THE "IDEALISM" IN WITTGENSTEIN

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In this paper I propose to use the term idealism for any philosophy whose account of the relationship between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge gives primacy to the knowing subject. For the philosopher who believes that deciding all questions about what is real is far too important to be left unexamined or left to the special sciences, I think it is helpful to realize the extent to which the Wittgenstinian heritage can perpetuate the conclusions of some forms of accounting for the act of cognition which gives primacy to the subject.

We may take as a point of departure for this cursory examination, the query "What is the relationship of language to reality in Wittgenstein?" True to form, a Wittgenstinian will come up of course with "Well, let's see what do we mean by 'reality'? How is the word used?" Now those are important, fair and interesting questions. But to stay with those questions is to stay within language. It is to risk failing to take account of the inherent intentionality of language to use a phenomenologist's term. It is as I would like to say, to remain on the horizontal dimension of language, it is to risk speaking as if language refers only to language, that what we mean by what we say is merely more things that we can say. If one maintains that position consistently language would have no referent, no world, no reality—the counterpart of an idealism that dispenses with the world that is not subject, or that is not mental.

What is crucial is that a possible exhaustive analysis of how the word "reality" is used will reveal the most authentic, most adequate, most practical, most close to an ideal of perfect use that men can make of the term. The joker is that an authentic, adequate, practical or ideal use must include the query how language relates to reality. One can call this my investigation into the vertical dimension of language. The question "what do we mean by the word reality?" although it can be clarified by analysis and perhaps even answered by analysis cannot be an affair that has to do only with language. To say something about the nature of the use of language is to say something about what we take language to be, and if our language does not refer to reality it is mere language or more properly not language at all. More clearly stated perhaps, the object of the intentionality of language is not language but the lived world, within which there is also language of course. Language is one of the realities of the world, a form of life. (To put this in a capsule phrase, it is not true that we cannot

exit from language, rather we are always already outside of language when we speak, unless we are speaking only about language.) This seems so obvious that I don't know whether I am saying something that is trivial though important, and recognized by everyone; or something trivial and important, but somehow forgotten by a large number of those who well or poorly follow the style of the great Wittgenstein in their philosophizing. I think there are among Wittgenstinians and Wittgenstein himself in various parts of his writings varying degrees of keeping these trivialities in the foreground, ranging from almost total forgetfulness to probing investigation.

Admittedly the use of the phrase "language games" and "maps" by Wittgenstein do not identify symbol and reality and hence there is no implication that the world is being forgotten, and hence there is no idealism here. But using language in what he claims are odd or mistaken ways and the further assertions that this language makes us see the world in an odd and mistaken way, is a clear counterpart of the idealistic tendency to equate how we view the world with the world itself. Just as the idealist can ask "What is the world except as it is represented in consciousness?" we can say for the Wittgenstinian "What is the world except as it is mapped in language?" In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein constantly points out that our language is what makes us believe or see this or that; it is clear to him that we cannot exit from language so our task is not to look again at the world to discern the facts (the way the world is) but to rearrange the mapping of the world. The idealist might say, "Look at the world at the different way and it will be a different world, for the world is your idea."

From the realization that I cannot know or perceive the world except by aquaintance with it, and the realization that subjectivity is necessarily entailed in any instance of aquaintainship, some form of "What is what is reality that is revealed in consciousness, but what *I can know* there is, is only what can be revealed in *my consciousness*." Let us compare these last remarks with Wittgenstein's view that language is the way we map the world. How we speak is how the world counts for us when we speak about the world. Language is logically entailed in any mapping of the world, and what is not mapped at all. If one says to this "but what is not mapped in language exists anyway" the reply might be "only for the philosopher who does not realize clearly that he cannot say the unsayable except by vocalizing nothing. Language is then idling." What can be said, then for the Wittgenstinian, "to be is to be sayable." The counterpart of Berkely's *esse est percipi* is a Wittgenstinian *esse est dice*. "What is or is not a cow is up to the public to decide." Without excessive disortion I think that Wittgenstien's language may be substituted for idealism's ideas

or mind, "what one says" for "what one perceives" or "thinks," language analysis for epistemology.

Lest it appear that I am pushing all this too far let me take a more specific example. Accounts have been given of Wittgenstein's philosophy of math and logic which may fairly be characterized as fitting the conventionalist mold. This view stems from passages such as those in which Wittgenstein speaks of a man who follows what we call the rules of logic and admits that his result differs from ours, but does not admit that his result is an exception to the rule. He would be playing a different game, Wittgenstein says.

On this view, the laws of logic are not inexorable, but we are. It is the way we establish what will be called rational. This is a quiet way of saying what the philosopher with the hammer, Nietzsche, preached from the mountain tops, that God is dead, meaning all truth, all dependable assertion is an erroneous dream of primitive men. Men make whatever truth there is, and the truth they make is a product of their will to power. We have only ourselves to ask "What is rational?" and if we find someone who disagrees there is no supra-rational way to settle the dispute. What is particularly relevant to the point I am making is not whether Wittgenstein is a conventionalist and refects the notion of hard logical necessity, but the fact that the approach he takes here is that logical necessity arises out of language and not the reverse. Language is, to borrow another way of speaking, both logically and ontologically prior to logic. Or to be more concrete, we who speak are logically ontologically prior to logic. The voluntarism of the Middle Ages has been brought down from God to man.

The terms may sound derogatory, but I mean them only descriptively. It may appear that I am changing my tack here, for I want to say that I agree with Wittgenstein on this crucial point as far as it goes. What worries me is does it go far enough? Not only does this position suggest, but quite openly asserts that a kind of Protagorean man is the measure of all things. We are beholden to no law above man, not even the laws of logical necessity. There is no truth with a capital T, and if this position is taken up with not only mind, but heart and gut would it not underwrite Nietzsche? I think it does all this, but it need not have, if Wittgenstein had made a further step or kept more fully in mind the horizontal dimension of language—if he had kept in the foreground that we are alone in shaping the language of man, in mapping the world in language, but that we must in deference to the best in us seek out the richest, fullest linguistic form of life, whose structure is within certain limited domains, at least as far as we can see, incorrigible, and that there is no foreseeable limit to the possibilities of altering and amplifying language. The prophetic and apocaplyptic note in Wittgenstein's philosophy, if it exists at all is perhaps

of the cyncial or prosaic type, which doggedly reasserts that language is all right the way it is and that when the philosopher's talk is finished everthing will be the same without muddles, and in fact without philosophy. Had Wittgenstein retained as a prominent feature of his philosophy the vertical dimension of language, the theme of existential philosophy called authenticity would have characterized language analysis, and philosophy would not claim to remain on the linguistic level. Duly acknowledging the inherent intentionality of language it might have been recognized that the laws we have made have been made in deference to a reality we have to some extent fathomed, that the laws of logic are the fruit of, an expression of, our insight into being.

Settling claims about how we may in fact use language without getting in fly bottles at the same time settles claims about how we regard the world. And settling claims about how we *should* use language without getting into fly bottles will settle claims about how we will in the future regard the world. And to settle these claims in the best manner is of the same importance as humanity itself and what it will become.

If I err not, the Wittgenstinian heritage is tending in a least the following three directions whose differences hinge upon their positions *vis-a-vis* the Language-Reality problem, and the descriptive-normative problem.

First there is the direction exemplified by Ryle. He would be clearly on the side of the view that philosophy cannot settle matters of fact or investigate them for that is the purview of the particular sciences. This is perhaps the most throughgoing of the idealistic tendencies in the Wittgenstinian heritage. On this view philosophy has nothing to say about existence and existence claims, but only about language, as if there were no vertical dimension to language. The idealistic equivalent is Berkeley with ideas or impressions and no spirits or active agents. Another interesting counterpart of this position is Husserl in his more idealistic phase. It is in fact a kind of linguistic phenomenology which cloaks itself in modesty of avoiding metaphysics or ontology.

Then there is the tendency which grants in one way or another that language is inherently intentional (logically necessarily intentional) in somewhat the sense that phenomenology of the existential kind emphasizes, but conceives the task of philosophy as purely therapeutic, to avoid confusion; and conceives the task of avoidance as determining how and when language is *de facto* used properly. There is no normative task (strictly speaking) except the negative one of avoiding muddles, no matter how deeply rooted. This seems to me to be Wittgenstein's position. The slogan of this view is that we cannot exit from language, and the idealism here is a kind of Protagorean man's language is the *de facto* measure of all things, and one measures duly and properly if he aviods muddles.

The third is the position that grants that language is inherently referential or intentional and allows that a large if not the primary scope of philosophy is to clarify the proper use of language, but finds that this clarification alters our view of what is to be said, and hence of what is to be considered real, valid, and true. This position contains the descriptive and negatively normative task, but adds the positive normative task as well and makes no pretense of avoiding ontological issues. From this point of view the task of philosophy is an onerous one, for it involves the notion of an ample Protagorean "Man's language is the measure of all things," and for him to measure well or poorly is a risk on which the destiny of man rides. From this position man is alone, and his risk-fraught task is to fashion a language about himself and his world that from a further vantage point will be recognized as wise, beautiful and within the scope of truth that man can achieve.

It does not seem at all improper to characterize this last position as an existential view of language. Not only does it pretend to make existence claims, but considers such claims to be primary and the goal of its endeavor. Moreover, it conceives man as a task, and his language and the formation of his language as the focal point of this task. Incidentally, in its general purpose and aims it rejoins the ancient tradition of philosophy which is to seek for a truth it can never rest assured in, for a reality it can never wholly fathom, for a beauty it can never fully enjoy, and a goodness it can never be fully confident of.

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