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The subdisciplines of philosophy seem to be sharing a common thread in the late 20th century. Epistemology, philosophy of language, ethics—most writings in these fields seem to be shifting from being primarily prescriptive to focusing on descriptive under the skeptic's microscope. I will argue that Ludwig Wittgenstein was a major contributor during this shift, and that he took a naturalistic approach to language and epistemology in general. I will propose that this is because Wittgenstein rejected foundationalism and, in doing so, he rejected normativity as well. In lieu of skepticism, he developed a holistic approach that was naturalistic, at least in the sense that naturalism is relevant to philosophical exploration. This is known as the relevance theory of naturalism, as opposed to replacement theory naturalism.

Naturalism

It would be difficult to explain what naturalism is without invoking the language of W. V. Quine. Quine, in a now famous essay, said that epistemology should be "naturalized." This was in 1969 and was one of the earliest urgings of naturalization in the Wittgensteinian discipline. What brought this on? Quine thought that we should leave traditional epistemology behind for a new epistemology that was essentially empirical psychology. Why would he give up traditional epistemology for a psychological approach? He reasoned that skepticism was

doomed to failure, and that we should stop trying to hold epistemology under the skeptic's scrutiny. Instead, we should be "scientifically investigating man's acquisition of science" or knowledge. Thus, the shift from prescription to description began (Shatz, 117).

What is the difference between these two methods? Prescriptive philosophy attempts to prescribe how one ought to do things, such as how one ought to know things (prescriptive epistemology). Descriptive philosophy attempts to describe how one really does things, such as how we come to know things (descriptive epistemology). It becomes readily apparent that the descriptive philosophers rely much more on empirical data or observations.

Quine's naturalism provides a well-laid out plan for tackling how we come to know things—an epistemological blueprint, if you will. He bases his naturalistic agenda on three central doctrines:

(1) the *mandatory use* doctrine: epistemology must make use of empirical data;

(2) the *exclusive use* doctrine: no data other than empirical data may be used in epistemology— there is no first philosophy, no transcendent standpoint, no *a priori* truth;

(3) the *free use* doctrine: the free use of empirical data about the formation of belief is unproblematic (Shatz, 119).

The change from prescription to description is very noticeable in Quine's doctrines, as they all require empirical data. The requirement of empirical support for philosophical claims was very important to Quine in philosophical inquiry. This characterizes the difference between traditional and naturalistic epistemology in philosophy.

Quine had the desire to build a descriptive foundation of science that would have a predictive value to it. He wanted to practice discovery instead of justification of epistemological

beliefs. He wanted a naturalistic philosophy to replace the skeptic's meaningless quest to find how the world is as opposed to how it appears. Quine sets out to form a theory of the world based on sensory, empirical data. This would later evolve into his "web of belief" (Quine 1960, 76-77). This web was a system of beliefs about the world that based on the rejection of two distinctions: *a priori/a posteriori* and analytic/synthetic.

A characteristic of the web of belief that seems common in naturalism is that it is holistic. In Quine's theory of beliefs about the world, there are stronger beliefs and weaker beliefs. The weaker, auxiliary beliefs, when contradicted, are easier to change than the stronger, center beliefs. When a center belief is contradicted, one can choose to change, in a major way, one's theory of beliefs, or one can reject the contradiction (Quine and Ullian, 9-19).

Philosophy in naturalized epistemology does differ from cognitive psychology. In naturalized epistemology, we can use the information gained to predict future occurrences involving epistemology with more accuracy. It is as if one uses the descriptive naturalized philosophy in order to come up with some prescriptions about epistemology in general, or about the future of epistemology.

Wittgenstein rejects skepticism, and in doing so, he rejects foundationalism. The rejection of foundationalism follows from the Wittgensteinian rejection of skepticism because foundational approaches generally lead to skepticism. In rejecting foundationalism, Wittgenstein accepts holism, and in holism, naturalism works well. Wittgenstein's philosophy of language holism can be seen as early as the 1960s in the *Blue and Brown Books:* "Understanding a sentence means understanding a language" (Wittgenstein 1969, 5). Now that we have a clearer idea of what it means to have a naturalistic approach to a philosophical discipline, namely epistemology, what does it mean to have a naturalistic approach to language, as Wittgenstein did?

The replacement sense of naturalism says that naturalized epistemology is able to deem traditional epistemology

unnecessary and thereby replaces any previous uses of traditional epistemology. The relevance sense of naturalism is making claims that empirical facts are relevant to traditional epistemology or epistemology in general. Psychology does not hope or need to replace epistemology. There are two different arguments one can make about Wittgenstein's naturalism: first, that he is a naturalist in the sense of replacement theory of naturalism, and second, that he is a naturalist in the relevance theory of naturalism. I will argue that Wittgenstein was a naturalist in the relevance sense of naturalism.

Traditional Philosophy of Language and Wittgenstein

The traditional idea of language has a logical atomistic feel. In the logical atomist's view of language, words stand for things. This occurs in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* where he claims that the foundation of language is atomistic.

Another idea that goes with the traditional view of language, later dropped by Wittgenstein, is that there is a logically perfect language that is prescriptive and has a direct word/object relationship throughout. In the *Tractatus,* he argues that there must be a fixed correlation between names and objects, and that the meaning of a word is the thing to which it refers (Wittgenstein 1992, #2-2.225, 34-43). Based upon this, one could have language in categories with clearly specified boundaries and a set of defining characteristics necessary and sufficient for membership in the category. In this language, sentences are determinably true, false, or meaningless, because the meaningfulness of a sentence cannot be separated from the true/false possibilities of a sentence. If words had ostensive definitions relating to objects in the world, then it should be possible (given omniscience) to determine the truth-value of the sentences in which they occur; otherwise, these sentences are meaningless. This idea of determining truth-value for all meaningful sentences is known as the

determinacy theory. However, determinate is not equal to being able to be determined (by use). Determinacy theory relies on a fixed, definite foundation for beliefs and knowledge. This ties in to the traditional epistemological notion of identifying the criteria for justified belief and examining the possibility of knowledge by these criteria, epistemological foundationalism. This was the skeptic's challenge (Nisbett and Ross, 278).

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein claims that the skeptic's question is unanswerable, and that it is impossible for language or epistemology to stand up to the skeptic's demands. The skeptical question is meaningless to him because the language of the skeptical question is useless. The main idea underlying Wittgenstein's later conception of language is that words derive their meaning from use. Words have meaning by the way that they enter into discourse. The meaning of language is only secured by using a word according to rules. Simply put, a word's meaning is its general use, and there can be no meaning found outside of a particular use. If there is no use, the language has no meaning. There is, as a necessity, agreement in expressions and reactions of language. As Rhees puts it, "Because there is this agreement we can understand one another. And since we understand one another we have rules" (Rhees, 57). Hence, skeptical questions are useless.

Why is meaning derivative of use? In the *Investigations*, #244, Wittgenstein says, ". . .words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. . . [T]he verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it" (1958, 89). McGinn interprets this, and I agree, as making the requirement that language must find meaning in that which can be publicly verified (McGinn, 49). How else would anyone know what the word(s) mean, including the speaker? How could I say I was incorrectly following the meaning of the words I use, when I can look to no place in order to determine how the words are used? (Rhees, 58)

The language user must have some place to look in order to verify correct language use. Rhees explains this point: "[It] is not that others must see what my words refer to. It is just that if my words are to refer to anything they must be understood" (Rhees, 61). This is what Wittgenstein means when he says that words have meaning, and understanding, in their use (Wittgenstein 1969, 72). Simply going through the motions of chess is not understanding the rule-guided nature of chess, just as going through the motions of language does not mean rules are being followed. Language is not contained in the models of mathematics or logic but is ". . .a game, an activity embedded within a background of human practice" (Stern, 103).

In order for me to make meaningful use of expressions of language, I must understand what they mean. For me to understand their meaning I have to know how they are used, and to know this I must have experienced their use in context. From somewhere, I must acquire the training of how to use the language. This is both acquired and constantly up for revision. Many times one may think one knows how to use a word, and someone says, "No, that's not what it means," or "No, that's not how you use that word." In the context, the rules naturally occur. In use, naturally agreed-upon rules develop or form. The naturalistic or descriptive qualities of Wittgenstein's language begin to be more readily apparent. He is relying on observable instances for the foundation of the meaning of language. The meaning is not fixed or definite, as the use is alterable.

Wittgenstein and Naturalistic Inquiry

Is Wittgenstein really engaging in naturalistic inquiry, or is he simply a semi-behaviorist or psychologist in a philosophical disguise? He claims in the *Tractatus*, "Psychology is no nearer related to philosophy than is any other natural science. The theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology" (Wittgenstein 1992, #4.1121, 77). The point that

Wittgenstein makes is that psychology is related to philosophy, but so are other natural sciences. The philosophical development of a theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology, but this does not imply that one does psychology, rather than philosophy, when exploring epistemology. Descriptive epistemology does certainly edge much closer to a form of psychology, and the rest of natural science, than the traditional prescriptive forms of philosophy. This is because naturalized epistemology, as set forth so well by Quine, relies solely on empirical data.

This is a stark contrast to the traditional transcendental philosophical approach to epistemology or language. No longer do we sit on high and decide *a priori* how the world works and why. The new trend is to take a down-to-earth approach, which seems to make much more sense. Why not discover why we do certain actions and how we acquire knowledge by observation, rather than formulate postulates or foundations that prescribe what we should do and how we should know? Wittgenstein says that prescribing what one should do is what the psychologist does. The psychologist is studying behavior of man and different characteristics of this behavior (Wittgenstein 1958, #II:v, 179). Psychology describes and then makes normative claims based on the descriptions or observations. (So the question is: where does Wittgenstein, as a philosopher, make normative claims based on descriptions?) The psychological or behavioral influence only makes sense in the naturalistic approach to philosophy. As Fogelin says, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* are a kind of philosophical psychology (Fogelin, 172). Wittgenstein is writing down thoughts that are products of his observations. The observations of linguistic expression become a psychology of sorts, because through the observation of behavior, one can philosophize about the psychological processes being implemented. The psychologist may explore the processes, but this is not Wittgenstein's concern; it is merely a consequence of the method of investigation Wittgenstein uses. It does, however, provide an explanation of how and why

Wittgenstein's naturalistic philosophy bleeds into the natural sciences as it explores our language.

However, as natural scientist or just plain philosopher, Wittgenstein is in the philosophical camp of naturalists. He writes, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, of the training required in the acquisition of language. This idea of training rather than deciding on an *a priori* explanation of language demonstrates his naturalistic approach to philosophy. Contrary to prescriptive language theories, it is through teaching that we learn language. Wittgenstein eventually makes prescriptive claims, but these are based upon the descriptions he has made throughout his philosophical exploration. He gives up on trying to please the skeptic and takes the sensible path from there. Skepticism is irrefutable, meaningless, and cannot be answered. Wittgenstein wants to observe and describe how we do what we do, and maybe then he can suggest ought or why. If we try to prescribe before we describe, we slip into the kind of philosophy of which Wittgenstein was most critical. Shatz writes:

> [Peter Strawson] also quotes with approval Wittgenstein's naturalism as it emerges in *On Certainty*, paraphrasing as follows:

> To attempt to confront the professional skeptical doubt with arguments in support of these beliefs, with rational justification, is simply to show a total misunderstanding of the role they actually play in our belief-systems. The correct way with the professional skeptical doubt is not to attempt to rebut it with argument, but to point out that it is idle, unreal, a pretense; and then the rebutting arguments will appear as equally idle. . .there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs (Shatz, 125-26).

To clarify, Wittgenstein says there is no skeptic-proof way to answer the question of what qualifies as knowledge. Quine

considers this Wittgenstein's therapy for philosophers. He cures philosophers of the delusion that there are epistemological problems. Epistemology answers to the natural sciences, which in turn answer to epistemology (Quine 1969, 69-90). Again, epistemology is normative of psychology, and Quine would argue that psychology is normative of epistemology. The wave of naturalism, upon which Wittgenstein is a force, sweeps epistemology—and perhaps philosophy or philosophical inquiry itself—into the natural sciences.

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