November 12, 2007

Dear Appointments Committee:

I am very pleased to recommend Chris Campbell for positions in philosophy. I first met Chris as a member of my seminar in his first year here, and again in some later semesters; we also attended seminars together, especially those on ancient philosophy (he has a sound knowledge of ancient Greek, by the way, and seems to be quite good with languages generally, having lately, with his marriage, undertaken the study of Japanese.) I was struck by the very high intelligence shown in his interventions, and in particular by what might be called the strength of his philosophical imagination, an ability for example to grasp important features of philosophical doctrines that, like those of Plato and Aristotle, are trapped in alien jargon and presuppositions. I knew that his principal interest was in the philosophy of thought, language and logic, and that he was among other things a student of the works of the early masters of analytic philosophy. It did not surprise me that a dissertation on the nature of logic, and of the 'formal' element in thought, with special reference to Frege, was proposed. That he was proposing to make one of his illustrations turn on a favorite topic of mine - the 'generic' form of description of kinds of living being that provides the raw material for biological inquiry - was one of the things that especially attracted me to join his committee. His thesis is about the question what logic, as a theoretical enquiry, pertains to, namely, what one might call the formal element in thought; or in a different jargon, one employed by the younger Frege among others, it is about the features of thought that cannot be put down to the objects thought of, but are introduced by the power of thought itself.

Chris' project as it has developed is extremely interesting and packed with fruitful ideas; and it is based on a very extensive study of the history of analytic philos-

ophy and the literature on some of the detailed illustrative topics he touches on. The question he poses is whether the shape of what, as followers of Frege, we understand as logic or the logical element impedes a proper grasp of the form of certain types of actual thought. On the relevant conception of 'logic,' it is the systematic elaboration of formal connections of thought to thought; the correlative understanding of the form, or 'logical form,' of individual thoughts is one that is fitted to the study of these inter-thought connection. What falls outside these forms is not thought. Thus for example Frege is led to reject vague predicates as failing to fit with his version of the law of excluded middle. The distinction between past and present tenses falls to similar considerations, even in *Grundlagen*, and must be replaced by an account in which tensed predicates really express atemporal relations to particular times, so that the opposition between "ξ is red" and "ξ was red (then)" turns on different ways of filling in the second "temporal" blank in, say, "Red(ξ,τ)". This last is reasonable enough on the face of it, though the intuition of Lewis, for example – that redness just isn't a relation, but something a thing can just plain *be* – must give one pause.

A more difficult case would be with aspectual judgment, whether of the type that pertains to intentional action, or to the operations of substances generally. This difficulty is independent of tense: peering into the remote past, or adopting a Godlike atemporal view, there will still be a difference between "the tree was falling over (on that Tuesday)" and "the tree fell over (on that Tuesday)"; the first might be true, but the second false, if say, someone did something to stop it, or an H-bomb went off and vaporized it before it hit the ground. Here the device of cutting an extra position in a predicate that is common to both judgments, in order to represent aspects of content that are the same and different, will plainly not work. (I note, *obiter*, that Lewis' four-dimensionalist solution to the problem of tensed state-attribution will not work either.) The Fregean will simply have to accept two predicates, "ξ fell over on τ" and "ξ was falling over on τ", and will be unable to represent the – evidently formal – connection between them.

This sort of example leads Chris to doubt that that everything that pertains to the form of thought is represented in the Fregean system and its successors, however much enriched by modal and suchlike operators. The systems characteristically accept only one *form of predication*, which is exactly the form that is found in purely mathematical judgments. But, on the face of it, the aspectual opposition would force us to accept at least two more. And similarly, it would force us to recognize a form of predicable item that admits these two modes of predication, and which is thus distinct from the Fregean *Begriffswort* and its successors in later systems. If I can be permitted the sort of symbolic perversity characteristic of Peirce's existential graphs (or indeed Frege's conditional) – again, strictly *obiter*, not as a record of Campbellism! – one might imagine a *Begriffsschrift* attempting to come to terms with this by admitting different positions for contentful sign of the relevant sort, so that "$\xi^{\text{fall over}}\tau$" and "$\xi_{\text{fall over}}\tau$ " would express respectively "ξ

fell over on τ" and "ξ was falling over on τ". All concrete symbols of that type – genuine verbs we might call them – would admit these two modes of 'unity' with other signs, and in the initial specification of vocabulary, they would have to occupy a different line than that supplies for 'normal' one-place predicates, two-place predicates, etc., as they are usually understood. It should be noticed that expressions of such a type cannot be classified by the sort of 'categorial grammar' familiar from Ajdukiewicz, Lewis and others; it does not admit what Chris calls a simple functional analysis, i.e. one which follows Frege in using the model of function and argument. Function and argument can only combine in one way – not to put too fine a point on it – but aspectual considerations seem to show that the concept *fall over* is made to be joined immediately to singular representations in two ways, even apart from difficulties about tense proper.

Chris' analysis of the failure of the received doctrine of logical segmentation in this sort of case is that it stays too close to the sort of analysis required for the formulation of principles of consequence. If we are only interested in the existential generalizations available by "the tree fell over on that Tuesday" and "the tree was falling over on that Tuesday", we will not need to see the sameness that my half-baked symbolism was trying to bring out. This is why he adopts the slogan of "form without formalizability", where the latter expression is closely tied to the articulation of inferential relations between thoughts.

I have labored this illustration, which belongs with Chris' discussion of *predication* in chapter 2, as (to my mind) especially clear and founded on what seem to be undeniable facts. Chris' third chapter is devoted to a more extensive and detailed discussion of what linguists call *generic* propositions, and the particular class of them that appear in simple discourses about species of plant and animal, which I called "natural historical judgments": say "robins nest", "robins have wings" etc. Generic propositions in the linguist's sense are quite wide class including, say, "Dutchmen are good sailors," "1969 Mustangs have rectangular tail-lights", "Tuesdays are a nightmare for me," "the French 'ne...pas' means *not*", and so on. Here there is an extensive contemporary literature, in linguistics and to some extent in philosophy, which Chris covers in extraordinary detail, and with a keen eye and a system of devastating criticisms. Here we have to do with a special form of *generality* - or, as he and I both think, a system of forms of generality - but at the bottom it is the issue of predication that makes for the difficulties, on his analysis. It is clear that in "robins nest" and "robins have wings" the surface-grammatical subject appears as a predicate in some judgments, e.g. in "this bird is a robin"; in the received logical atmosphere this will inevitably be taken as the core employment of the expression; similarly predicate in "robins have wings" will appear in quite different predications, singular predications like "this robin has wings". The generic sentence "robins have wings" will thus inevitably be analyzed as containing the elements "ξ is a robin" and "ξ has wings". An example is in the use of the "Gen x" operator, wherewith the judgment that robins have wings is

expressed "[Gen x: x is a robin](x has wings)", a formulation that is usually traced to the treatment of "most" and similar expressions in Lewis' categorial grammar. Basically the thought is that in the generic proposition we are secretly employing *an operator that takes two* THINGS-THAT-TAKE-NAMES-AND-YIELD-SENTENCES *and yields a sentence.* (This is only the syntactic beginning; a flood of semantical proposals then follow.)

Here Chris sees manifold objections. –It is not clear that the semantic features of "robin" that come out in its predicative use are all those that are relevant to the formulation of the natural history of robins. –Doctrines of this type operate on a sentence by sentence level, as one would reasonably do with "most", but it is clearly constitutive of the natural history generics that they form a system. And so forth. The point that strikes deepest, I think, arises from his discussion of the connection between simple predications like "this bird has wings" or "this robin has wings" and a background of generic judgments. (My estimate of its profundity is perhaps tainted by its connection with some brief and half-baked remarks of my own.) It is not clear that there is not a circle secretly present in accounts that begin with this syntactical decision. To put the point crudely, the generic facts about robins have a bearing on the facts about individual robins, which are presented with the form of predication contained in the sub-sentence "x has wings". This again is a contrast with the like of "most"; what holds of an individual A doesn't often turn on what holds of most A's.

Having myself carried on above about the matter of temporal aspect, I might make a point not made by Chris, unless I am misremembering, to help illustrate what is going on. This is that typically Campbellian trouble will immediately arise with the other sentence I mentioned, "robins nest". Intuitively, the second element in the 'Gen x' machinery would have to be "x nests", which would have a substitution instance in "this robin nests" affirmed in a suitable demonstrative context. In English this proposition is habitual in character. It would not seem to be truly affirmed of a perfectly ordinary adolescent robin whom I might see now, one facing her first winter, and not having nested since she was born this past spring. But in any case, it is plainly not a habitual that is wanted (this would be clear if our example were, say, "mayflies breed" - the individual only breeds once, not habitually.) In the present tense - and on the face of it the judgment in question, "robins nest," is purely present in character - the only available non-habitual remark would be the progressive proposition "this robin is nesting". But a rewrite of the generic proposition as "[Gen x: x is a robin](x is nesting)" would go back into English as "robins are nesting" which, though generic, is not natural-historical, and is in any case false when said at this time of year. It can be said in spring, when all goes well, but "robins nest" can be said at any time of year. The truth is that the aspectible expressions exemplified above with "fall over" are shown to admit *yet another* form of predication in generic propositions. "This robin was nesting last spring" (e.g. before I shot it), "this robin nested last

spring" and "robins nest in spring" all have the same content (I overlook difficulties with the demonstrative) and differ only by form - logical form if you like - and in the final analysis, none can be taken as prior; these possibilities of thought come into the world together. If human thought is 'discursive thought' in Kant's sense, and thus typically involves predication, then it must be a completely false understanding of predication, and thus of the inner character of thought itself, and of the logical element, that falls down before such quotidian examples.

As I said, Chris' account of these matters is very rich and astounding in its detailed discussion of views. His larger project, of course, is to say something systematic about the nature of logical inquiry and its object, and moreover to trace the development of doctrine on the topic within the history of analytic philosophy. There is something in the element we breath that makes us torture perfectly ordinary propositions like "the tree is falling over" and "robins breed". Here too he has many profound things to say, especially about the character of a Fregean approach, and the partial reception of it, and partial opposition to it, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the different phases of his later development. Chris' thought is that Wittgenstein was everywhere dealing, with increasing degrees of radicalism, with problems of Fregeanism of the type he himself discusses, though the range of examples is of course different. In this respect Wittgenstein was perhaps following a sounder path than the dominant branch of analytic philosophy, which has taken the received conception of the logical more or less for granted, and fits everything to its procrustean bed. Campbell's account does I think provide an apt account of Wittgenstein's self-understanding, as little as this is grasped by writers on the topic and by received opinion. What I wouldn't myself make bold to say is how far Wittgenstein ever met with success in his venture, as his later work is so difficult to penetrate.

The dissertation will immediately bring forth a number of papers on the detailed topics Chris addresses. I would anticipate a book as well, though it is not clear how the inevitable further development will affect its focus: will it be a direct discussion of the nature of logic, of the form of thought, etc.? Or will it be a more historical account about the history of analytical, i.e. Fregean and post-Fregean, thought about the matter? Perhaps two books should be envisaged. An account of Wittgenstein's development that fits with the framework he is working out would certainly be revolutionary, though again there is the difficulty that one cannot tell in advance whether it will be a development that ends in ruin. I believe that he has found a very fruitful avenue of research, the thin edge of an important wedge, and that much good can be anticipated to come from it. I should add that he is an unusually lucid writer, especially given the range of topics that absorb his attention, and seems to become ever better.

That Chris is an excellent undergraduate teacher is plain, and is a point addressed in a letter by Anil Gupta. He will also make an excellent colleague. He is interested and well-read in a wide range of philosophical sub-disciplines, for example

ethics and ancient philosophy, and as I said, his very strong philosophical imagination admits sympathetic entry into quite alien positions. This too will help his teaching. His pleasant, unassuming, somewhat self-effacing bearing will make him an excellent colleague and fellow discussant.

It will be clear that recommend Chris Campbell very highly; he is an excellent philosopher and human being. I think his case should be studied by all departments looking in his areas of specialization.

Yours ever,

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P.S. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions about Chris Campbell.