

# Metadata of the article that will be visualized in OnlineFirst

---

ArticleTitle	Book notice	
Article Sub-Title	Michael Dummett: The nature and future of philosophy. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, vi +152pp, \$19.95 PB	
Article CopyRight	Springer Science+Business Media B.V. (This will be the copyright line in the final PDF)	
Journal Name	Metascience	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	<b>Psillos</b>
	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>Stathis</b>
	Suffix	
	Division	Department of Philosophy and History of Science
	Organization	University of Athens, University Campus
	Address	Athens, 15771, Greece
	Email	psillos@phs.uoa.gr
Schedule	Received	
	Revised	
	Accepted	
Footnote Information		

---

2 **Book notice**

3 **Michael Dummett: The nature and future of philosophy.**  
4 **New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, vi+152pp, \$19.95 PB**

5 **Stathis Psillos**

6  
7 © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

8  
9 This latest addition to Michael Dummett's corpus is a philosophical gem: the (at  
10 least as of late) rare kind of philosophy book that is short, insightful and elegantly  
11 written. Dummett, of course, is a philosophical master. One of the not-very-many  
12 whose thought and philosophical endeavours the philosophical community ought to  
13 (and does) try to keep track with. *The Future and Nature of Philosophy* recapitulates  
14 his philosophy, his debt to Frege and intuitionism, his take on realism and his key  
15 thought that a semantic theory is the basis of metaphysics (with the notion of truth  
16 embodying this basis) as well as his fairly recent attempts to 'converse' with both  
17 continental philosophers (as with Gadamer, in Chapter 11) and the history of  
18 philosophy (as with Husserl, in Chapter 12). But, especially in the early chapters,  
19 the book ventures also into important meta-philosophical issues. Dummett takes it  
20 that we owe the fact that philosophy is still being taught in universities to the deeply  
21 entrenched—but now under severe danger from technocrats and impact-factor  
22 devotees—humanistic tradition that has shaped—historically—our modern idea of a  
23 University. Philosophy, Dummett argues, is like mathematics in not having a  
24 straightforward empirical input. But unlike mathematics, philosophy does not start  
25 with arbitrary (or defined from scratch) concepts, but with concepts already in use,  
26 that is concepts that are imprecise but for which there is nonetheless some implicit  
27 understanding. Hence, he takes it that philosophy aims at conceptual clarification  
28 and analysis. As such, Dummett (21) argues, "philosophy does not advance  
29 knowledge: it clarifies what we already know". This kind of thought lands him with  
30 the traditional paradox of analysis (Chapter 12): if we look for a correct analysis  
31 (definition) of a concept, then the *analysans* should be conceptually synonymous to  
32 the *analysandum* and hence the definition should be an analytic truth with no new  
33 informational content. Dummett's way-out of this predicament is to claim that

---

A1 S. Psillos (✉)  
A2 Department of Philosophy and History of Science, University of Athens,  
A3 University Campus, 15771 Athens, Greece  
A4 e-mail: psillos@phs.uoa.gr

34 conceptual analysis might not be, in the end, informative, but that it is still non-  
 35 trivial because it takes quite a lot of reflection to establish that the *analysans* and the  
 36 *analysandum* are “demonstrably equivalent” (110). Having said that, however, he  
 37 does claim that it is not true that philosophy must leave everything as it is—hence  
 38 (I take it) conceptual analysis does involve a bit of rational reconstruction, too—  
 39 which is certainly a creative business.

40 The view that philosophy offers no new knowledge makes it—it seems—inferior  
 41 to science, which does. Dummett’s line here is that science is not independent of  
 42 philosophy in at least two senses: (a) there are genuinely philosophical problems  
 43 (e.g., the direction of time) that arise from within the scientific image of the world  
 44 and call for a distinctively philosophical (that is, conceptual; non-empirical)  
 45 investigation; (b) the very image of the world as offered by scientific theories raises  
 46 philosophical questions of interpretation and clarification (e.g., the relation between  
 47 relativity and quantum mechanics). So philosophy and science are not rivals: they  
 48 work together to “improve our picture of reality”, the chief difference between them  
 49 being that science “enlarges our field of vision” whilst philosophy “seeks to rectify  
 50 our vision” (30). Not surprisingly, given his deep commitment to Catholicism,  
 51 Dummett takes it that philosophy and religious beliefs can leave in harmony. He  
 52 adds, however, that intellectual honesty requires that a philosopher should follow her  
 53 arguments to their bitter end and that, if they land in conflict with some religious  
 54 belief, she should present them nonetheless, even if she is convinced—on religious  
 55 grounds, I guess—that their conclusions cannot be correct (even though she does not  
 56 know how to avoid them). This may be puzzling enough if reason is the sole guide in  
 57 philosophy *qua* non-empirical enterprise. What is more puzzling, to me at least, is  
 58 Dummett’s claim that a realist view that there is a way reality is in itself  
 59 (independently of any human representation of it) requires belief in the existence of  
 60 God and His knowledge of the world (44). The elaboration of this thought—which is  
 61 not given in the book—might take us in the direction of another great Catholic  
 62 philosopher of science: Duhem and his idea of ‘natural classification’ and the world’s  
 63 ontological order that the former tends to match.  
 64