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# A Look At Philosophical Analysis

by Ralph L. Pounds

Now after I have prepared this paper, I look again at the title and find it quite misleading. I started out to take a critical look at some aspects of philosophical analysis. I end up finding that I have examined the role of philosophy (in general but with a minimal consideration of its use in education — in that respect somewhat in continuation of the line of discourse established by Ballenger and Smith in previous presidential addresses) *and* I have stated and defended a point of view.

Since later on in this paper, I am going to stress the primacy and importance of experience in any endeavor, including philosophy, a word about my own particular approach to philosophy may be somewhat enlightening in helping to understand what I am to say. I came into an interest in and a study of philosophy via mathematics and the “exact” sciences. I was an undergraduate college major in mathematics and the physical sciences. While an undergraduate, I read in part, on my own, Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* and, on the other hand, material then flowing out on Einsteinian science. While in a groping stage, I grasped onto the behavioristic psychology, determinism, and the positivism of the period. However, I discovered through my mathematical studies that absolute precision can be secured only when we deal with a “language reality.” Russell’s mathematical system was a constructed and artificial language. “In mathematics you never know what you are talking about nor whether what you are saying is true.” It is a narrow symbolism theory — a special language. This language has been found helpful when adopted as a tool for working on specialized problems “abstracted out” of human experience. The failure of Euclidean geometry, a beautiful logico-deductive system, to accord with the realities of the Einsteinian world and the failure of Newtonian science, another mathematical deductive system, to explain the phenomena of the physical world led to the discredit and eventual failure both of absolute idealism and of objective realism. (The first two failures would obviously be more widely agreed to than the latter.)

My work with Bode at The Ohio State University quite well established the fallacy of the extreme Watsonian behaviorism of the period and its mechanistic explanation of human behavior, an inadequate description of human nature. As a result, I reacted against logical systems and verbalisms and against attempts to solve problems piecemeal (i.e., without consideration of the total pertinent situational field). I accepted and operated within my conception of a pragmatic-instrumentalist position with the emphasis on experience, tentativeness, and reflective thinking.

In the meantime, the logical approach was not dead. In the philosophical-

analytical school, both in Europe (the Vienna and the Oxford groups) and in America, there has been an increasing interest in a linguistic analysis of philosophical problems and a growth in the number of persons, both in general and educational philosophy, using this approach.

### What Is Analytical Philosophy?

When I attempted to define this term as related to this movement, I found the greatest of difficulty. Like democracy, experience, and other broad and basic terms, it appears to escape precise definition. Persons identified with this movement seem in general to deal with the analysis of the language we use in communicating and with a theory of the meaning which can be ascribed to language statements. The central emphasis is on the linguistic analysis of the words or the statements (meaningful combination of words) used. I find at least three overlapping but distinctive uses of the term in current scholarly circles: The field of *semantics*, the meaning of words in general; the *linguistic analysis of the structure of a language* as used, such as a structural analysis of American English (not in theory but as used); and the examination of the role of language in the meaning of statements purporting to be philosophical in nature (consideration of the role of language with respect to problems of meaning, truth, and value — age-old philosophical questions), philosophical analysis proper. It is to the third meaning of the term I shall mainly address myself. I am in general talking about the point of view of persons as found in the literature ranging from Smith (B.O.) and Ennis, Scheffler to Nowell-Smith, Ayer, Moore, Wittgenstein, and to Russell, Carnap, Strawson, and Copi.

These persons, of course, vary a great deal in their approach and emphasis. They range from those desiring only clarification of the language for improving the discussion of philosophic problems to those espousing logical positivism as a definite philosophic position; from persons critically analyzing but using “ordinary” language, to those who are largely abandoning the attempt to use such ordinary language and who have moved largely to symbolic logic and language (Copi, Carnap, Strawson).

### Issues Involved

It would seem to be desirable to pull out, from among the great number of issues and unresolved questions, some of those most important and basic for discussion:

1. What is philosophy? Ayer, and the more extreme logical positivists, seems to have reduced or limited philosophy to the study of the language of statements about knowledge. Does this clarification of language, for example, describing most of the age-old questions of philosophy as meaningless, pave the way for eventual complete philosophic agreement when there has been agreement on the meaning of the language so that full communication has been established.

2. Are there any necessary prior philosophical assumptions (ontological or axiological) before one can start any kind of investigation, scientific or philosophical? If not, as many analytical philosophers hold, cannot philosophical differences be eliminated as language and the rules of language are clarified?

3. Which has priority in investigation, human experience or language? Which is the center of investigation and which is the tool? This seems to me to be the real heart of the matter I am discussing.

4. What is an adequate theory of values or valuing? Running through all types of analytical philosophy seems to be an antipathy to value considerations except as they are held merely as expressions of human preference. There seems to be no thought that a basis or procedure for validating hypothetical values might be established on the same basis as methods and procedures for validating hypothetical statements of knowledge.

### Merits of Linguistic Analysis

Before entering into what is now evidently to be a critical approach to philosophical analysis, I should like to list some of the *positive contributions* of this movement that are here not being questioned.

1. Clarification of the language used in philosophical discourse.

This is badly needed. The semantic problems involved in philosophic discourse have been frequently a stumbling block to its success. Since philosophic investigation must be carried on by language, it must be sharpened to convey clear meaning, not used to obfuscate or to becloud the issue. However, language is a tool and not the end.<sup>1</sup> Some of the hair-splitting of the inter-analytic discussion — Ayer vs. Moore, Russell vs. Ryle — does not give confidence to the student of the method.<sup>2</sup>

2. The continuation of the job of clearing out of the meaningless debris of past philosophical discussion.

Each new development that has influenced intellectual thought has cleared out much of the obscurities of previous thinking. Kant desired to substitute science for scholasticism. Later the psychologists substituted behavior for mentalism and the functioning organism for mind. The pragmatists and positivists of the contemporary periods consider language propositions about an experienced world in place of the “ideas” of the dualistic world of the idealist, and so on.

3. The clarification of the key role of language and logic in philosophic discourse.

The analysts have centered our attention, and rightly so, on the vehicle in which the discourse is carried on, language and the need for clarification of its meaning continuously and on critically analyzing the rules of language and logic. This is central and important but questions may be raised as to the role language plays in relation to the objectives of philosophic discourse itself. Are the statements about philosophical matters to be equated with philosophy?



Certain Questionable Trends in Philosophic Analysis

Before proceeding to some examples to illustrate the relative role of analysis in what appears to me to be essential in philosophic investigation, I shall list some trends among *some* of the philosophic analysts that seem questionable.

1. There is a tendency among many of the analysts, in spite of a neutralist pose, to legislate the nature of philosophy, rather than to limit themselves to their avowed purpose, viz; to show how language used in philosophy may be clarified. For example, Ayer, in *Language, Truth, and Logic*,<sup>3</sup> eliminates what he calls "metaphysics" in his first chapter by defining his terms in such a way as to render certain metaphysical propositions meaningless and then in Chapter VIII he proceeds to "solve" all of the age-old philosophical disputes by using his set of definitions and criteria. Even though I tend to agree largely with his interpretations, this does not convince me that one can demolish another's view with one's own interpretations.

2. There is a tendency to assume and to assert that when the language has been clarified (or at least after the legislation on the points involved has been established), the issues have been resolved. Philosophic differences, in this view, are purely differences arising from lack of clarity, or inadequacies in the meaning, of the language involved.

3. There seems to be a tendency in analytic procedure that demonstrates, in effect, an implicit belief by some analysts that reality resides in the words, the language, rather than in context the words are discussing or pointing to. This leads into a modern version (but, of course, with different issues involved) of the old realist-nominalist controversy.

4. There is an increasing tendency toward some form of positivism — at least among certain thinkers of the group — and not only those who use this term among themselves — a new "quest for certainty," long engaged in by certain objective idealists and by scientists of the old Newtonian variety. This certainty is to be achieved by the positivists through limiting one's statements only to those which can be verified by some undisputed means and eradicating all others as not logically necessary or as not meaningful or significant. This shows itself in the Illinois group (Smith and Ennis) as well as in the Oxford group.<sup>4</sup>

I do not have time to substantiate all of these statements by examples,<sup>5</sup> but I would like to devote the remainder of my discussion to a presentation of the role and scope of philosophy (or of the philosophic enterprise) as I see it. This will be a pragmatic-instrumentalistic position.

The Nature and Central Role of Experience

Questions about the nature and procedures of philosophy arise (as do other questions) in the course of human experience as the individual deals with problem situations. Experience is prior to all else. Experience is virtually undefinable since it is the raw data as well as the context in which all meaning must be derived and tested.

Experience is the name applied to the product of the interaction of a sensing organism with its environment, i.e. both with its self and its self-other (or its external environment).<sup>6</sup> All problems arise out of and meanings must be derived from the probings and undergoings (trans-actions) of the organism with itself, its physical environment and with other organisms with which it has communication. This communication, primarily through a developed language, extends experience of a direct nature to encompass vicariously experiences of the whole group of communicating organisms. The basic reality, in this point of view, is of necessity entirely within and limited by the scope of human experience. Science, philosophy, values, language and other questions arise out of and have significance only in reference to this experience.<sup>7</sup>

### The Role of Language

Man, the talking animal, developing in all stages — “primitive” to modern — a complicated language, is able to use that language — itself a part of human behavior and experience — in order to probe and extend his investigations in the getting of meaning as to his own nature and to his relation to the self-other. Language arose, of course, in the process of establishing and improving communication between human organisms.<sup>8</sup> It enabled the organisms to share, among other things, at least partially, experiences had by each when apart from each other. It is also used by the individual as a tool in talking to himself (thinking) as an aid to problem-solving. The organism without language is limited largely to trial and error behavior. When language facility has been gained, problem-solving in symbolic form may be used to cut down the time necessary for scanning and eliminating many of the possibilities and for finally choosing only one or two for actual testing or try out. Such testing by words (or thinking) is of course not conclusive and eliminations can and are constantly being questioned.

Language is, of course, itself a part of human experience but may be differentiated from other experiences in that its basic purpose is to point to — to substitute for — other experiences (frequently called real). Of course, other kinds of human experiences, such as acting or mimicry, may also serve the same purpose as word language but words potentially offer so many more possibilities.

Language then is a tool or instrument used by the human organism in problem-solving, in its interaction with — in its probing of — its environment. It was in the traditional idealistic philosophy that the word became the idea and was elevated by Plato to be above and beyond *human experience* — transcending it.

When one leaves the realm of the directly experiential, to center attention on some phase of it, when one abstracts, analyzes, theorizes, or generalizes, concentrating on words rather than what the words signify, all sorts of pitfalls can befall one, as the history of man in general and of philosophy in particular can all too often give powerful evidence. Wars, disputes, and all manners of cruelties have often involved the word separated from practically all significance in human experience.<sup>9</sup>

Language then is instrumental. It is a tool to clarification of situations. When

one leaves experience and becomes involved in language manipulation the verbal confusion may mount and some one *must always say*, "Let us see now, what does this mean in experience (actual experience, probing into one's environment)? Do these verbal differences actually make a difference?"<sup>10</sup>

Since individuals approach a discussion with differences in experience, in values and so on and even if language could be clarified (in the manner of the analytical philosopher), it might serve only to indicate more clearly the differences rather than to eliminate them. With language clarified, the differences would not be in language or in meaning but would be experiential. Sometimes the vagueness in language had merely obscured them. Clarity would show them up.

Now if the individuals who differ are experimentalists, and the language is clear, the differences will be in the content and scope of each individual's experiences. Therefore deliberate attempts to widen the experiential content — to explore and test out differences in common new experiences — might tend to resolve them, but pure manipulation of the language itself wouldn't help. With other philosophical positions, there might not be the same willingness to resolve the issue by mutual exploration and enlarging the area of common experience. However, it would seem that the differences are the same in origin although not as readily resolved, for, often by philosophic commitment, the combat (pardon me, the discussion) must continue in words.

In the view which we are proposing here, language is still the tool for discovering areas that need further exploration. However, in other views with different epistemological assumptions as to how one arrives at knowledge, such differences cannot be resolved by widening the common area of experience. From the standpoint of the pragmatist, the other views have misunderstood or misconstrued the instrumentalist nature of language; but, from their standpoint, the experimentalist is in error in his assumptions<sup>11</sup> and no bridge can be built. To be sure, in certain limited areas of activity they might work together and even may agree as far as certain limited operation and action are concerned, even though, the underlying explanation of what is being done (and why) may differ and in many other areas not under consideration at that moment, they might differ even more basically.

#### A Theory of Valuation

E. Maccia in a paper<sup>12</sup> read before the recent Philosophy of Education Society meeting called upon philosophers (including philosophers of education) to develop what she termed a "synthetic" value theory as apart from the analytic theory appropriate to ordinary knowledge propositions. It is practically impossible to find from current philosophic literature any agreement as to the meaning of the words "analytic" or "synthetic," but it is clear that she feels that value theory is important and basic and that it somehow must differ in nature from an analytic (or empirical?) basis for knowledge and further than, in instrumentalism, we do not find an adequate approach. She differs from many of the analysts in that she implies that one is possible but not through what she calls "reductionism."



In the same meeting, the paper by (Philip) Smith,<sup>13</sup> “A Useful Limit for the Is-Ought Dichotomy,” seems to be a brilliant effort and a successful one to prove that any such an apparent dichotomy (between propositions of existence and normative propositions) is a function of language rather than being founded upon human behavior or experience.

As Dewey has pointed out in *The Quest for Certainty* and elsewhere, at one time in the history of human thought value and fact were intertwined. Science made its greatest progress because it separated questions of scientific fact from the unsatisfactory methods of resolving situations which had grown up. By defining scientific terms or proposed generalizations, such as, What is the density of a given substance? or What is the relation between pressure and volume of an enclosed gas with temperature constant? in such a way as to eliminate value considerations and further human choices, it directed experiences assisted by refined tools of measurement and observation to develop highly accurate facts, data, and even far-reaching scientific generalizations quite free from possibilities of dispute because of careful limiting of the data and the situations to those which could be standardized and were therefore not indeterminate.

The tensile strength of steel and concrete can be measured to almost any degree of accuracy and the data placed in an engineering handbook. But, “ought we build a bridge here and now?” involves to be sure, different kinds of decisions. The situation now is not standard but situational. Even if “politics” and human emotions could somehow be eliminated there still is a different kind of decision here, involving choices between conflicting values and considerations. The problem cannot be standardized and made objective in the sense that it is independent of time and situation.

Objective science then attempted to develop definitions, and standardized systematized procedures which were independent of particular situations. This was relatively easy in the so-called exact sciences — the physical sciences — as long as you stayed with the standard universal situation; but in the social sciences, values and situational considerations seem to play such an important role that it is next to impossible to eliminate them and to develop standard situations in which any observer would arrive at the same answer. With Einsteinian physics, it is seen quite clearly that the objective pose by science is illusory, and that even such stable meanings as “mass” vary according to the position of the observer and the object under discussion.<sup>14</sup> What I am trying to say is this: It is not so much that problems involving values are different from those involving exclusively facts but that we have badly misconstrued the alleged objective nature of fact. Either may lead to an indeterminacy when applied to a specific situation.

To try to help make my point clear by using situational examples rather than highly “abstracted-out” propositions capable of “standardization,” let us consider the following:

1. Do you believe in (accept or choose) freedom as a value? (in the sense of the right of the individual to choose)?



2. Should there be a traffic light at this street corner?

3. Is this table solid?

Many persons might say "Yes" to the first although being more cautious some might say, "Give me a fr-istance." The second example involving both questions of value and fact would obviously depend on the location and situation. The third is answerable only if you knew the purpose of the question, solid enough to hold papers? a heavy object? or what? The scientist has tended to answer questions of the third type by taking them out of a specific situation and by preparing in advance, by standardized procedures, tables on the tensile strengths, stress factors, etc. of a variety of materials. These data (or formulæ) can then be used to answer such questions as to whether the table is solid enough for the object being considered or for other purposes. The scientific facts involved seem to be objective and unequivocal and yet the questions originally faced can only be resolved in a situational response. The collected standardized data do not give us the answer directly if all we want to know is whether we can safely set an object down on this table. Past experience of a much less precise nature may give us a much better answer. Different situations require data of a different sort, and the engineer would look foolish who would run for his engineering handbook and slide rule for problems of this kind. Each situation requires its own precision of answer.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, having determined that this table is solid and that it will hold the object, some one may object that it is *not* "solid" since the atomic physicist had discovered it is "really" empty space filled with extremely small bits of matter (or energy). Even so-called objective (or standardized) scientific knowledge is only meaningful in terms of the situation or purpose at hand.

The decision involving the traffic lights is full of value choices. Do we hold that the installation of the traffic light might be a better choice in terms of achieving desired values consequential to it than would other alternatives (including inaction). The values held by the individual and the consequences to those arising out of the action would determine the appropriateness of any decision made.

It is in questions of the first type that broad generalizations, remote from the situations, are considered. Is there an ethical or value theory analogous to the scientific laws and data of the engineering handbook type that can be stored up and then called forth to answer all questions of the value type? It is, of course, possible and by analogy may seem plausible but actually such a handbook would be of little value in resolving situations involving value problems.<sup>16</sup> Although the resolution of value problems must be sought in human consequences, just as so-called facts must be continually tested in experience, the complexities of situations that are constantly presenting themselves baffle any attempt to standardize and attempt answers in advance. The question we are facing is, Can there be a value theory — sources and practices — just as there are tables of physical data and a set of standardized procedures for establishing them? Let us further see what is involved here.

In the first place questions of broad nature such as the one on freedom are

vague and abstract. The process of verification might go something like this, "Yes I do believe in freedom." In this situation it means thus and so operationally. I then proceed to test out my hypothetical meaning of freedom as operationally derived in this situation. This particular deduced hypothetical application of this value can be tested in exactly the same way as any other hypothesis can be tested. Do the consequences of action in line with the postulated value in fact lead to the value desired? Does it conflict with or jeopardize other values I wish to maintain? If the latter, either it must be rejected or the other value discarded (in this situation). If the action must be rejected, the fault may lie in the hypothetical action rather than in the abstract value, "freedom" and other possible deduced hypothetical actions may be tried.<sup>17</sup>

Many proposed value principles are untestable because they are too broad and vague. Each has meaning and value only after it has been translated into a hypothetical action which is testable. The main difference then between testing value propositions and fact propositions lies in the step in which we go from the abstract or universal to the specific action posited on it. This step in factual matters, although also present, is so obvious or inconsequential that it is ignored.

It is my contention that valuing is a distinct, meaningful, philosophic process, even in an instrumentalist approach. Value possibilities are testable just as are knowledge propositions. (In fact, I contend that it is only with difficulty that they can be separated in actual human situations.) An adequate and tenable theory of values to be worked out in advance of valuing is no more possible than would be a complete theory of scientific knowledge to be completed before one could start assembling knowledge. In this world of tentativeness and with fundamental changes occurring, especially changes in the organism making choices of values, it cannot be expected that an all-encompassing theory to resolve value problems for all times will be achieved.<sup>18</sup> Let us be on with valuing! Let us not ignore value considerations nor the value dimensions. Let us adjust the precision of our effort to the nature of the situation at hand. Just as many scientific situations do not require micrometer calipers so many value considerations are relatively simple choices but crucially important in terms of the consequences for human action. We cannot ignore values (or the necessity for value choices). Let us not pretend we can but let us bring them to the open for consideration.<sup>19</sup>

Philosophical analysts can be helpful in clarification of logic and in seeing what the role of language is within the framework of the experiential process. Philosophical analysts cannot legislate the nature of philosophy but can set forth for consideration claims based on a presumed lack of meaning of certain kinds of propositions, such as value statements. The differences in philosophy cannot be eliminated purely by language manipulation. Language is a tool — not the complete subject matter of philosophic endeavor.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 It seems impossible to conceive of a human behavior labelled “philosophic” without language. The abstracting out of experience of certain elements for consideration, the naming of these, and the manipulating of these word-symbols make up the content of philosophy. Yet like all other human behavior, such symbolic manipulation must eventually affect human behavior in some way outside of the mere verbal manipulation of those symbols.
- 2 This could lead to a new “scholasticism”— much belaboring of the inconsequential.
- 3 New York: Dover (1946).
- 4 I find myself much more in agreement with the Illinois group and with Scheffler than with the others I have examined. For example, in the recent *Language and Concepts in Education* by R. H. Ennis and B. O. Smith, Chicago: Rand McNally (1961), I take important issue only with Smith’s forcible separation of teaching from learning and with Ennis’ attempt to argue away the necessity for prior assumptions.
- 5 This is not easy to do since a quotation out of context would not reveal it. It would seem to involve more of a total appraisal of the effect of the total enterprise as carried on by each person analyzed.
- 6 I still find that Dewey’s *Experience and Nature and Experience and Education* provide the most satisfactory extended discussions of the nature and role of experience.
- 7 This does not rule out in advance any kind of question or decide an exclusive nature of experience. The field of parapsychology, for example, can be included if it can be shown to have a testable existence within human experience.
- 8 It can be seen that to me communication is more inclusive than language, including (for example) observation of activity directly. (pantomime, acting, mimicry, sign symbolism, etc.)
- 9 Wendall Johnson’s *People in Quandaries* (Harper, 1946) is full of examples, historical and individual, where language has become the main source of maladjustment and serious conflict. Johnson is a clinical psychologist who is both a student of semantics and of personal adjustment. He is tied in with Korzybski’s “general semantics” position.
- 10 Many discussions in philosophy and politics qualify as examples here. The recent article by Champlin on Maccia’s paper [*Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 2, Number 3 (Summer, 1963), 258-287], the Smith, Gowin, Aschner controversy on the teaching-learning concept [*Ibid.*, I, Number 3 (August, 1961), 1-113; II, Number 2 (Spring, 1962), 172-202; and II, Number 3 (Summer, 1962), 287-248], and many of the attempts by the analysts themselves to define facts, proposition, etc. are in part lost in verbalism and one needs to ask, Does this make a difference? or In what situations does the particular point made apply?
- 11 It can be readily seen that in my view such assumptions are not unavoidable. On this respect I differ basically with Ennis (pp. 161ff.) in *Language and Concepts in Education*.
- 12 “The Role of Synthetic Philosophy in Philosophy of Education.” *Proceedings, Philosophy of Education Society*, 1962, pp. 21-26.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-32.  
Smith’s paper may very well be the key to unlock some of the important difficulties here. However, I do not agree with some of the language used. The “is-ness and the oughtness” (for the descriptive and the normative) have idealistic overtones.
- 14 Both Newtonian and Einsteinian science abound with examples in which precision gives way to practicality or simplicity. In classical physics, frequently in the development of formulas, in addition to such phrases as “neglecting friction,” often we find “since this term is nearly equal to 1 (or to 0), we can neglect it and then our formula will read . . .” In Einsteinian physics the differential equations for defining the



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nature of space surrounding matter are so complex as to be virtually insoluble until simplifications are made which do not significantly change the numerical answers. Cf. D'Abro, *The Evolution of Scientific Thought: from Newton to Einstein*. New York: Dover, 1950.

- 15 Newsome's paper, "Ordinary Language Philosophy and Education." (*Proceedings, Philosophy of Education Society*, 1962, pp. 90-99) seems to make a good case for ordinary language as "used among rather ordinary folk" as being more appropriate to discourse about education: Linguistic analysis rather than philosophic analysis would then seem more desirable.
- 16 "The Basic Premises of American Liberty" developed by the Citizenship Education Project of Columbia University (in "Improving Citizenship Education," Append. A, Columbia University, 1955) represents one worthwhile attempt among others to assess and assemble the major values of a culture. While these are quite helpful and deserve major study and attention, they neither answer the value problems involved in a specific situation nor do they provide a clue to or a basis for changes in values.
- 17 In general I think the position that I have set forth here on the relation of the factual to the valuative is in line with that proposed by Morton White in his *Toward Reunion in Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1956), Chapters XVI and XVII, although it is not identical and there are important variations.
- 18 My presentation of a rationale of valuing is held to be in accord with Dewey's view in his "Theory of Valuation," *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, Volume II, Number 4 (still available as a monograph from University of Chicago Press). Dewey's discussion of how we go about the process of valuing is analagous to recent accounts of the philosophy of science — how we validate proposed statements of fact. Smith's (Philip) paper and my attempt to spell out the value validation process are merely clarifications of certain aspects of this view.
- 19 If this seems exhortatory or ejaculative, let me point out that Macchia's call for a synthetic value theory was also so couched, e.g. "Let us be done with reductionism . . . Let us be done . . . Let us be done with," etc. (p. 261, *Proceedings, Philosophy of Education Society*, 1962).

