

There are several matters on which I've found Hilary Putnam to shed a good deal of light in his essay, "A Half Century of Philosophy, Viewed from Within," *Daedalus*, 126, 1 [Winter 1997]: 175-208).

One is how Wittgenstein's later philosophy is to be understood. On this he says:

[T]he idea that some philosophical problems are illusory is not a new one in the history of philosophy; it plays a central role in as pivotal a work as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. But for the most part the philosophers who find Wittgenstein's thought difficult to grasp are people who have little time for Immanuel Kant. In their memories, the idea that there are 'pseudoproblems in philosophy' is inextricably linked to the name of Rudolf Carnap and to logical positivism. Thus, it is natural for them to suppose that the Wittgensteinians' denial of the intelligibility of certain philosophical issues must stem from a commitment to the positivist 'verifiability theory of meaning,' even if they deny that it does. That one can come to see that a philosophical issue is a pseudo-issue by working through the considerations that seem to make it not only genuine but somehow obligatory, and not by bringing a 'criterion of cognitive significance' to bear on it from the outside, is something that can take someone with training in analytic philosophy a long time to see (it certainly took *me* a long time to see) (193 f.).

He then goes on to speak of "another, not incompatible but perhaps supplementary, way of seeing the upshot of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. For Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein," he says, "philosophical confusions are not just matters of language gone wrong, but an expression of deep human issues that also express themselves in a variety of other ways—political, theological, and literary" (194). In this connection, Putnam remarks that "many of the problems Wittgenstein discusses have to do with our uneasy relation to the normative."

By the 'normative' I do not mean just *ethics*. Consider the normativity involved in the notion of following a rule. That there is a right and a wrong way to follow a rule is what Wittgenstein would call a 'grammatical' truth; the notion of a rule goes with the notions of doing the right thing and doing the wrong thing, or giving the right answer and giving the wrong answer. But many philosophers feel that they have to reduce this normativity to something else; they seek, for example, to locate it in the brain, but then it turns out that if the structures in the brain lead us to follow rules correctly, some of the time they also lead us to follow them incorrectly. . . . In the past, philosophers who saw that reductive accounts of rule following did not work [posited either] mysterious mental powers or Platonic entities to which the mind was supposed to have a mysterious relation. Both in the case of the scientific reductionist and the old-time metaphysician, the impulse is the same: to treat normativity, that is, the rightness of going one way as opposed to another, as if it were a *phenomenon* standing in

need of a *causal* explanation (either an ordinary scientific explanation or a, so to speak, ‘superscientific’ explanation). Wittgenstein’s response was to challenge the idea that normative talk needs to be ‘explained’ in one of these ways, indeed, to challenge the idea that there is a problem of ‘explanation’ here.

From the outset of *Philosophical Investigations*, comfort and discomfort with the normative are associated with comfort and discomfort with the messiness of language—with the fact that language that is perfectly useful in its context may utterly fail to satisfy the standards of ‘precision’ and ‘clarity’ imposed by philosophers and logicians; indeed, with our desire to deny all this messiness, to force language and thought to fit one or another impossibly tidy representation.

At the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein emphasizes that such words as ‘believe,’ ‘question,’ and ‘command’ represent (practically speaking) many different things. The desire in contemporary scientific realism to represent all questions as of one kind, as, in effect, empirical questions, and all justifications as of one kind, as empirical justifications, is simply another manifestation of the tendency to force a single representation on what is in no sense one unified phenomenon. Wittgenstein wants not to clarify just our concepts, but to clarify *us*; and, paradoxically, to clarify *us* by teaching us to live, as we must live, with what is unclear. On such a reading, a concern with Wittgenstein and a concern with personal and social transformation are not only not incompatible, but they can reinforce one another (194 f.).

Another related matter that Putnam helps to clarify is what he treats under the heading “the history of philosophy returns.” Appealing here to the work of Charles Taylor, he takes up again the point that “certain ways of thinking seem obligatory to us.” With Taylor’s support, he then argues that “without an investigation into the *history* of that obligatoriness, an investigation that tries to uncover[, for example,] the genealogy of the conceptual changes that made Cartesianism (or Cartesianism *cum* materialism) seem the only *possible* way of thinking about the mind, we can never come to see how *contingent* some of the assumptions that generate our problems are; as long as we do not see that, we will remain stuck in those problems” (199 f.). As much as I welcome Putnam’s criticism of “the idea that ‘philosophy is one thing and history of philosophy is another,’” I feel obliged to insist, as Hartshorne did, that the history of philosophy that systematic philosophizing itself requires cannot be left to the “history of philosophy,” as it is ordinarily understood. Just as, on my view, the systematic theologian has to engage in historical theological reflection in order to do (*not* historical, but) systematic theology, so the systematic philosopher has to engage in the history of philosophy in order to do systematic philosophy. This means that she or he cannot alienate the responsibility to do so to historians of philosophy properly so-called.

Yet another matter that Putnam illuminates in a way closely convergent with my own thinking is “the meaning of meaning.” What he had come to realize by 1966, he says, is that “the whole image of language as something that is entirely ‘in the head’ of the individual speaker had to be wrong.”

[T]he familiar comparison of words to tools is wrong, if the ‘tools’ one has in mind are tools that one person could in principle use in isolation, such as a hammer or a screwdriver. If language is a tool, it is a tool like an ocean liner, which requires many people cooperating (and cooperating in a complex division of labor) to use. What gives one’s words the particular meanings they have is not just the state of one’s brain, but the relations one has to both one’s non-human environment and to other speakers. . . . [A]ny complete account of meaning must include factors outside the head of the speaker (195 f.).

Here again, I can only welcome Putnam’s argument as confirming, in its way, a point that Hartshorne insisted on all along—namely, that, at least in “the real-world language” (Brümmer), “the rules relating concepts to reality” require that “[i]f a concept refers neither to a producible positive entity nor to an inherent aspect of the ultimate productive power, then it does not refer and is void of coherent meaning. If its object is producible, then it may or may not exist. If it is the ultimate productive power, then either the concept misconceives that power and is logically incoherent, or it correctly conceives it, and then certainly the object exists” (“John Hick on Logical and Ontological Necessity”: 163).

I also welcome, by the way, Putnam’s comment on Quine’s view that there is no “‘fact of the matter’ about what our words refer to.” “It has always seemed to me,” he says, “that a view that is so contrary to our whole sense of being in intellectual and perceptual contact with the world *cannot* be right” (198).

There are two other matters that Putnam helpfully clarifies. One is what he says about “good prose.” “Good prose, whatever its subject, must communicate something worth communicating to a sensitive reader. If it seeks to persuade, the persuasion must not be irrational (which does not exclude the possibility that what is involved may be an appeal to *see* something one is refusing to see—say, the appeal of a way of life, or what actually goes on in our linguistic, or scientific, or ethical, or political practices[—]and not simply a deduction from already accepted premises, or the presentation of evidence for an

empirical hypothesis)” (201 f.). The other matter is what he says about analytic philosophy as a “movement.” “Just as we can learn from Kant without calling ourselves Kantians, and from James and Dewey without calling ourselves pragmatists, and from Wittgenstein without calling ourselves Wittgensteinians, so we can learn from Frege and Russell and Carnap and Quine and Davidson without calling ourselves ‘analytic philosophers.’ Why can we not just be ‘philosophers’ without an adjective?” (203). Exactly!

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