "Linguistic Inadequacy", 166.

²⁴ Russell, "Vagueness". For the reference to Goodman's use, see Rorty "Introduction", 18-19. For a very good account of Wittgenstein's use of pictures and models see Kenny, *Philosophy in the Modern World*, 133-4.

perceived confusions of ordinary speech and writing.²⁵ Ambrose first of all posits that there is nothing wrong with ordinary language and that it does not need fixing; this pronouncement appears at first to be a form of Wittgensteinianism to the effect that ‘ordinary people are satisfied with language’ whereas philosophers who find fault with it ‘are chronically dissatisfied’ (158). Her more compelling arguments come with the idea that all languages suffer from what these special artificial languages propose to eradicate, namely lack of vocabulary, ‘vaguenesses’, and the inability to express direct experience. She argues that each of these are not really problems for language but features of it and even part of its usefulness and capacity for adaptability.

Ambrose first distinguishes vagueness from ambiguity, since they are often treated as the same thing (158).²⁶ She next discusses two proposed solutions, ‘adding new criteria for the application of a word’ and adding ‘new words in place of the old’ (159).

Concentrating on the second supposed solution, Ambrose regards this as a failure in vocabulary. She insists that this is not a genuine complain against ordinary language, emphasising what we actually do in cases where we feel that we cannot ‘find the right words’ to express what we want to (161). This might be because we ourselves lack vocabulary, in which case there is nothing wrong with the language itself. Ambrose is dubious that there really could be words missing, which needed to be found and added. At times, new words are invented, for example to mark out newly useful labels for phenomena like psychological disorders (158-9). This is one of the ways in which we adapt language to suit new practices. New labels like this do not indicate that such words were missing from the earlier language; i.e. that the language was incomplete. The ‘older’ language was perfectly fine; it is only in retrospect that one could think it was missing anything (175).²⁷ Another good reason to reject the idea that new words

²⁵ I do not have time to give a detailed account of Church’s work. See Anderson, “Alonzo Church’s Contributions”.

²⁶ For example in Russell, “Vagueness”.

²⁷ The idea that hermeneutical injustice requires finding the right terms to express experiences (Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*) can be accommodated on Ambrose’s schema. Just as new words come into our languages in order to label psychological disorders we were collectively unaware of previously, so this can also happen with social disorders. For Ambrose, words that come into use due to a need are absent before that need is felt

with new meanings are missing from a language and need to be found, is that this thought makes no sense or is 'impossible' (171-2). In order to understand what that completely unfamiliar sound/word meant, we would need to define it in terms of old words that we do understand. But if we can do this, then there is nothing missing from the language *per se*; it can express what it needs to.

But if the old words cannot be the rights ones, then neither can the new ones, since they must be explained by the old ones... To introduce a new word by means of the old ones is of course to do with the old words what was claimed could not be done. Any description of what would make an expression, which we do not as yet have, the proper one to express what we cannot now say would involve our actually having the proper words for expressing what we wish. It would appear, then, that 'finding the proper words because the old ones will not do' is but a pretended task. For what must be done is self-contradictory: invent new words to which the meaning we wish them to express is assigned, but to which the meaning cannot be assigned for lack of the right words (172)

Furthermore, one cannot urge that new words are required to convey feelings better, since subjective experience simply cannot be contained or elicited by any words. Words are symbols that do not 'embody' experiences: 'words cannot unlock the door to an individual's private world' (172). Here we can see the direct influence of Wittgenstein's lectures on the problem of solipsism; she is able to press the point that sense-data cannot in principle provide any foundations for language.²⁸ Her use of this insight moves forward Wittgenstein's cryptic sayings and brings the idea of private experience directly into the debate about the supposed inadequacy of current language.

In addition to dismissing the idea that ordinary language has 'gaps' in it which could plausibly be filled by new words, Ambrose also seeks to establish that vagueness is a necessary feature of all languages, including artificial ones. The analysis of vagueness here represents one of the most interesting discussions before the boom of philosophical writing on the topic the 1970s. Drawing in part on a 1939 paper by I. M.

strongly enough; she does not have to deny that it is an unjust situation for the persons who suffer because of this.

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Lectures 1932-5, Brown Book*; Glock, "Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy", 577.

Copilowish [Copi], Ambrose seeks to establish that it is ‘theoretically’ impossible to draw a line or establish a limit in order to eliminate vagueness (167).²⁹ But as well as that insight, she offers a possible way forward, based in pragmatic principles which are similar to the supervaluationist solutions that would come much later.

Ambrose’s favoured examples are from everyday life, such as whether X is an animal or a plant or whether Y is a rich person or not (166-7, 169). Analysis of a term does not remove vagueness; there will be instances in which it cannot be decided on the basis of the correct definition of an animal whether X is one or not (168). Thus, in practice, ‘the resolution of borderline cases is effected arbitrarily’ or by using some other extra-definitional criteria. This is also the case in deciding whether certain numbers, such as irrational numbers, count as proper numbers; thus, mathematical languages have the same feature (168). Therefore, there is no language that can eliminate vagueness.³⁰ Ambrose presses on what we actually do in particular instances, which reveals the key role played by pragmatic considerations in how we mean words and expressions.

[I]f a man were legally bound to give up two-thirds of his earnings when he became rich, and at no point would admit to being rich, a successful suit to compel payment would no doubt involve a court decision that part of the meaning of ‘being rich’ was to have, say \$50,000. And the court’s decision would not be an interpretation of what the word already meant but of what the court decreed it was to mean in this case (169).

By suggesting what actually happens in cases where vagueness is resolved, Ambrose’s position resembles that of the ‘contextualism’ of Delia Graff, who urges that words’ meanings in borderline cases are determined by the ‘interests’ of the speaker.³¹ Her views also line up to some degree with aspects of the more recent supervaluationist response to vagueness, which takes the indecision involved in such terms as functional. For Ambrose, the fact that some words have flexibility in their application is very useful in certain instances, for example ‘vitamin’ has a broader use than its technical definition

²⁹ Copilowish, “Borderline Cases”.

³⁰ This pulls against Russell’s idea of his own ideal logical language: ‘I invented a special language with a view to avoiding vagueness’ (Russell, “Vagueness”, 84).

³¹ Graff, “Shifting Sands”; Sorenson, “Vagueness”.

(178) and so vagueness cannot be eradicated in an attempt to ‘improve’ any language. Thus, she rejects the first solution of adding criteria to systematically tighten up vocabulary, since this would undermine the usefulness of language. Although Ambrose generally follows Wittgenstein’s idea that philosophical problems ought to be addressed by describing the rules of the language use,³² she takes this further to include the broader pragmatic context.

This sense that words gain their meaning through use and context leads Ambrose to question any strict distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, an idea that many in her intellectual milieu were coming to share, and which would be expressed most famously in Quine famous 1951 paper “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”. In Section IV of that paper, which is reminiscent of many of the points made by Ambrose, Quine writes:

It is often hinted that the difficulty in separating analytic statements from synthetic ones in ordinary language is due to the vagueness of ordinary language and that the distinction is clear when we have a precise artificial language with explicit “semantic rules.” This, however... is a confusion (31)

Quine also presses on the fact that vagueness plagues artificial as well as natural languages, before asserting that ‘truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact’ (32, 34).

In summary, Ambrose engages directly with current philosophical attempts to create a more accurate language. She challenges this goal as unattainable and suggests that this is the wrong way for philosophy to proceed. Her meta-philosophical stance appears to be broadly Wittgensteinian in that she urges use to consider the use of language and to turn away from philosophical techniques which treat philosophy as if it were a science. But Ambrose can be seen here to use a style of writing alien to her old teacher and to develop new ideas and frameworks, including compelling arguments about the nature of vagueness that were rare at the time. There are hints in this paper of a view of philosophy as a different kind of discourse which need not centre itself in artificially constructed languages. There is nothing wrong with the languages that we have and use; but these languages are not static; they contain within them the ability to adapt to different situations and uses and to develop to accommodate new needs. There

³² Glock, “Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy”, 576-77

are maps that show roads and maps that show mountains and rivers – each is useful for different purposes depending on how the user needs to travel and what she needs to know (175). Psychiatrists, in treating certain conditions, may need to adapt the use of language; so also, it may be that philosophers will require a different way of expressing themselves from the non-philosopher. This does not make their language more complete or an improvement on other languages; and it better explains how philosophers talk to each other – what purposes and needs lie behind their discussions. Unlike Wittgenstein, Ambrose does not wish us to abandon philosophical discourse, but to embrace it for what it is – useful academic prose.

Despite its various merits, reception of the paper is almost non-existent.³³ An early review in *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, by the then managing editor Charles A. Baylis, complains that language is not ‘complete’ in the way Ambrose specifies and so may still be remedied from other sorts of incompleteness.

To demonstrate logical impossibility she asserts the contradictory tautologies, for example, that no language is incomplete since, though it may be inadequate for certain purposes, it does what it does completely. To this one might reply that the objection is not to incompleteness as thus defined, but to the admitted inadequacies, many of which can be remedied. More generally, the assertion of tautologies adds nothing to our empirical knowledge of languages and their functioning. (Baylis 1951: 299)

This complaint dismisses the paper entirely, but does not seem to understand its import. Another paper from 1961 by W.E. Kennick treats Ambrose’s views with more seriousness. Kennick takes Ambrose to be saying that all languages are on a par, and are to be judged only by whether they carry out their ‘purpose’. In the end he critiques the idea that one cannot express an experience (claiming that one can describe the aroma of coffee³⁴) and the general idea that a language cannot be inadequate, which he marks as

³³ One way of measuring the ‘impact’ of a piece of work is to see how many times it is cited by others. One search engine, Google scholar, records only 12 citations in the last 70 years. See LaVine for a compelling case for considering ‘under-citation’ and ‘under-engagement’ with the work of women philosophers as sort of ‘gendered discursive injustice’ (*Gender, Race*, xxxi).

³⁴ Kennick, “Art and the Ineffable”, 610.

‘what Wittgenstein and Ambrose say’. I do not have time to consider the criticism, but it is worth noting that Kennick never cites Wittgenstein but allows that Ambrose’s views represent Wittgenstein’s, implying that they are not really her own. Similarly, a paper from 1960 by D. Harrah entitled ‘The Adequacy of Language’ sets out Ambrose’s views from her paper as those of the ‘Wittgensteinian’, leaving Ambrose’s name entirely out of the main text. By 2002, the thought that artificial languages are ‘self-contradictory’ is attributed to Ambrose herself but mentioned only in one sentence and her view is not detailed any further.³⁵

The most sustained treatment of this paper to be found is in a 1993 Dalhousie University MA thesis. The philosopher Paul Raymont is most intrigued by Ambrose’s early expression of something like qualia. ‘Ambrose means that the inexpressibility of a colour experience poses no real complaint against our actual, every-day language, for there is no superior language to which we may aspire that does succeed in fully conveying a colour experience’ (29). Raymont concludes, however, that ‘contrary to what Ambrose suggests, it is surely legitimate and interesting to point out this kind of linguistic inadequacy’ (30). Thus, this single example in her larger case for the thesis against linguistic inadequacy is taken out of context and used against her without any broader discussion. There is no evidence of any engagement with Ambrose’s paper in later work on the semantics of artificial languages or the analysis of vagueness.

It is possible that this neglect is due in part to epistemic injustice because her ideas were not taken seriously as her own. One indication of this tendency is evident in an early review of the volume. In Anthony Flew’s 1953 review in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, both Ambrose and Anscombe’s names are followed by their married titles in brackets: ‘Alice Ambrose (Mrs. M. Lazerowitz)’; ‘G. E. M. Anscombe (Mrs. G. T. Geach)’ (284-5). This reminds the reader not only that the writers are women but that they are married to philosophers and so suggests that their philosophical identity is part of that of their spouse.³⁶ Other earlier references always indicate Ambrose’s gender and suggest a non-intellectual status by the use of ‘Miss’; no male philosophers are thought to require any title (‘Mr’ ‘Dr’ etc.). Before considering this effect in more detail in

³⁵ Falzer and Davidson “Language, Logic and Recovery”, 133.

³⁶ For the likelihood of this sort of thing triggering implicit bias see Saul, “Implicit Bias”.

Section (3), I will turn to the second paper, published around the same time which receives a little more attention.³⁷

2.3: Ambrose and philosophers' 'linguistic turn'

In 1952 Ambrose published a paper entitled 'Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems' in *The Journal of Philosophy*, which was read in a symposium at Smith College on May 20, 1951. A slightly revised version of the paper is printed in Richard Rorty's collection *The Linguistic Turn* in 1967 where he gathers 'many of the leading analytic philosophers of the day' (Hacker, "The Linguistic Turn", 928). Ambrose is the only woman to be included; her paper is followed by the reply of Chisholm, also a paper presented at the Smith College symposium.

In the piece, Ambrose gives what she takes to be 'heterodox' views about the nature of philosophical theories (i) 'they state analyses of concepts'; (ii) 'they state what is the established usage of words'; (iii) 'they conceal a proposal for linguistic change' (151). Ambrose opposes both (i) and (ii) which she takes to be the approach of Moore (although he would deny (ii)); she also associates (ii) with Malcolm. While (i) purports to be analysis of a concept, it 'is in fact engaging in one linguistic approach to philosophical problems' (150). Ambrose assigns a 'linguistic approach' to someone if they try 'to refute a philosophical theory [by] informing one about language' (150). The other linguistic approach she identifies with the metaphilosophical position of Lazerowitz and Wisdom (iii), which is that philosophical theories are actually 'proposals to alter language'.³⁸ This she takes to bottom out in 'the Wittgenstein position that once one sees what a question comes to the craving for an answer disappears' (151). This view is illustrated by considering the way that Berkeley operates. The Berkelian idea that we are 'clothed in ideas', that is, that supposed material objects, like shoes and coats, are actually ideas, openly subverts the common usage of language and replaces it with language which reflects the ontology subscribed to (152). The best modern technique is to show up past philosophical problems as concealed attempts to convince us that language should be changed to be more in line with metaphysical proposals. Revising language in this manner is not to be

³⁷ This paper gets a more respectable 20 citations from the Google scholar survey.

³⁸ This is then referred to as 'proposal theory' in Chisholm, "Comments".

recommended and so the philosophical theory is undermined. In this Wittgensteinian spirit, the modern philosopher is able to diffuse philosophical problems by pointing out that there is a grave misunderstanding about what language is meant to do and how it operates (since language becomes meaningful through use).

Responses to this paper show a degree of misunderstanding, mostly based in the assumption that Ambrose must be parroting and promoting her husband, Lazerowitz's, position.³⁹ Instead, Ambrose is evidently setting out this idea without necessarily subscribing to it. The paper begins with a general distinction between orthodox and heterodox views about the nature of philosophy; Ambrose remains guarded about the second set of views, directing the core of her argument towards attacking the first set: 'I shall argue without reservation against the orthodox position' (147). Ambrose, then, is not necessarily promoting the view dubbed 'proposal theory' by Chisholm, but exploring the ways in which the orthodox position has been challenged with a view to seeing philosophy from 'beyond' or above, as an activity that attempts to alter the way that we see the world by altering our language usage. She defends the 'proposal theory' from several criticisms before concentrating on the main task: that of defeating the 'orthodox' position. She does this toward the end of the paper by arguing against the idea that philosophy is not about language but about 'matters of fact' and/or 'relations of ideas' (154), the familiar synthetic/analytic distinction. The paper ends with an ingenious way to see both (i) analysis and (iii) 'proposal theory' as exploiting the same 'verbal fact which the [philosophical] theories conceal' (155). The verbal fact which underlies necessary statements is about use; a statement such as 'material bodies are extended' conceals the fact that 'unextended materials bodies', 'has no descriptive use, not that it describes what is counter to natural law' (154). Thus, a necessary statement or truth cannot really be known without reference to linguistic use. Again we find that Ambrose supports a broadly Wittgensteinian position; however, she is not copying him or Lazerowitz. Her division of meta-philosophical analysis into three is unique and her analysis of the current state of philosophy is entirely her own.

³⁹ Chisholm's critical paper begins thus: 'Miss Ambrose discusses a number of "linguistic approaches" to philosophical problems and seems inclined to accept what might be called the "proposal theory" of philosophy' ("Comments", 156).

Other than Chisholm, who pressed Ambrose on the meaning of ‘descriptive use’, without which he finds her case unconvincing (159), there is no other philosophical engagement with what Ambrose expresses in terms of her own views.⁴⁰ A paper in the journal *Metaphilosophy* focuses on her paper only to help elucidate what is taken to be Lazerowitz’ position. In this paper, W. L. Reese describes how Lazerowitz himself invents the term ‘metaphilosophy’ to represent what goes ‘beyond’ philosophy, that is ‘to dissolve philosophical statements back into those of ordinary language’ (“Morris Lazerowitz”, 28).⁴¹ Reese takes this position to be the project from Wittgenstein’s middle period (1930s) which is to take ‘the artificial language game of metaphysics’ and ‘dissolve...it back into the natural language game from which it came’ (34). While Ambrose does not oppose such a view in “Linguistic Approaches”, her analysis is richer; thus, although she is sympathetic to undermining a proposal like Berkeley’s, she would allow that there are philosophers who use language differently to express linguistic philosophy and metaphilosophy, as she and her contemporaries do. Her “Inadequacy” paper makes clear that different languages will fit different purposes; the philosophical ‘map’ requires an awareness of a philosophical terrain.

Ambrose has set out what the ‘proposal theory’ of philosophy is; it judges traditional metaphysically heavy philosophy as philosophers’ attempts to reform language, whether consciously or not. And proponents of this view propose to undercut that attempt, for example, perhaps it ought to be seen that ‘Whitehead’s large-scale manufacture of new terminology’ to fit his outlandish metaphysics is futile (Ambrose, “Linguistic Inadequacy”, 170). That point fits to Ambrose’s own views about the difficulty with so-called ‘new words’. However, Ambrose allows that for the sort of philosophy she engages in, which no longer requires metaphysical system building, the development of new forms of useful philosophical language is a good thing. And this

⁴⁰ Parker-Ryan lumps Ambrose in with Malcolm, Wisdom and Lazerowitz as someone who encourages us to consider ‘how we use language’ by citing this 1952 paper (“Reconsidering”, 147 n.13). See also Nielsen who discusses Ambrose only as part of a ‘branch of Wittgensteinians who follow common language philosophy’ (“Meta-philosophy”, 2).

⁴¹ It is perhaps ironic that Lazerowitz invents a word to do this job, not fully agreeing, then, that ordinary language is good enough.

we see in practice in her writing where she employs terms such as ‘proposition’, ‘grammar’, ‘sense-data’ and ‘universals’ in their philosophical senses.⁴² Her discussion of maps, she knows, has a resonance with philosophers that it will not have with cartographers.

Ambrose’s development of ideas in this period was muted by institutional and social factors. It was evidently very easy for her contemporaries to dismiss her views without really giving them due consideration. She was not thought of as someone it was imperative to engage with. Instead it is her husband who gets the attention.⁴³ There is no doubt that the Ambrose and Lazerowitz spent a good deal of time together, but there is nothing to suggest that Ambrose could only express the same ideas as her husband and indeed this is falsified by the evidence.⁴⁴

The ideas explored by women philosophers were often not paid attention to and thus were not further developed through dialectical processes; their attempts at conversation were one-sided. In the case of Ambrose, she engages with numerous contemporaneous philosophers, showing extensive knowledge of current research across a broad range of analytical epistemology, logic and philosophy of language. Within the two papers here discussed she notes the thoughts of Russell, Whitehead, Copi, Church, Malcolm, Wisdom, Moore, Lewis, Black, Carnap, Bar-Hillel, Lazerowitz and of course Wittgenstein. In reply, there is silence; she is listening and speaking but is seldom heard.

⁴² Michael Beaney points out that Wittgenstein actually introduces philosophical phrases and terminology, which is difficult to square with his attitudes. For an excellent attempt to explain his thinking on these matters, see Beaney “First Step”, 137-42.

⁴³ Chisholm, “Comments”, 156; Harrah, “The Adequacy of Language”; Reese, “Morris Lazerowitz”; Nielsen, “Meta-philosophy Once Again”, 2; Glock “Wittgenstein on American Philosophy”, 383-4. For a similar tendency to look to Stebbing only for insights about Moore, see Janssen-Lauret, “Susan Stebbing’s Metaphysics”.

⁴⁴ Ambrose becomes professor a long time before her husband and is included in important volumes such as the *Linguistic Turn*. It is quite conceivable that she felt pressure to promote her husband so as to avoid any domestic strife. It is still difficult for men even today to accept that their female partner has greater professional success than they do. See Byrne and Barling, “Does a Woman’s High-Status Career”.

The history of philosophy must be careful not to repeat such patterns. The Principle of Charity is generously applied to those philosophers who deemed each other to be great geniuses, such as Russell, Wittgenstein and Moore; in reading their works, contemporary philosophers are inclined to find that whatever they are saying is at core important because of who they were. Someone who was never treated as important at the time becomes even less so when this principle is not applied to them. In short, to think that Ambrose had nothing important to say because she was dismissed by her contemporaries is to justify and entrench sexism into the history of philosophy.⁴⁵

3. Ambrose in her own right: listening to women's voices

Ambrose is best known as a Wittgensteinian. As well as the evidence provided throughout this paper, one can add in Michael Beaney's monumental *Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*, in which Ambrose is mentioned in only one essay by P. M. S. Hacker entitled "The Linguistic Turn in Analytic Philosophy". She features in a final chart at the end of a list of 'Wittgenstein's pupils and followers' (947). It is worth considering Hacker's position in more detail as it helps us to make sense of another reason why Ambrose's views have become so neglected. Those labelled Wittgensteinians are liable to be treated as derivative thinkers. For Hacker, Wittgenstein was the origin of the philosophical writings of his 'pupils and followers'; the ideas come from him and are carried along by others.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Another example is the lack of engagement with Ambrose's paper on Moore's "Proof of an External World", although it appears alongside Malcolm's in the same 1942 volume (Schilpp (ed.) *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*). Early on there is a marked lack of engagement with her paper, evident for example in Chisholm's 1951 "Philosophers and Ordinary Language" which mentions Ambrose in one footnote; the bulk of his discussion focuses on Malcolm. In contemporary accounts of Moore's paper, only Malcolm is discussed. See for example Coliva "Scepticism and Knowledge".

⁴⁶ See also Soames who defines analytic philosophy as 'a discrete historical tradition stemming from Frege, Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein...' and reinforces the genius paradigm by noting the reaction of Quine to Russell as his 'most dazzling exposure to greatness' (Soames, "Analytic Philosophy in America", 454). Ironically, Ambrose may have partly reinforcing the genius myth. In a 1968 essay she writes: 'The revolutionary

‘He conveyed his new and revolutionary ideas in his classes at Cambridge, and his pupils in due course transmitted them in their own teachings and writings’ (938)

Hacker further posits that the U.S. was ‘bare soil’ for Wittgenstein’s ‘seeds’ (as opposed to the more fertile environment of Oxford), thus suggesting that there was very little that American followers contributed (941). The idea of Wittgenstein as the father of analytic philosophy is strong here.⁴⁷ ‘Myths are contagious, however, and sooner or later these shadow histories require correction’ (Beaney, “Historiography of Analytic Philosophy”, 59-60).

One difficulty with this myth is that Wittgenstein did not convey his ideas in a very clear manner. Perhaps he did not even himself know what he meant or there was some ‘difficulty of articulating ideas which he still had not thought his way through’ (Ambrose, “Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Portrait”, 15). Wittgenstein initially resisted his lectures being recorded. When he did finally agree to dictation of notes, with a view to some kind of publication, he seemed to have an indifference to these notes being typed up and distributed, a task Ambrose took upon herself.⁴⁸ Even with such notes in hand, it is not clear what Wittgenstein’s views are – which means that anyone who ‘follows’ him and writes in more standard academic prose, will necessarily be interpreting him, that is, contributing his or her own views to make sense of, develop and expand what starts with his ‘aphoristic’ sayings. Ambrose herself once wrote to a friend that ‘we

storm began in Vienna and moved to Cambridge University, where it had its culmination in the later teachings of Ludwig Wittgenstein’ (Ambrose, “The Revolution in Philosophy”, 551). Ambrose’s edited volumes on Moore and Wittgenstein’s philosophy also contain ideas about their inspired greatness.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Wittgenstein denies this seminal view of himself, writing ‘I believe that my originality (if that is the right word) is an originality belonging to the soil rather than to the seed (Perhaps I have no seed of my own)’ (CV 36).

⁴⁸ So far as we know, Skinner made no such attempt. De Pellegrin, “The Brown Book”, 15-16, 20.

must go and listen to the oracle now'.⁴⁹ She explains further as follows: 'What was puzzling was his use of picturesque examples, which in themselves were easily comprehensible, but of which the *point* they were intended to make escaped one. It was like hearing a parable without being able to draw the moral' (ibid, 16).

Despite evidence of the contribution of Alice Ambrose to philosophy, there is strong inclination to see her as passive. This fits to a general cultural tendency to consider authoritative voices (especially in philosophy) to be male. When assessing someone's intellect, the habit is to seek out what the authorities thought of that person; in the case of Ambrose, Wittgenstein, given supreme authority in the history of this period, emphatically deemed her to be intellectually inadequate. He thought of her as a clerical aid and as someone 'indefatigable in trying to understand the extremely difficult problems we have been discussing'.⁵⁰ Certain gender, class and social prejudices no doubt played a significant role in such judgements.⁵¹ This he was probably unaware of, but secure in the infallibility of his beliefs, he took many measures to try to make sure that Ambrose not gain enough confidence in her ideas to undermine his judgements. In a letter to G. E. Moore, her supervisor, Wittgenstein lets it be known that he believes Ambrose 'misjudges' her own 'intellectual powers'.

'[S]he is now actually standing at a crossroad. One road leading her to perpetual misjudging of her intellectual power and thereby to hurt pride and vanity etc. etc. The other would have led her to a knowledge of her own capacities'.⁵²

We can now see that his assessments were not merited.

⁴⁹ Letter to C. L. Stevenson c. 1934 (McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 219).

⁵⁰ From a reference letter (<https://www.raabcollection.com/ludwig-wittegenstein-autograph/ludwig-wittegenstein-signed-sold-wittegenstein-evaluates-potential>).

⁵¹ Wittgenstein was notorious for his 'general dislike of academic women and especially of female philosophers' (Monk, *Duty of Genius*, 498).

⁵² Letter to G. E. Moore, 15 May 1935 from Wittgenstein's *Gesamtbriefwechsel* III. Wittgenstein evidently wrote to Ambrose herself to the same effect as she makes clear in a letter to Dorothy Moore: 'He wrote me a letter indicating that I do not yet think lowly enough of myself' (8 Feb. 1936, Cambridge University Archives: Add 8330 8L/8/1).

To counteract the neglect of women philosophers, we must allow them to speak. We must judge them by their own words and writings and treat these as authoritative.⁵³ In the case of Ambrose, this is not difficult. Through her preserved writings she shows and tells us that she is not a passive disciple of Wittgenstein. That was a role she refused, in a brave and ultimately tragic move in her career history. In a letter to Wittgenstein she tells him that she will not copy down his ideas but wants to write her own philosophical work.

‘[A]bout your proposal to Professor Moore that I write another article for *Mind*, satisfactory to you...He gathered that this was to be done by my coming to you for discussion ...I consider the success of his proposal very doubtful, and give here my reasons for thinking so. First, it is doubtful whether what I write at the end of further discussion with you will be satisfactory to you – unless you dictate the material. This latter I refuse to be partner to. If you want to write an article, that is your affair; but there is no point in giving a quotation from you with my name on it.’⁵⁴

When we listen, we hear her telling Wittgenstein that she will not worship him and sublimate herself to his selfish and exacting requirements. Acutely aware of Wittgenstein’s low opinion of her talents and his attempt to dissuade her from academia, she continues to assert herself:

‘I resent bitterly your attempts at forcing advice on me I refused to accept from you more than a week and a half ago. I will not have advice forced on me, and such tactics are useless. If I were to come to you I should come to learn, not to be converted.’⁵⁵

⁵³ Like LaVine (*Gender, Race*, 19), I believe that women’s words in philosophy are often not treated as if they were ‘expert assertions’. LaVine explains this in terms of Austin’s speech act theory, but this seems unnecessary given that it is just another way to seek the authority of a male philosopher to support a quite straightforward point.

⁵⁴ McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 240, from AA 16.5.1935.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Wittgenstein is not unaware that he treats Ambrose badly. In a later letter he writes ‘I hope you have forgiven me for inflicting pain on you while you were in Cambridge’ (McGuinness, *Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, 261; AA 17.2.1937).

And later in a letter to G.E. Moore's wife, Dorothy, she explains further attempts to build toward her own views:

'I told him [Wittgenstein] outright that he....doesn't question his right to pass judgement on people...And I told him that he used his power over people to extract worship. I suspect he will be wild at me, but I'm not going to let him get me back to the inertia of last summer' (Cambridge University Archives: Add 8330 8L/8/1)

Allowing Ambrose's own words to have authority makes it difficult to call her a 'follower' of Wittgenstein without certain qualifications and explanations. This is not what she considers herself to be and we ought to take her seriously on this matter.

Another difficulty in allowing Ambrose's voice to come through is her own modesty. In the preface to her 1966 collection of essays, *Essays in Analysis*, she credits her work to her teachers and thanks her husband profusely. These words are written in a public setting and to a male audience, rather than in letters to those she trusts. Living most of her life before the time of the Women's Liberation Movement, Ambrose would have learnt to show herself to be submissive and subordinate to men.⁵⁶ This habit is also evident in Ambrose 1972 "Portrait of Wittgenstein" which sugar coats his problematic treatment of her. One must keep in mind that her husband prefaces this account with the following: 'Wittgenstein was not only a vastly important philosopher; he was also an arresting and compelling personality...Alice Ambrose's portrait gives us a picture of the person behind the legend' ("Preface", 9). The audience is set up for something charming, and would not tolerate complaints; she seems persuaded to underplay her part, writing 'I was a naive witness'. Even so, Ambrose slips in that Wittgenstein was 'formidable in his impatience' ("Portrait", 15).

Here are some suggestions about what we can now see as Ambrose's own positions in philosophy. Ambrose is a philosopher acutely aware of the significance of changes in her discipline. She thought long and hard about 'what the philosopher's task should be', a question she attributes to Wittgenstein's lectures of 1933. But it cannot be that this view is frozen in time in lecture notes. For Ambrose, the attempt to 'adopt the procedure Wittgenstein recommends' is a challenge and one that leads her to make her

⁵⁶ For a similar tendency in Stebbing, see Janssen-Lauret, "Susan Stebbing's Metaphysics".

own decisions (“Wittgenstein on Universals”, 104, 112). Ultimately, she does not agree with Wittgenstein that ‘philosophical problems should *completely* disappear’ (PI 133). She does not agree that ‘philosophy puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything’ (PI 126). By the 1950s Ambrose was aware of significant changes in her discipline and was commenting on how to take it forward by contributing to and developing the new academic analytical style, which will lead to the flourishing of philosophical topics.

In the 1967 Introduction to *The Linguistic Turn*, Richard Rorty predicated that analytic philosophy would end itself.

If linguistic philosophy cannot be a strict science, if it has a merely critical, essentially dialectical, function, then what of the future?...Does that mean that philosophy will have come to an end – that philosophers will have worked themselves out of a job! (33)

Rorty was attempting to create a dramatic divide between analytic and pragmatic philosophy in order to put his own preferred ‘looser, more relativistic’ pragmatism centre stage.⁵⁷ Rorty failed to recognise how analytic philosophy in the US incorporated aspects of more rigorous branches of pragmatism and would thus take the discipline forward.⁵⁸ Ambrose is one of many thinkers whose sympathies for logical empiricism along with pragmatism show why Rorty’s prediction was so wrong.⁵⁹ Rorty’s idea that if ‘philosophers drop their traditional conception of the nature of their discipline – then linguistic philosophy will have nothing left to criticize’ (23) was taken on directly by Ambrose. A year later, in her own predictions of ‘the future of philosophy’, she remarks that ‘the impetus for doing philosophy in the traditional manner may well go into decline and perhaps be replaced by the study of the workings of language with which philosophy is so bound up with so profoundly’ (“The Revolution in Philosophy”, 564).

⁵⁷ Misak, “Pragmatism and Analytic Philosophy”, 1009.

⁵⁸ See *ibid*, 1112-14.

⁵⁹ Her first published paper was a review article on the logician and pragmatist C.I. Lewis’ book, *Mind and the World-Order*. Ambrose provides a detailed critique and analysis but also proclaims: ‘this book is an event in contemporary philosophy. It is a real pleasure to chance upon a system so surprising in its reconciliation of warring camps’ (366).

Reflecting on the influence of Wittgenstein, Ambrose wonders how his ‘revolutionary’ work is to be ‘assimilated into our thinking’ (564), concluding that ‘it throws light on the puzzling intractability of philosophical disputation’. She does not propose to *dissolve* such problems, a position more akin to that of Lazerowitz. Instead, she ends her musing with a quote from Spinoza, who believes that we ought to improve our philosophical understanding: ‘all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare’ (“The Revolution in Philosophy”, 564). While Ambrose agrees with Wittgenstein that ‘what the bedmaker says is all right’, she ultimately disagrees that ‘what the philosopher says is all wrong’.⁶⁰ Academic analytic philosophy is ‘a different’ language game; while shying away from building systems, it concentrates instead on discussion, explanation, argumentation and analysis.⁶¹ This is the legacy that early analytic philosophy has left us, and Ambrose’s place in this requires belated acknowledgement.

Ambrose became, at least on the surface, one of the most established philosophers of her generation when she was elected to the Presidency of the American Philosophical Association in 1975. But in terms of her actual philosophical work, Ambrose suffered from a lack of direct engagement with her ideas. This is reinforced now in histories of this period; her work is very often ignored or, if noticed, swiftly dismissed and her ideas are treated as passively following those of Wittgenstein or as propping up those of her husband. The obscuring of Alice Ambrose as a thinker must end; we must finally listen to what she had to say.

⁶⁰ Bedmakers are domestic servants in Cambridge colleges, at this time normally from the working classes. The quotation is from the Yellow Book, quoted in Ambrose, “The Revolution in Philosophy”, 563. See discussion in Ambrose “Wittgenstein on Universals”, 106-7.

⁶¹ Ambrose, “Inadequacy”, 175. Analytic philosophy as it would take over in Anglo-America has an ‘emphasis on argumentation, clarity, rigour’ and would be ‘relatively meritocratic and democratic’ (Beaney, “What is Analytic Philosophy”, 24, 27).

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