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THE LINGUISTIC IDEALISM QUESTION: WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD AND HIS REJECTION OF REALISM

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Abstract

After the publication of Wittgenstein's posthumous work the question was raised whether that work involved idealist tendencies. The debate also engaged Wittgenstein's immediate students. Resistance to presumed idealist positions had been ideologically central to G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell and other representatives of realism and early analytic philosophy. While Wittgenstein disagreed with them in key respects, he accepted their tendentious definition of 'idealism' at face value and bequeathed it to his students. The greatest flaw in the Realists' view on idealism was their assumption of symmetry between realist and idealist approaches. For Realists, the chief task of philosophy was to establish what kinds of thing exist, and they took Idealists to offer an alternative account of that. However, the Idealists' guiding concern was rather to investigate the subjective conditions of knowledge. In this respect, Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical method was closer to theirs than to that of the Realists. This is especially obvious in his rejection of Moore's idea of immediate knowledge. Ultimately, the trouble with Wittgenstein was not that he endorsed any kind of idealist ontology. It was his refusal to deliver the expected realist ontological messages on the supposed question of whether reality is independent of language or otherwise.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Idealism, Realism, Scepticism, History of philosophy, G.E. Moore, G.E.M. Anscombe, Norman Malcolm, R.G. Collingwood, *On Certainty*

THE LINGUISTIC IDEALISM QUESTION: WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD AND HIS REJECTION OF REALISM

Wittgenstein, Idealism and Realism

Ludwig Wittgenstein's relation to idealism has been a topic of constant debate. Wittgenstein received early influences from idealist thinkers like Schopenhauer and Weininger (see Janik & Toulmin 1973). What he made of those impulses in the *Tractatus* – going along with them or resisting them – is a matter of debate. The present essay concentrates on his later work and what is known as the question of linguistic idealism. Most scholars agree that Wittgenstein did not put forward an ontological position after the *Tractatus* – and arguably not in that book either. Nevertheless, with the posthumous publication of Wittgenstein's manuscripts, discussion started on whether his take on certainty and language-games might commit him to some kind of idealism after all. The debate, still ongoing, also engaged Wittgenstein's immediate disciples.

The main suggestion of the present paper is this: The problem with Wittgenstein – if that is the word – was not any endorsement of idealist ontology on his part. It was rather his refusal to deliver the expected *realist* ontological messages. Ultimately, the stumbling block was his general vision of philosophy; a view markedly different from the 'realist' approach. For him, the task of philosophy was not to establish correspondence between thinking and reality, thus issuing metaphysical warrants to our fact-finding practices. Instead, philosophy was about clarifying what is at stake in those practices.

A central obstacle to debate here is the difficulty of pinning down the exact position the protagonists describe as idealism. The difficulty has specific historical roots. Resistance to 'idealism' had an ideological role for the generation of British philosophers coming of age in the end of the Nineteenth Century (see a critical contemporary description by Collingwood [1939] 1978, 15–21). The 'realist' schools at Oxford and Cambridge, including George Edward Moore (1873–1958) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and morphing into the emerging analytic philosophy, construed their self-understanding to a large extent by disowning what they believed to be the dominant philosophy of the previous generation. However, these early Realists and Analytics had a rather limited conception of what idealism was, mistaking the philosophies of Thomas Hill Green, F.H. Bradley and J.M.E. McTaggart for Hegelianism (Rockmore 2005; Hylton 1990).

It is useful here to distinguish between ontological and epistemological idealism (Guyer & Horstmann 2020). Ontological idealism is a theory of the nature of reality. It would hold that all of reality, some way or other, is a form of thought or is produced by thought. That would be approximately the position of McTaggart, who taught Moore and Russell at one point. Also George Berkeley's philosophy is typically described as ontological idealism. However, from Immanuel Kant onwards, epistemological idealism became the mainstream of idealist thought on the European continent (Guyer & Horstmann 2020). It holds that *knowledge* of reality is the result of the sensibilities and organising activities of the mind. Just as Copernicus had shown that the apparent law-like movements of the Sun depended on the changing position of earthly observers, in a similar fashion Kant argued that apparently necessary features of reality were expressive of the condition of the epistemic subject (Kant, KrV, B xvi). Kant's transcendental idealism implied the demise of ontology as an autonomous field of investigation apart from epistemology. The two sides of the coin – the conditions of knowledge and the nature of its object – can only be approached together (Höffe 1994, 37–38). This quick summary should be uncontroversial in its general outline. Good expositions of idealism are available elsewhere (Guyer & Horstmann 2020; on Kant in particular, see Höffe 1994).

From the present point of view, the greatest flaw in the early Realists' treatment of idealism was their assumption of *symmetry* between realism and idealism. They never digested Kant's idea of a 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy, preferring to bypass him in favour of the earlier traditions of British empiricism (Toulmin 1978, xiii and fn 1). For the Realists, the chief task of philosophy was to establish what kinds of thing exist, and they took Idealists to offer a competing answer to that question. For Moore and Russell, idealism was the ontological thesis that 'the universe' ... 'is *spiritual*' (Moore [1903] 1948, 1); that 'whatever exists, or at any rate whatever can be known to exist, must be in some sense mental' (Russell 1923, 58). While departing from the analytic school in significant ways, Wittgenstein nevertheless inherited its definition of idealism, which he conflated with solipsism (see MWL 1993, 102–103). Moreover, he passed it on to his students. My argument is that this flawed conception has blocked full understanding of real ways in which Wittgenstein and the Idealists shared common ground: not an ontological position, but a view on philosophy, its methods and purposes. For them, the task of philosophy was not to investigate the nature of reality, but our relation to reality – as Wittgenstein put it in *Philosophical Investigations* (I §

126), ‘One might also give the name “philosophy” to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions’.

Late Twentieth-Century debates on the topic of ‘Wittgenstein and idealism’ were mostly conducted with a definite agenda. For many contributors, the primary aim was not to highlight whatever they found fruitful in Wittgenstein’s work by way of comparisons with an equally fruitful idealist tradition. They wished to establish guilt by association, connecting Wittgenstein with ideas already dismissed (influential cases are Williams 1981 and Nagel 1986). Conversely, Wittgenstein’s loyal students like Elizabeth Anscombe and Norman Malcolm would downplay the embarrassing connection. Malcolm (1982, 249) states categorically that ‘no tendency towards any form of idealism is to be found in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy’. This is a curiously strong statement, given the fact that ‘idealism’ may mean different things (Bloor 2017, 333). In his relatively recent response to Bernard Williams (1981), Stephen Mulhall (2008) is equally solicitous to distance Wittgenstein from idealism. Also İlham Dilman, in his book-length treatment of Wittgenstein and idealism (2002) insists that Wittgenstein was not an idealist, even though his descriptions sometimes make it difficult to see how he thinks of the difference (see reviews by Gert 2003, Loomis 2002).

Wittgenstein’s overall relation to Kant’s transcendental idealism is left open in the present paper (for critique of Thomas Nagel’s (1986) construal of Wittgenstein as transcendental idealist, see Cerbone 2011. For exploration of the common ground between Wittgenstein and Kant’s idealism, see Dilman 2002). The rest of this paper concentrates on limited themes. *On Certainty* is the central document here. My discussion concerns, first, Moore’s polemic against idealism and Wittgenstein’s comments on it in the early part of that work; and then, Anscombe’s and Malcolm’s attempts to rescue Wittgenstein from the charge of ‘linguistic idealism’. Finally, I suggest that Wittgenstein, in his approach to knowledge, was closer to allegedly idealist R.G. Collingwood and his ‘logic of question and answer’ (Collingwood [1939] 1978, 27–43) than to G.E. Moore’s common-sense realism.

Moore’s Realism and his Refutations of ‘Idealism’

In his lectures of 1910–11, G.E. Moore offered a concise statement of what he saw as ‘the first and most important problem of philosophy’ – ‘To give a general description of the *whole* Universe’:

> To begin with then, it seems to me that the most important and interesting thing which philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the *whole* of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we *know* to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely *know* to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another. I call this, for short, "Giving a general description of the *whole* Universe," and hence will say that the first and most important problem of philosophy is: "To give a general description of the *whole* Universe" (Moore [1910–11] 1957, 13).

Russell – influenced by Moore's lectures[1] – advanced a similar view of the task of philosophy in his *Problems of Philosophy*. Moore claimed that the solution he would defend was inherent in 'common sense'; namely, that the universe included two kinds of objects, physical and mental. The main opposing view, labelled 'idealism', was that only mental objects existed. For Moore, resistance to 'idealism' was a life-long project; including his 1903 paper 'The Refutation of Idealism' ([1903] 1948) and its sequel, 'The Nature and Reality of Objects of Perception' ([1905-06] 1948).[2] 'The Refutation of Idealism' belonged to the formative texts of the emerging analytic philosophy.

In that paper, Moore purported to argue against the specific form of idealism he attributed to Berkeley. It was the position where '*what is experienced* is held to be identical with *the experience of it*' (Moore 1948, 19), denying the existence of material objects in space. Against this, Moore argued that we are *directly* aware of external objects:

> I am as directly aware of the existence of material things in space as of my own sensations; and *what* I am aware of with regard to each is exactly the same – namely that in one case the material thing, and in the other case my sensation does really exist. The question requiring to be asked about material things is thus not: What reason have we for supposing that anything exists *corresponding* to our sensations?

[1] Russell acknowledges Moore's lectures (then unpublished) in his Foreword to *Problems of Philosophy* (1923).
[2] Both included in Moore 1948, 1–30 and 31–96, respectively.

> but: What reason have we for supposing that material things do *not* exist, since *their* existence has precisely the same evidence as that of our sensations? (Moore 1948, 30)

Collingwood, meanwhile, held that 'the position actually criticized in that article is not Berkeley's position; indeed, in certain important respects it is the exact position which Berkeley was controverting. In order to see this, I had only to open the article and Berkeley's text and compare them' (Collingwood, [1939] 1978, 22). The first pages of Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* indicate that its aim was not to propose, but to *refute* scepticism about objects in space, which Berkeley believed would be an implicit consequence of realism (Berkeley ([1710] 2002, I: §§ 35, 86, 89). The target of Berkeley's attack was the doctrine of 'the absolute Existence' of objects, which for him was 'Words without a Meaning, or which include a Contradiction' (I: § 24). We understand what it means to speak of the 'existence' of objects only by considering their possible relations with a perceiving subject (Berkeley [1710] 2002, I: §5).[3]

The irrelevance of Moore's 'Refutation' is even more obvious in the case of Kant's transcendental idealism. Kant's contention was not that our forms of intuition might fail to correspond with qualities of real objects in space. Rather than questioning the availability of objective knowledge, he wanted to vindicate it against realist and rationalist demands that were, in fact, unsatisfiable. For Kant, the possibility of empirical knowledge would be guaranteed by establishing that the relationship between cognition and empirical reality was internal (see Höffe 1994, 36–37, 44, 79; Kant, *Prolegomena*, A 63–A 71). Moore's failure to engage with this aspect of Kant's 'Copernican revolution' falsely led him to postulate affinity between idealism and solipsism. Kant, on the contrary, offered a well-known refutation of solipsism in his first *Critique* (KrV, B 274–279). Wittgenstein's argument against Solipsism

[3] Kant (KrV, B 274; *Prolegomena*, A 70) appears to misrepresent Berkeley's position on this point, describing it as 'dogmatic' and 'mystical' idealism.

in the *Tractatus* (TLP 1922: 5.64) was obviously indebted to Kant.[4] For Kant, solipsism was not only *not* a form of transcendental idealism, but incompatible with it.[5]

Moore's 'Proof of an External World'

Thomas Baldwin points out that Moore's two papers, with their appeal to direct awareness, did not yet provide the answer to external-world scepticism. One would still have to show that our awareness of what we take to be material objects corresponds with reality. Moore knew this; 'From then on, therefore, Moore is engaged in a complex process of salvage and reconstruction' (Baldwin 1984, 372). The early Realists' polemic, up to and including Moore's 'Proof of an External World' ([1939] 1959), aimed to establish the independent existence of the objects of perception, and they took Idealists to be in denial of *that*.

In his 'Proof ', Moore directly took issue with external-world scepticism. He set out to prove two claims: external objects exist (more than one of them) and external objects have existed in the past. By way of proof, he (in)famously held up his two hands, saying, 'here is one hand' and 'here another'. Moore admitted that he could not produce a formal proof of these two facts. Rather they had to be admitted at face value.

> I can know things, which I cannot prove; and among things which I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were the premisses of my two proofs (Moore [1939] 1959, 148).

Moore argued already in his lectures that it simply must be possible for us to know *some* things without proof if there is to be any knowledge at all ([1910–11] 1957, 122–123). By pain of infinite regress, we cannot expect that *every* proposition we know to be true should follow from some other proposition already known to be true. There must be an end point, which Moore calls '*immediate* knowledge' (Moore [1910–11] 1957, 123). Moore's

[4] Wittgenstein's response to solipsism in *Tractatus* (TLP 1922, 5.64) is this: When solipsism is consistently followed through, no 'I' will be left as a substance, as the thing whose experiences supposedly constitute the world. This implies the refutation of Descartes' methodological solipsism of the Second Meditation, running parallel to Kant's 'Refutation of Idealism' and, especially, his 'First Paralogism: Of Substantiality' (Kant, KrV, B 274–279; A 348/B 406 – A 351/B 410). Kant sees the rejection of solipsism as support for his own combination of 'empirical realism' and 'transcendental idealism'.

[5] In his response to Bernard Williams (1981), also Stephen Mulhall (2008, 388) assimilates, without argument, 'transcendental idealism' to 'solipsism'. He then cites Wittgenstein's refutation of solipsism in the *Tractatus* and offers *that* as a proof that early Wittgenstein was not an idealist, transcendental or otherwise.

immediate knowledge of his two hands guaranteed their existence, and consequently, that of material objects.

It has been proposed that the real value of Moore's 'Proof' did not lie in the result it claimed to achieve – usually seen as inadequate – but in the light it throws on the notion of sceptical doubt. Alice Ambrose and Norman Malcolm, in their contributions to the Schilpp volume on Moore's philosophy ([1942] 1952), suggested that the 'Proof' draws attention to the ordinary language-game where the existence of a thing is proved by showing up that thing. On that reconstruction, Moore's paper was a contribution to ordinary language philosophy, a reminder of how we speak of giving proofs outside philosophy.

However, regardless of whether this is a lesson that others could draw from the 'Proof', Moore ([1942] 1952, 668–674) disowned it in his replies to Ambrose and Malcolm. In their review of the debate, Morris and Preti (2015) argue that the paper as a whole did not indicate a shift in Moore's thinking. They note that 'much of the attention on Moore's paper has concerned its final pages', i.e., the pages that include Moore producing his two hands (Morris & Preti 2015, 4). The main body of the 'Proof', however, was about establishing the distinction between things 'inside' and 'outside' the mind, aiming at the conclusion that to show one's hands *is* a legitimate move in the philosophical proof-game (see also Moore [1942] 1952, 670–672).[6] Furthermore, considered as an attempt to invoke ordinary language, Moore's use of the word 'proof' surely was a misuse. No one had doubted specifically that *Moore* had two hands.

Moore's and Wittgenstein's Refutations of 'Idealism'

In the first 65 paragraphs of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein chiefly concerns himself with Moore's 'Proof'. In these early parts of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein adopts Moore's vocabulary. 'Idealism', when mentioned (OC 1969: §§ 19, 24, 37), equals 'external-world scepticism' or 'solipsism'. Wittgenstein agrees that external-world scepticism is absurd, but he is nevertheless adamant that Moore's response to it is a failure. Moore's immediate awareness of his two hands does not constitute a valid reply to the sceptic or solipsist (or 'idealist'). The sceptic does not deny that Moore has the experience that he *thinks* is the

[6] Morris & Preti consider Moore's unpublished drafts for the 'Proof', and say this aim is even more obvious in the drafts (2015, 7–8).

experience of his hands. For the sceptic, 'there is a further doubt *behind* that one' (OC 1969: § 19).

Michael Williams, in his helpful 'Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism' (2004), identifies Wittgenstein's diagnosis of Moore's argument as follows. If I know something, it follows by definition that the thing I know is true (OC 1969: §§ 12, 21). Moore's crucial move now is to describe knowledge as a mental state (Williams 2004, 92). A thinking subject's sincere descriptions of his or her mental states (such as, 'I believe ...') have first-person authority; the subject cannot be mistaken about them. Now it follows that knowledge, for Moore, is a mental state with the special feature that it validates itself (OC 1969: § 178). However, precisely the construal of knowledge as a kind of *experience* invites the sceptical idea that nothing real corresponds to it (Williams 2004, 93–94). Wittgenstein, on Michael Williams' analysis, identifies the source of scepticism in a doctrine that Moore shares with the sceptic: 'the priority of experience over knowledge of the worldly objects' (Williams 2004, 94). Williams points out that the following passage constitutes Wittgenstein's diagnosis of Moore's 'immediate knowledge':

> 'I know' has a primitive meaning similar to and related to 'I see' ('wissen', 'videre'). And 'I knew he was in the room, but he wasn't in the room' is like 'I saw him in the room, but he wasn't there'. 'I know' is meant to express a relation, not between me and the sense of a proposition (like 'I believe') but between me and a fact. So that the *fact* is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes on in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense-data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the perception of an outer event through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be *certain* of the projection. And this picture does indeed show how our *imagination* presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation (OC 1969: § 90).

Malcom's report of his conversations with Wittgenstein at Cornell in the summer of 1949 concerns the issues addressed in the early part of *On Certainty*. What Wittgenstein says there is in accordance with Williams' analysis.

> Moore would like to stare at a house that is only 20 feet away and say, with a peculiar intonation, 'I *know* that *there's* a *house*!' He does this because he wants to produce in himself the *feeling* of knowing. [...] It is as if someone had said 'You don't really feel pain when you are pinched' and Moore then pinched himself in order to feel the pain, and thus prove to himself that the other is wrong. Moore treats the sentence 'I know so & so' like the sentence 'I have a pain' (Malcolm 1978, 87–88).

Russell, like Moore, associated knowledge with a kind of immediate experience. In the end of his groundbreaking paper, 'On Denoting', Russell declared knowledge by acquaintance the rock bottom of any kind of factual discourse. According to Russell, 'in every proposition we can apprehend [...] all the constituents are really [i.e., ultimately] entities with which we have immediate acquaintance' (1905, 492). Later, in 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description', Russell mentioned the brown colour of his desk. To *see* the colour is already to have full knowledge of it, without anything else being required or even possible (Russell 1923, 73–74). As Wittgenstein described such views: '*Knowing* is here like having; having in yourself' (CE 1993: 418).

This is a topic of criticism that runs through much of Wittgenstein's work (Z 1967: § 332, RPP 1980: I § 644). For Wittgenstein, knowledge is not an experience constituted by a kind of presence, but an achievement in the context of an inquiry. It is associated with finding out and making sure (OC 1969 §§ 18, 23). Wittgenstein's well-known resistance to saying that I know my own mental states (e.g., concerning pain – OC 1969: §§ 41, 504) is similarly rooted in the requirement that talk about knowledge should be situated in an investigative context. 'One says "I know" where one can also say "I believe" or "I suspect"; where one can find out' (PI 1953: II p. 221). To be sure, it would not be right to say that Wittgenstein proposed a certain *definition of* knowledge – e.g., that we truly know something only when also doubt would be possible (cf. OC 1969: § 121). Wittgenstein's typical approach was not to advance definitions, but to demonstrate how the meaning of a word would change along with the context of its use. When the context of 'finding out' grows thin, the word 'knowledge' no longer has its usual connotations (see Glock 1996, 77–78). This is the exact opposite of Moore and Russell. For them, the *best* possible case of knowledge was one that Wittgenstein at best considered a dubious limiting case: one where no 'finding out' was required or even possible.

The rejection of Moore's analysis of knowledge is central to what, according to Michael Williams, constitutes Wittgenstein's 'refutation of idealism'. However, the target of Wittgenstein's criticism in *On Certainty* is not so much 'idealism' or scepticism as Moore's inadequate response to it. Moreover – although Williams does not say this – the epistemological position that Wittgenstein has diagnosed as the root cause of external-world scepticism is not proper to idealism but to *realism*.

The 'Linguistic Idealism' Debate: Essences

Wittgenstein's response to Moore's sceptic ('idealist') employs the concept of a language-game:

> The idealist's question would be something like: 'What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?' (And to that the answer can't be: I *know* that they exist.) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and don't understand this straight off (OC 1969: § 24).

Curiously enough, Wittgenstein's response to the sceptic or 'idealist' is exactly what, in the eyes of his critics and of some followers, exposes him to the charge of espousing 'linguistic idealism'.

G.E.M. Anscombe's essay, 'The Question of Linguistic Idealism' (Anscombe 1981, 112–133) takes issue with a worry that she sees emerging from Wittgenstein's treatment of language-games. If doubt only makes sense in the context of a language-game, doesn't that imply that language-games themselves are excluded from doubt; that one cannot check their adequacy by means of comparisons with reality? Anscombe undertakes both to defend and to correct Wittgenstein. As to what Wittgenstein's position really was, she is somewhat ambiguous, but on the whole she believes he has managed to 'steer in the narrow channel here: to avoid the falsehoods of idealism and the stupidities of empiricist realism' (1981, 115).[7]

[7] Dilman (2002, 57–58, 77) adopts the same imagery of sailing through a narrow channel.

Taking up Wittgenstein's remark, '*Essence* is expressed by grammar' (PI 1953: I § 371), Anscombe states (1981, 112), 'what I mean by "linguistic idealism" would go further and say "Essence is *created* by grammar".' This definition of linguistic idealism leads Anscombe to her first 'test' question (1981, 116): Considering some specific truth claim, we should ask, 'Does this existence, this truth, depend upon human linguistic practice?' As she puts it, 'What we want to be assured of is that [what our concepts pick out] actually exists and is not a mere projection of the forms of our thinking upon reality' (113). Would there have been horses in the world even if human beings had never developed the concept of a horse? On that question, she is unhesitating:

> [I]f there had never been humans around talking about horses, that is not the slightest reason to say there wouldn't have been horses. These essences, then, which are expressed by grammar, are not created by grammar. It must be a misunderstanding of 'essence' to think otherwise: to think, for example, that though there doubtless would have been horses, the essence expressed by 'horse' would not have existed but for human language and thought (Anscombe 1981, 114).

Anscombe's question reproduces the Realist contrast between how things are in themselves and how the mind presents them.[8] Of course, once the contrast is put in that way, it stands to reason that things are not just creations of the mind. 'Horses and giraffes, colours and shapes – the existence of these is not such a product, either in fact or in Wittgenstein' (Anscombe 1981, 121). In the same vein, Dilman finds it necessary to assure, in contrast with what 'the linguistic idealist comes perilously near to denying', that 'there were rocks, mountains and dinosaurs before there was human language' (Dilman 2002, 39). – However, framing the question in terms the existence of specific *things*, and in terms of 'before' and 'after', diverts it from the original concern that gives rise to it.[9] The original question is: What are the conditions – *now* – for applying specific concepts? How are those concepts related to human activities and interests? It is perfectly possible to say, for instance, that the concept of

[8] The question of reality and the mind is related to Wittgenstein's intriguing remark in PI 1953: II vii, 184: 'The evolution of the higher animals and man, and the awakening of consciousness at a particular level. The picture is something like this: Though the ether is filled with vibrations the world is dark. But one day man opens his seeing eye, and there is light.' Wittgenstein sees the use of this picture as harmful.

[9] Cf. David Cockburn's discussion of Peter Winch's statement that "order is indeed a product of the activity of human beings" (referring to Peter Winch (1989), *Simone Weil: "The Just Balance"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 33). Cockburn (2013, 305) claims the remark might suggest that 'before the emergence of human beings there was no order in the world'. However, he then aptly observes: 'Part of the difficulty here may arise from the tendency to think of the issues [...] in *temporal* terms' (Cockburn 2013, 307).

material object must be understood in the context of certain activities and interests, without implying that no material object was in existence until that context was present.

Anscombe's question, to be sure, was not only whether things existed, but whether their *essences* existed independently of human language. She wanted to say that the word 'horse' does not simply pick out a piece of reality in an arbitrary cookie-cutter fashion, but that it *rightly* designates a natural kind or essence. Anscombe's use of the word 'essence' is different from Wittgenstein's. She treats 'essences' as entities that *either* predate human language (to be picked up by it) *or*, as Anscombe's linguistic idealist would have it, are made to *exist* through linguistic practices. But it seems to me that Wittgenstein is consciously avoiding this contrast. He just thinks of 'essence' (*Wesen*) as whatever is essential, central or important (*wesentlich*) about a thing we are considering; what is essential about it in a given context of discussion and inquiry. Grammar expresses essence because, *in* using a word the way we do, we specify *the concept we are using*.

This is more conspicuous if we consider psychological concepts, the original context of Wittgenstein's remark. Anscombe's second example is about this: the grammar of sensation language (Anscombe 1981, 113). Reports and ascriptions of sensation involve first/second/third person asymmetries. Anscombe asks whether the asymmetries are created by grammar or are a real feature of sensations, picked up by grammar. She supports the latter alternative, even though she acknowledges that a different sensation-language might be theoretically possible (Anscombe 1981, 115). But Wittgenstein's point simply seems to be: The game *is* played by these rules. Anscombe in fact has embraced exactly the position that Wittgenstein, in 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"' (ca. 1934-36), identifies as a problem and a temptation:

> The difficulty is that we feel that we have said something about the nature of pain when we say that one person can't have another person's pain. [...] So we speak for example of an asymmetry in our mode of expression and we look on it as a mirror image of the essence of the things (LPE 1993: 208–209; cf. PI 1953: I §§ 654, 655).

Wittgenstein clarifies his use of 'essence' in PI 1953: I § 373 with the parenthesis, '(Theology as grammar)'. Theology spells out what kind of a thing we talk about when we talk of God. This is explained further elsewhere (CV 1980: 82e):

> God's essence [*Wesen*] is supposed to guarantee his existence – what this really means is that what is here at issue is not the existence of something.
>
> Couldn't one actually say equally well that the essence of colour guarantees its existence? As opposed, say, to white elephants. Because all that really means: I cannot explain what 'colour' is, what the word "colour" means, except with the help of a colour sample. So in this case there is no such thing as explaining 'what it *would* be like if colours *were* to exist'.

The grammar of 'God' – albeit difficult to survey and indeterminate on many points – is different from the grammar of 'the gods on Olympus'. One can tell a story of how the Olympian gods came to existence (as in Hesiod) and imagine what it would be like for them (not) to exist, but nothing similar can be done with the monotheistic God. Nietzsche's 'God is dead' creates a sense of paradox because the monotheistic God must be imagined as eternal. If God can't be dead, does then grammar guarantee that God *exists*? Wittgenstein indicates that the question of existence – of "God" as well as of "sensation", "colour" or "physical object" (cf. OC 1969: § 36) – is out of place, or at any rate not a question for philosophy.

'Empiricist realism' and 'idealism', at least for Anscombe, are ontological positions. The idea that Wittgenstein steers a middle course between the 'stupidities' of the one and the 'falsehoods' of the other unfortunately invites the worry that he found a middle position that involves *both* stupidity *and* falsehood. It seems more to the point to say that he did not engage in ontology at all. Wittgenstein's use of 'essence' is an expression of his idea of philosophy as a descriptive enterprise.

'Facts' to the Rescue?

For Anscombe, Wittgenstein's contention that we should simply describe language-games invites a further worry – what she calls 'another way of raising the question of a sort of idealism' (Anscombe 1981, 124). Anscombe treats 'language-games', 'practices', 'world pictures' and 'knowledge systems' as closely related if not synonymous. She is aware that language, for Wittgenstein, is always interwoven with other activities (Anscombe 1981, 117; see also Bloor 2017, 334); her question is whether Wittgenstein expects the practices of a language-game as a whole to be self-contained. Does Wittgenstein, she asks, imply that we are not qualified to judge the correctness of reality claims when they belong to practices and

world-views that are not our own (say, of ‘witch-doctoring’, Anscombe 1981, 125)? The second part of Anscombe’s essay addresses this question. If two language-games or world-views are incommensurable, they cannot be compared against a common standard of correctness. But then, ‘has one to be “moving within the system” to call anything error?’ (Anscombe 1981, 130–131)

Citing OC 1969: § 611, however, Anscombe quickly concludes that Wittgenstein’s examples are not cases of incommensurability or cultural relativism. In that paragraph, Wittgenstein says he envisages a conflict between ‘two principles which *really meet* and can’t be reconciled’ (Anscombe 1981, 131, italics added). Anscombe appears to regret that Wittgenstein did not make clear enough where he stands on this issue: ‘isn’t it as if Wittgenstein were saying: there isn’t a right or wrong – but only the conflict, or persuasion, or decision?’ (Anscombe 1981, 132)

Anscombe resists saddling Wittgenstein with that sort of quietism. She wants to show that language-games, for Wittgenstein, neither restrict knowledge to what is possible ‘within the system’ nor guarantee knowledge in those contexts. Her core argument is that language-games are ultimately responsive to *facts* (Anscombe 1981, 133). She seizes on a remark by Wittgenstein concerning ‘the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature’ (Wittgenstein, PI 1953: II xii, 230). Language-games are not immune to facts, because for Wittgenstein, ‘It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something’ (OC § 505, quoted in Anscombe 1981, 133).

Anscombe takes up the example Wittgenstein considers here, the language-game of calling people by their names. It is inherent in the system that people generally know what *they* are called. Wittgenstein floats the idea that he might one day suddenly ‘wake up’ and realise his name was not Ludwig Wittgenstein after all (OC 1969: § 642). For him personally, it would raise the question whether he can rely on his sanity at all. This single occurrence would not jeopardise the language-game as a whole, but the game does presuppose that *most* people are not deluded about their names (OC 1969: § 628). Otherwise, ‘if that always or often happened it would completely alter the character of the language-game’ (OC 1969: § 646). ‘With that observation’, Anscombe declares, ‘this particular battle has been fought out’ (1981, 133).

> [T]he ‘language-game’ of assertion, which for speaking humans is so important a part of the whole business of knowing and being certain, depends for its character on a “general fact of nature”, namely that that sequence of phenomena is rare (Anscombe 1981, 133).

Malcolm presents a rather similar discussion of Wittgenstein’s example (Malcolm 1982, 263–267). Language-games presuppose that certain mistakes are out of the question. If I am confused about something as basic as my name, that would not count as a mistake but as something else: as *inability* fully to engage in the practice. As a participant of the language-game, I am ‘*entitled* to say, with confidence, “I know that so-and-so”, I can’t be mistaken’. Malcolm grants this but points out that I am not guaranteed to be *right*. In the end, ‘reality, the facts, may give one a surprise’ (Malcolm 1982, 267).

A complication here might be that language-games connected with people’s names are not about language-independent facts, but about social practices – and you cannot think that facts about people’s names are *independent* of the practices of using those names. However, for Wittgenstein’s purposes, the difference does not appear to be crucial. He is considering the general possibility that some unexpected discovery might ‘[throw him] completely off the rails’, the possibility of ‘[e]vidence that made the most certain thing unacceptable to [him]’ (OC 1969: § 517). Malcolm offers a further quote from *On Certainty* as evidence of this ‘anti-idealistic feature of Wittgenstein’s thinking’:

> Now does that mean: ‘I can only make judgments at all because things behave thus and thus (as it were, behave kindly)’? (OC 1969: § 615)

Wittgenstein continues,

> Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any more. In which I was torn away from the *sureness* of the game. Indeed, isn’t it obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts? (OC 1969: § 617)

Is the possibility of a language-game conditioned by certain facts? Malcolm replaces Wittgenstein’s question with a definite Yes. As Malcolm puts it,

> We move about in our language-games with confidence. We name things, report events, give descriptions. In an overwhelming number of cases we are entirely free from any doubt about what to say. [...] But this ease and confidence in speech and action is possible only because the world and life go on in regular ways – because, as it were, things 'behave kindly' […]. *This conception is surely contrary to idealism*. If the logical possibility of language, and therefore of thought and judgment, depends on regularities in the world and life, then it cannot be that reality is created by language, thought, judgment (Malcolm 1982, 266).

The general idea for both Anscombe and Malcolm is that something extra-linguistic – a new fact – might cut through the language-game and make it obsolete. As Cerbone (2011, 330) puts it,

> Wittgenstein's appeal here [Z 1967: § 352] to *facts* as motivating the formation of new concepts tells against the kind of confinement Nagel [1986] sees him as endorsing. [...] [N]ew facts may be learned (not created, stipulated, or 'imposed' by the mind) that sometimes push and prod us to alter how we think about the world, even at the basic level of our conceptual repertoire.

The argument from 'general facts of nature' involves two related ideas that Wittgenstein quite certainly held: (1) Language-games are not invulnerable, because new discoveries might render them obsolete; (2) Language-games can be different for communities living in different circumstances, hence the rules of specific games are not necessary expressions of immutable, transcendental conditions of thought.[10]

However, it is actually difficult to see why either of these observations would contradict idealist metaphysics – apart from the fact that Wittgenstein never claimed they did. Like Moore's two hands, new facts would presumably be incorporated among the things already

[10] A strange feature of the debate here is that Cerbone and Anscombe seem to cite opposite reasons for dismissing suggestions of idealist leanings in Wittgenstein. For Anscombe, the fact (if it is a fact) that Wittgenstein *did not* envisage the possibility of radically incommensurable language-games shows that Wittgenstein was not an idealist, because it counts against the idea that concepts are freely imposed on reality. For Cerbone, the fact (if it is a fact) that Wittgenstein *did* entertain the possibility of radically incommensurable language-games shows that he did not believe in transcendental conditions of cognition – and hence, that he was not a transcendental idealist.

embraced by the mind. Moore looked for physical objects and found his hands. But the idealist project was not about asserting or denying the existence of any particular object, but about understanding the role of formal concepts like ‘physical object’ as thinking tools. As to the implications of conceptual variation and change, many idealists (such as Hegel) actually emphasise that the mind undergoes historical development.

One might suggest that any language-game would presuppose at least one very general fact of nature, namely, the uniformity of natural processes. Consider Wittgenstein’s thought experiment, the language-game of selling cheese by the weight. Now suppose pieces of cheese were to expand and shrink unpredictably (PI 1953: I § 142). The game of weighing cheese would lose its point. However – although Wittgenstein does not say it here – we would quite likely not throw in the towel but look for *hidden* regularities in the process. As in the case of other presumed causal influences, ‘we should look frantically for a difference’ between different pieces of cheese (cf. CE 1993, 411). The phenomenon might in the end remain unexplained, but it would be treated within a larger scheme of things that presupposes uniformity.

But is natural uniformity a *fact*? Not, in any case, anything similar to the fact that people know their names, but rather the framework for identifying facts (cf. TLP 1922: 6.34, 6.35, 6.36). The concept of regularity is itself internal to the method of investigation. Wittgenstein points out (PI 1953: I § 242) that ‘what we call “measuring” is partly determined by a certain constancy in measurement’, but he intends the internal relation to cut both ways: we define ‘constancy’ with reference to the methods in use (cf. PI 1953: II xi, 225, RPP 1980: I § 632, RFM 1967: I § 155).[11] – In sum, As İlham Dilman puts it,

> [W]hat Hume was drawing our attention to when he spoke about ‘the resemblance betwixt the future and the past’ or ‘the uniformity of nature’ is not, as he thought, *a very general fact* about the nature of the universe. [...] No, what it characterizes is our

[11] Anscombe’s translation of PI 1953: I § 242 starts with: ‘If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but (queer as it sounds) in judgments’. The conjunction ‘if’ makes it look as if agreement was a condition of a further thing, communication. But the idea in the original German is almost the exact opposite: ‘Zur Verständigung durch die Sprache gehört ...’. There are not two things, the propositional content (‘Gedanke’) on the one hand, and assent on the other. This is what might ‘seem[] to abolish logic’; and it *would* presumably abolish the kind of analysis that Frege and Russell had been developing.

> mode of procedure when we make inductive inferences, whether in thought, speech or action (Dilman 2002, 66).

Suppose then the ‘cheese counter’ scenario is radicalised. If *no* object had a stable weight at all, the very idea of determining the weight of something would be meaningless; in fact there would be no such thing as weight as we know it (see Hertzberg 2011, 355). Physics would need other ways to deal with the properties of natural objects and to bring them within ‘uniformity’. Now suppose further radicalisation, so that no uniformities are found in nature *at all*. The problem here is that, with that further move, it is increasingly unclear whether a scenario *has* been described (cf. TLP 1922: 6.361, 6.362). Nothing stays put, but somehow presumably *we* are still around, developing new ways to speak, think and act. Probably because of such considerations, Wittgenstein’s comments on possible radically new scenarios are extremely tentative.

Malcolm and Anscombe’s prime example from Wittgenstein concerned the practice of calling people by their names. In those passages, however, Wittgenstein did not focus on the general possibility of upholding a language game in the face of unexpected developments. The focus was on *his* chances of participating in the language game. And he qualifies the suggested conclusion (OC 1969: § 616):

> Why, would it be *unthinkable* that I should stay in the saddle however much the facts bucked?

Wittgenstein then asks his general question about regularity in nature. Now he is even more hesitant about the role of facts (OC 1969: §§ 618–619):

> Then can one say that only a certain regularity in occurrences makes induction possible? The ‘possible’ would of course have to be ‘*logically possible*’.
>
> Am I to say: even if an irregularity in natural events did suddenly occur, that wouldn’t *have* to throw me out of the saddle. I might make inferences then just as before, but whether one would call that ‘induction’ is another question.

Irregularities would not immediately disqualify the language-game of induction, because they could be treated as yet unexplained instances of *other* regularities. The language-game is a way both to identify facts (say, as counter-instances to a presumed regularity) and to come to terms with them (as instances of an unexplored regularity). As Lars Hertzberg puts it, 'what [Wittgenstein] has in mind is an internal relation between the concepts and the life in which they have a place'.

> The idea that we could adjudicate the meaningfulness of a range of concepts by asking whether they correspond to certain facts of nature, it might be said, rests on too simple an idea of what that correspondence might consist in. [...] We need to get clear about the *different* things it may mean for our concepts to correspond to the facts (Hertzberg 2011, 353, italics added).

Wittgenstein did not think of facts as something knocking at the door of the language-game, waiting to justify or refute it. An appeal to direct awareness of facts would involve a relapse to Moore's 'realist' view on knowledge, the view to which Wittgenstein was vehemently opposed.

Language-games in conflict

Going back to Anscombe's worry about radically incompatible language-games. One trouble here is that we cannot settle the question of relativism straight off by appealing to facts, as in the case she presented as Wittgenstein's final answer. If Wittgenstein is merely confused about his name, the facts might one day show him precisely that – namely, that he, Wittgenstein, has lost his footing in a language-game he was playing *together with members of his community*. It would remain for Wittgenstein just to come back to his senses. However, in the cases that invite the question of relativism it is unclear whether there *is* a shared pool of facts for reference. From the '70s and '80s onwards, worries of this kind fed into a debate on 'rationality and relativism' in the social sciences (see Gunnell 2016).

We can bring Anscombe's question to focus via one of her examples from Wittgenstein (Anscombe 1981, 128–130). It is implicit in historical research that the Earth has existed for a very long time. Wittgenstein now imagines a king brought up in the belief that the world was created the moment he was born, presumably complete with fake memories and historical records (OC 1969: § 92). The King is a stylised version of Moore's 'idealist'. Historical

records would convince him just as little as Moore's hands convince the 'idealist', for he can make out any empirical observation to fit his belief. It only appears possible to convince the King through a kind of 'conversion'. Anscombe's question is whether Wittgenstein would acknowledge a rational way to show that the historian is right and the King is wrong.

So the situation is this: There is Reality on the one hand, and the two language-games on the other. Language-games are different ways of relating to Reality. *They* will be treating the question how to do it as already *settled*, each in their own way. Anscombe looks for a way out of this impasse. She wants 'facts of nature' to cut through the King's language-game and wake him to the realisation that he has been confused.

It is important to see that, the way she sets up the problem, *Anscombe* is already adhering to a picture of language that is 'idealist' in a bad sense (but implicit in the 'realist' approach). Language-games are self-contained activities with words; so the question is how those words connect with Reality (see also Ahlskog & Lagerspetz 2015, 312). A central part of the picture is that language-games themselves are *not* part of Reality. And vice versa: Reality is not part of the language-game. Is it logically possible for any fact or argument to penetrate this wall of self-confinement? If the question whether Wittgenstein was a linguistic idealist is to take hold, one must establish that this is an adequate interpretation of the challenge he was facing. But it clearly isn't. The point of speaking of language-games was precisely to highlight language, not as something opposed to reality, but as an aspect of the worldly activities where agents engage each other and the environment.

So what we need to know about the King is how this language-game connects with the rest of his life and the lives of those around him – a question Wittgenstein does not pursue with this example. Will the King's parents be around, or are they killed or imprisoned? If we imagine that the language-game has the monopoly in the King's court, one consequence appears to be that there will be no historians there. In their official duties, diplomats in the King's service will not refer to treaties signed with other countries before he was born. Another possibility is that two language-games coexist in the King's environment: a ceremonial one and one for daily business. If the King wields real power he will have to be conversant in both. In this latter scenario, 'the King's language-game' should presumably be seen in analogy with religious language-games.

So the question is: What is the general position of this language-game in the affairs of the country? Now ‘the facts’ would not have the kind of role Anscombe was imagining. The relevant facts would rather be ones about the divine role of the King and conceptions of political legitimacy – including of course how these things are talked about. It would be difficult to think of some simple empirical observation cutting through the language-game and making it obsolete; but we can think of social developments (such as modernisation, popular revolt or colonial intrusion) that might do so. The King himself might come to see the language-game as repulsive, because of what it implies about his relations with his family and friends.[12]

Wittgenstein’s Questioning Approach to Knowledge

Wittgenstein’s resistance to the realist approach in philosophy has a close connection with his approach to linguistic meaning. When Wittgenstein remarks that ‘a doubt about existence only works in a language-game’ (OC 1969, § 24; see also § 458), he is pointing out that doubt belongs to some investigative context. Simply to put together a sentence that *might* express doubt *if* a context was provided is not yet to express doubt. You must be prepared to explain why you doubt – i.e., *what* kind of doubt you have in mind. The corresponding point applies to knowledge: ‘the concept of knowing is coupled with that of the language-game’ (OC 1969: § 560). The meaning of a knowledge claim (or its lack thereof) depends on the context in which it is advanced (see OC 1969: §§ 347–350, 393, 484, 533, 622). Wittgenstein tends, in *On Certainty*, to focus not on what we can rightly claim to know, but on the ways ‘knowledge’, ‘certainty’ and ‘doubt’ figure in our inquiries (OC 1969: §§ 103, 105, 125, 197–200, 249, 318, 329, 341, 401, 410, etc.).

If the function and validity of one’s knowledge claims change along with the various forms of inquiry that correspond to them, it also follows that it would be impossible once and for all to produce a list of the things one knows (see OC 1969: §§ 6, 488). The reason is not that the list would be very long. Rather, it is because there is no such stable thing as ‘all the things I know’ regardless of how the *questions* arise for me. This undermines Moore’s and Russell’s

[12] As a case in point, see the memoirs of Pu Yi ([1967] 2010), the last emperor of China, who had been brought up to think of himself as divine. After re-education, he saw that his obsession with his divinity had made him a willing tool in the hands of the Japanese occupation, driving him to complicity in war crimes. It had also blocked him off from ordinary moral relations with others, including his family.

overall conception of philosophy as the pursuit of a general description of everything we know to exist.

At the same time, it appears to me that Wittgenstein does not fully connect the dots in *On Certainty*. Consider this striking passage:

> My difficulty can also be shewn like this: I am sitting talking to a friend. Suddenly I say: "I knew all along that you were so-and-so." Is that really just a superfluous, though true, remark? I feel as if these words were like "Good morning" said to someone in the middle of a conversation (OC 1969: § 464).

Here and elsewhere (OC 1969: §§ 348, 350, 467–469), Wittgenstein is inclined to say that the meaning of an utterance is *indeterminate* until we have an intelligible context for it. Nevertheless, he indicates that there is still a 'difficulty'. It is that, with this example, 'it seems to [him] that [he has] known something the whole time, and yet there is no meaning in saying so, in uttering this truth' (OC 1969: § 466; cf. §§ 397, 423, 544, 552). Two days after writing this (5 April 1951), Wittgenstein complains: 'Here there is still a big gap in my thinking. And I doubt whether it will be filled now' (OC 1969, inserted before § 471).

In order to fill the 'gap', one should perhaps spell out the connection between Wittgenstein's critique of realist ideas and his view on language. The apparent paradox in § 466 seems to depend on lingering traces of a realist notion of 'truth'. Truth is presented as something that simply *is there*, as if waiting on a shelf, to be exhibited at leisure. But if truth is a quality of something that is said, and *what is said* can only be specified in a context, a sentence taken out of context does not express a truth of any kind – not even a 'superfluous' one. (What obscures this point is the fact that, when we hear a random sentence, we tend almost automatically to fill in a context where it *would* make sense.)

At this juncture, I find it useful to compare Wittgenstein with R.G. Collingwood, who is quite explicit about the connections between his critique of metaphysical realism and his analysis of linguistic meaning. Collingwood (1889–1943) and Wittgenstein were contemporaries, and their approaches are at times very similar. Today, Collingwood is mostly noted for his work on the philosophy of history ([1946] 1993). What is less commonly known is that he saw it as

an application of his general take on truth and meaning, the full exposition of which was cut short by his early death.

The most original aspect of Collingwood's philosophical approach was his attempt to address truth in terms of 'a logic of question and answer' ([1939] 1978, 37). It marks a departure from traditional views. The individual proposition was typically seen as the bearer of meaning and truth or falsity. However, truth on Collingwood's view, –

> was something that belonged not to any single proposition, nor even, as the coherence-theorists maintained, to a complex of propositions taken together; but to a complex consisting of questions and answers (Collingwood [1939] 1978, 37).

Collingwood invited his readers to think of truth claims as *answers to questions*, explicit or implicit. To identify the meaning of someone's utterance is to identify the question that the utterer wanted to answer. At the same time, the questions, too, must be ones that 'arise' or might plausibly do so in the context; we may legitimately refuse to answer a question that 'doesn't arise'. An utterance gives us knowledge because it is appropriate in an investigative context.

By situating knowledge in a context of questions and answers, Collingwood develops a critique of realism. Knowledge, for the Realists, had consisted of a state of 'compresence with, or apprehension of, something' (Collingwood [1939] 1978, 26). Collingwood was obviously thinking of Moore's examples of immediate knowledge:

> What all these 'realists' were saying, I thought, was that the condition of a knowing mind is not indeed a passive condition, for it is actively engaged in knowing; but a 'simple' condition, one in which there are no complexities or diversities, nothing except just the knowing. [...] This doctrine, which was rendered plausible by choosing examples of knowledge statements like 'this is a red rose', 'my hand is resting on the table', where familiarity with the mental operations involved has bred not so much contempt as oblivion, was quite incompatible with what I had learned in my 'laboratory' of historical thought (Collingwood [1939] 1978, 25–26).

‘My hand is resting on the table’ here belongs to a typical seminar-like situation. Moore looks at his hand and *tells himself* he knows it is resting on the table. But he has not explained how that would be a response to a question that arises. The meaning, and hence the truth value, of Moore’s assertion is indeterminate.

Wittgenstein, Realism and Idealism

Realism, at least for Moore and Russell, relied heavily on the idea of immediate knowledge. The general possibility of knowledge would be secured if some facts could be established directly, once and for all regardless of how they connect to specific inquiries. Wittgenstein consistently rejected that idea, both in *On Certainty* and earlier.

Wittgenstein saw realist ideas as confused and mostly irrelevant, while his relation to idealism was more complex. He differed from the Idealists on many points, one being the rejection of system-building ambitions in his later work. Nevertheless, in a crucial respect, his aims with philosophy were closer to theirs than to those of the Realists. Realists formulated the task of philosophy as one of determining what kinds of thing really exist. Wittgenstein wanted to sidestep that question entirely and instead to reflect on what it *means* to make knowledge claims. Not unlike Idealists after Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’, Wittgenstein rejected ontology as a form of inquiry and focused on describing the different ways in which we relate to reality. Wittgenstein’s immediate students downplayed these affinities because, like Moore and Russell, they identified idealism with an ontological position rather than with an approach to epistemology. The subsequent debate on language-games and facts has sometimes involved partial relapse to the realist positions that Wittgenstein rejected.[13]

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