



Potted thinking in Susan Stebbing (1885–1943)

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Stebbing identifies her best practices for the everyday use of logic and language in *Thinking to Some Purpose*. Stebbing calls thinking that is too quick and not clear “potted thinking”, a reference to potted meat. Like potted meat, she claims, “potted thinking is easily accepted, is concentrated in form, and has lost the vitamins essential to mental nourishment” (Stebbing, 1939, p 68). What she thinks we need to do with such thinking is essentially to un-pot it. We need to think about what each of the words we are using means and how they hang together. We need to spell out what is not clear, and then replace unclear things with clear, precise things. In this sense, what she asks of us is something like a directional analysis. Through analysis, we can come to a better understanding of things by being clear and precise. Analyses help us come to a better understanding, and directional analyses take us from complex things to simpler thing. So, taking this influence from her academic work seriously, to un-pot our thinking, we need to analyze it.

Stebbing uses her logic textbooks to introduce her general audience to logical tools which might be of use to them. In *Logic in Practice*, for example, she discusses deductive forms and the possible relationships between propositions (propositions can, for example, be compatible, contradictory, independent, etc.). In *Thinking to Some Purpose*, she discusses in detail several logical fallacies.

Primary Sources:

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