



## LANGUAGE AND LIFE WORLD: WITTGENSTEINIAN & HEIDEGGERIAN PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

The historical impact of the convergence between Wittgenstein and Heidegger has contributed to bridging the gaps between analytic traditions on the one hand and continental tradition on the other. The paper is an attempt to develop a comparative study of the two philosophers and their contribution in the said aspects, restricting primarily to their philosophisation of language and life world. Can there be a shared concern for certain limitations of the analytical trend in philosophy in general and of philosophy of language that needs revision in the context of practical concerns for the life-world? The article makes an attempt at exploring this possible link in the two despite differences in many other areas.

**Keywords:** Language, Life World

### INTRODUCTION

The problems faced by both the traditional analytic philosophy in general and the logical positivist group of the Vienna Circle is similar to some extent that they can not but adopt a critical attitude towards metaphysical problems which some such so called pseudo problems that are akin to philosophical puzzles, if one wants to name it that way. This is bound to be paradoxical because it represented a negation of critical philosophy's own claims to meaning and truth (Marianna .P: 1999: 123). The generally accepted traditional problem of consciousness in modern philosophy marked by Descartes was the certainty of my inner experience only and hence the only genuine object of my consciousness is the belief in my own act of perceiving something here and there, irrespective of the fact that things and persons do really exist in the external world, out-there. This way of philosophizing ultimately end with the observation that everything I take to be real could be something which appears only in my consciousness, or in the word of Descartes, only in my dream. From this standpoint, the question of certainty of the subjective statement like 'I am in pain', does not arise at all because what I think of x is nothing but the special representation of x that I have in my inner experience. That amounts to the same thing that in order to know that x exists, all we have to do is a simple act of assuming that x surely exists as such just because of the subjectively private certainty of my inner experience in this regard. This also leads to the denial of public and rule governed dimension of our languages, that one is not bound up with a publicly controllable rule-following procedure while communicating with others.



This kind of certainty of pain sensations or of a reflective thinking only in term of one's own inner experience is definitely linked up with the prospect of an inner-private realm and its inner private language. The post-Cartesian indubitable certainty of inner experience continued to exist because the distinction between the terms like doing and thinking, being and appearance, were highly suspended. Even a great philosopher of Kant's stature could not come out of this dichotomy finally ending up with a dichotomy centering round the philosophy of appearance and reality. Kant tried to refute the primacy accorded to 'inner experience' and accordingly to 'subjective idealism' but remain caught in the transcendental idealism of consciousness (P.Strawson: 1966). The Kantian line could not bridge the unknowable but still thinkable things in themselves and their appearance in the public world. This was the general line of thought carried over till the pre-Wittgenstein and pre-Heideggerian paradigm (ibid: 1999: 125).

## **WITTGENSTEIN, LANGUAGE –GAME AND THE FORM OF LIFE**

According to Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as private ideas that could be understood in term of a private language. Infact such a language is unthinkable. If we assume the existence of such private language then there should be, according to Wittgenstein, something like my inner-private 'dictionary', which would exist only in my mind. Then it would follow that justification of correctness to say that x exists, will be based only on my consciousness independent of anything external to it. That means justification of true or false, right or wrong depends only on my mind for there would be no distinction between 'following the rules' and 'thinking one is following the rule'. As Wittgenstein says, if I would have to decide about the question of 'whether I have correctly noted the departure time of a train', only by remembering an image of the page of the timetable, and not by testing this memory image with reference to a publicly accessible timetable, then I will rely on a private language understandable only to me as per a private dictionary used by me.

In his latter work on 'language game', Wittgenstein lay out precisely the impossibility of a private language since all language, according to him, is rule governed and a solitary individual cannot follow a rule. What is denied here is the emphasis on purely subjective certainty of my solitary voice and its claim about the reality of an object based on my private but intense awareness of it without according any kind of inter-subjectivist knowledge of the external world into that realm of experience. Wittgenstein submits that our knowledge claims are bound up with the assumption of some kind of publicly shared language which is ruled out in private ideas and private language. Wittgenstein's later thoughts are basically centered on his concept of language game and he tries to explain every act of communication in terms of a language-game, which ultimately represents a 'form of life'. For Wittgenstein, to speak a language is to participate in a form of life. Hence, all such acts of learning a language, articulating and thereby sharing one's ideas and others take place only in the context of a form of life. To quote A.C.Grayling: "Coming to share a form of life consists in being trained to share it; such training obviously has to take place in public, for otherwise it is not training in the sharing of the form of life which gives meaning to language." (A.C.Grayling: 2002:86). For Wittgenstein, a "form of life" is the ground upon which our actions prevail. It is the ultimate substratum that supports a particular way of acting or performing. For Wittgenstein a form of life is the final point and is beyond explanations and arguments. It is the ground upon which every argument is based. Forms of life form the common



ground between two different individuals or communities who share the same mode of life. Forms of life can be considered as a wider notion when compared to the notion of language-game. A.C. Grayling summarizes what Wittgenstein meant by a “form of life” in the following manner:

“ It is the underlying consensus of linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, assumptions, practices, traditions, and natural propensities which humans, as social beings, share with one another, and which is therefore presupposed in the language they use; language is woven into that pattern of human activity and character, and meaning is conferred on its expressions by the shared outlook and nature of its users. (Ibid: 2002:84)

A key notion in Wittgenstein's conception of language game is that language has multiple functions to perform besides simply mirroring the facts as noted in his *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein claims that this incorrect picture of language, as shown in the *Tractatus*, is produced by “grammatical illusions”. Wittgenstein's latter pragmatic attitude towards language made him disown his earlier approach to language and the assumption that all language contains logical skeleton saying that this kind of pure academic exercise resulted in conceptual clarity for sure but it made thought divorced of experience.

It was the result of thought but not of observation. It was simply held that all language is alike as it shares some common essence. Wittgenstein uncovered this flaw in his later work by noticing the way in which games differ from each other with respect to their rules and the way in which they are played although they are all games. The remarkable shift in Wittgenstein's attitude towards language is noticed from his statement “don't think, but look.” (Wittgenstein: 1953). Words, according to Wittgenstein, are not to be understood by looking for some associated idea in the mind, or by following some producers of verification, or even by looking at the object for which they stand, rather, we should think of words in terms of their uses, and referring to objects in the world is only one of many uses that words have. This statement of Wittgenstein clearly brings out that the various functions of language are revealed by our use of language in our form of life. Thus, the meaning of a word is given in its use and the various families of uses that a group of words has constituted a language game. Example includes the language game we play in describing our own sensations, or the language game we play in identifying the cause of events. Such conception of language leads Wittgenstein to the rejection of the conception that the task of philosophical analyses is either reductionism or foundationalism. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that language games either have or need a foundation in something else, and he rejects the idea that certain language games can be reduced to certain other kinds of language games. The effect, Wittgenstein says, of philosophical analysis is not to alter our existing linguistic practices or to challenge their validity; but to simply describe them. Language has neither, nor needs a foundation in the traditional sense.

Wittgenstein remains the single most influential philosopher of the twentieth century and Prior to Austin, the attention of linguistic and analytic philosophers had been directed almost exclusively to statements, assertions, and propositions — to linguistic acts that (at least in theory) have truth-value. This led to problems when analyzing certain types of statements, for example in determining the truth conditions for such statements as “I promise to do so-and-so.” Austin pointed out that we use language to *do* things as well as to *assert* things, and that the utterance of



a statement like "I promise to do so-and-so" is best understood as *doing* something — *making a promise* — rather than making an assertion about anything. Hence the name of one of his best-known works: "How to do Things with Words". Austin's theory of speech acts was suspicious of both the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, and the distinction between evaluative and descriptive utterance. One of the great merits of Austin's theory of speech acts is that it enabled subsequent philosophers to construct the philosophy of language as a branch of the philosophy of action.

Wittgenstein observed that many philosophically puzzling concepts do not have a central core or essence of meaning, but a variety of different *uses* united only by a 'family resemblance'. Wittgenstein attempted to undermine the idea that philosophy is a foundational enterprise. Many other philosophers would say that conceptual analysis is still an essential part of the philosophical enterprise, as indeed it has been since the time of Socratic and Platonic emphasis on *Dialogue*, but it is no longer seen to be the whole of the enterprise. Philosophy is now seen by most analytic philosophers as being adjacent to and overlapping with the sciences. Wittgenstein asserts that philosophy is a purely descriptive enterprise that the task of philosophy is neither to reform language nor to try to place the various uses of language on a secure foundation rather philosophical problems are removed by having a correct understanding of how language actually functions. According to Searle, philosophy now tends to be more general than other subjects, more synoptic in its vision, more conceptually or logically oriented than other subjects. The result is that many areas of investigation, which were largely ignored by analytic philosophy, including cognitive science, the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of economics have now become thriving branches of philosophy. To all this achievement, Wittgenstein's conception of language as activity has made a significant contribution in this revolutionary turn in the history of philosophy.

## **HEIDEGGER: THE PRE-GIVEN OR THE PRE-SUPPOSITION**

Heidegger's *Being and Time* was a protest against the idea of philosophy as *theoria*. We have seen how Wittgenstein himself began having doubt about his own early philosophical position about the picture theory of language that also led to radical doubts about the very notions of philosophy as provider of knowledge. Later, the philosopher shifted his position that the detranscendentalised, naturalized conception of philosophy is a form of therapy rather than as the achievement of *theoria*. As Richard Rorty has already shown, there is much similarity in the positions of early Heidegger and the later philosophical phase of Wittgenstein that philosophy is a practical tool or a kind of language related to a form of life. Heidegger's interests too shifted after *Being and Time* and he became more pragmatic and ontologically inclined though retaining his basic phenomenological foundation in its modified form as hermeneutical and ontological. We also find that Heidegger gradually left some of the ontological questions, and retracted criticisms of Kant and others as his style of philosophising became less academic and more impressionist concentrating more with art, truth and language. While there was no ultimate reality for the early Heidegger, beyond what we consciously choose for ourselves, the later Heidegger came to reify language, i.e. make material of what was conceptually abstract. Heidegger speaks of language as a quasi-divinity in which we live and move and have our being, of all previous thought as a limited whole, a tale that had been fully told (Richard: 1991:l: 52). Heidegger tries to distance himself from the limited whole, which he called the 'metaphysics' or the 'west'. For him, "the



mystical became the sense of himself as thinking after the end of metaphysics”- as looking back on metaphysics, seeing it as a limited, rounded-off-whole-and thus as something we might hope to put behind us (Marianna P.1999: 51).

Da-sein for him was linguistically through and through, just as it was social through and through. For Heidegger's, if we try to transcend language by giving a metaphysical turns we become self-deceptive and inauthentic. Heidegger's big point about language is that it is not a medium of communication rather language is first and foremost the "as"-ness of our experience. For Heidegger, words are also contextual; language is not a one-to-one relationship of with beings and things. When we speak together, for instance, we are not shipping meanings from one mind to another. We are instead turning towards the world together, letting the world reveal itself in its as-ness. The "as-ness" of a thing is, Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, totally contextual: a hammer can't be a hammer (for driving nails) without a context that includes nails, lumber, trees, humans as builders, humans as needers of shelter, etc. Further, language is also a "gesture. Language as gesture means that language is not merely a replicate of our inner state but also a way we turn towards the world together. On a smaller scale, Heidegger certainly thinks that language isn't merely how we experience the world, for he rejects the idea that we start out with two poles: the world and our perception. For him the world is what shows itself to us, and it shows itself to us in the as-ness of language. Hence, language is the house of Being because language fundamentally is the as-ness of the world, and to be is to be as something. It's also the floor plan of being, and the wallpaper and matching sofa of being.

Heidegger came to regard language as the ultimate reality. Heidegger has a heroic view of the development of language. Heidegger in fact uses poetry for illustration of his own ideas. He believes that poets are the real philosophers because poets shape language and thus shape being (the way the world presents itself to us). Metaphor came to play a central role. Philosophy traditionally regards non-metaphoric language to be primary, and Heidegger did not deny that reference (ontic explanation) could be useful within a conceptual scheme. He doesn't want to say that poets make stuff up, so he instead has an idea of Being unfolding itself in history. For Heidegger, you can't have a destiny unless history is unfolding. But to escape that scheme (what would be called by Poststructuralists the "prison house of language") we needed to use language more reverently and receptively. Hence Heidegger's interest in the poets, Greek and German. Heidegger claims language is historically shaped, but his own shaping lacks even the sanction of social use. And for many philosophers Heidegger's shaping is a fraud, a play on words, a monstrous etymology that makes only partial sense in German and none at all in translation. Heidegger has many striking turns of phrase, and Poststructuralists have naturally treated him as evidence in their claim that reality is *made* through novel use of language. But the claim is only an assertion, an undemonstrated assertion, and in fact Heidegger has very different objectives. Art may allow Being to come forth, but does not constitute Being as such.

## **LIFE WORLD –THE INTELLECTUAL REVOLUTION**

Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger have made a great contribution to this revolution of re-defining language and human communication in terms of a life world or a form of life. According to Heidegger, we are already in the so-called being-in-the-world and being-with – other, which constitute a pre-structure understanding, of temporality and historicity that



incorporate a pre-established linguistic disclosed and hence a prefigured pre-comprehension of the life-world. However, according to Wittgenstein history can engender and transform language game. Wittgenstein hardly investigates the historical dependence of our thinking upon the tradition of Western philosophy, a tradition which prefers to construct functional models of as many simply language as possible-‘objects of possible comparison’, as he likes to call them- which are supposed to facilitate the description of everyday language usage (Marianna: 1999:129). Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger started from a need to escape from what they both called ‘chatter’ a need for purity, a need to become authentic by ceasing to speak the language of the philosophical tribe within which they had been raised. But while Heidegger remained a humanist continually embodying the philosophical and historical orientation of life, Wittgenstein remained a trained aircraft engineer who does not have much feeling or in other word less humanist.

‘*Everydayness*’ is the common word wherefrom the link between the two great philosophers can be drawn. While Wittgensteinian language game is bound up with an analyses of ‘*everyday*’ activities, expression, interpretation and representation of various life form, Heidegger’s analyses of ‘*everyday*’ understanding is in everyday-being-in-the-world, an analyses drawn from his *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, “our ordinary understanding of the world assumes the form of being-in-the-world and, hence to this extent, uncovers the real being itself” as something ‘in a relationship’ or ‘meaning context’- the ‘roaring car’, the ‘motor car’, and the ‘tapping woodpecker’, not the corresponding noises in consciousness”. (Marianna, 1999:p. 130). This analysis of Heidegger’s already-being-in-the-world could establish a critique of Cartesian position of dream argument and also a critique of Kant’s theory of thing in itself, which is an isolated subject present at hand. The connection between inner and outer, appearance and reality, phenomena and noemata in relation to my consciousness can be rendered intelligible only if there is already a pre-supposition of the primacy of being-in-the-world as being along side eternal entities. Heidegger thereby arrive at the ‘scandal of philosophy’ against which Kant rails as not in the proof of the existence of an external world, but rather that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again. Another important analysis of Heidegger’s being-in-the-world is his being-with that leads to acknowledgement of ‘Other Minds’. Contrary to Husserl, Heidegger’s rejected empathy as empathy for the latter, presupposes wrongly the self-reflective self-understanding of other from the isolated first-person. For Heidegger the other is already in me. Infact for Heidegger’s in-authenticity is the basis of authenticity. Heidegger on the Inauthentic “They” and intersubjectivity claim that: The *Others* are not ones from whom we already have distinguished ourselves: “They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too” (Marianna, 1962, 154).

Heidegger’s formulation of the pre-theoretical constitution of the life-world in term of the possible structural pre-stages of any theoretical use of language is analogous to Wittgensteinian reference to the multiplicity of non-theoretical language games. Science for Heidegger is not purely theoretical at least in principle, as it required collectivize verification. However Heidegger understanding of scientific world fails to bridge the gap with appropriate link of the phenomenon of strictly inter-subjective validity, which requires that scientific statements should be validated through procedures of argumentative discourse. Still less did he appreciate the circumstance that the objectivity which makes the world available to science does not have to lead to a schematizing conception of the worlds as absolute – a ‘making available’ in the sense of an



‘enflaming’- quite simply because the making available of the world in the sense of the subject-object relation ‘always already’ presupposes that complementary communicative understanding of one’s co-subjects which proceeds from the existence of a discursive community. Later Hiedegger conceive of the objectivity of science as a merely contingent pre-condition of world understanding, a pre-condition which is grounded in the ‘thrown projection’ of being-in-the-world, that is in a world establishing, epochal event in the history of being.

Hiedeggerian limitation of *de-worlding* and Wittgensteinian limitation of *language going on holiday* can be supplemented by the very misunderstood conception of Husserl’s life-world. Husserl is generally misunderstood for propagating a Cartesian kind of solipsism. Even Hiedegger wrongly conceives Husserl’s methodology as giving primordial importance only to the *solitariness* of the transcendental ego. Hence while late Hiedegger became a mystic, Husserl’s life world remained scientific as well as humanist (inspite of his phenomenological reduction). The concept of life world employed by late Husserl is his *Crisis*, was more radical then the much-accepted view of Hiedegger and Wittgenstein. Husserl’s abstract idealization of objectification of European science presupposed the emergence of meaning out of the life world. Husserl assumed that even the meaning constitution of the life-world and its inter-subjective validity could be traced back to the intentional operations of a transcendental consciousness. Husserl theory of transcendental consciousness was very much debated and misunderstood as a representation of Cartesian philosophy of consciousness. Husserl’s meaning constitution of the life-world is in the pre-linguistic intentional operation of the ego consciousness found in the meaning constitution of the life world. This ego consciousness of Husserl’s is not to be mistaken with the Cartesian ego. Husserl’s ego is different from the Cartesian in the sense that the former is intentional and not solitary. The merit of Husserl’s phenomenology is the acceptance of the pre-scientific life and the ordinary performance of life as carried out in the life-world. Hence while Wittgenstein more or less remain a trained engineer and Hiedegger much like a mystic in his later life; Husserl’s remained a scientist as well as a true humanist.

Though, Merleau-Ponty presented in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, the life-worlds as the turning in Husserl’s thought away from transcendental idealism, it is more accurate to view the layer of life-world as one more constituted layer of meaning uncovered by Husserlian reduction and itself constituted by the anonymous transcendental ego. (*Crisis*: 36). The new reduction for Husserl starts with the life-world and ask about the ‘how of the world’s pre-giveness’ doing away with the so-called Cartesian ways of reduction. The difference is that, the reduction of Husserl does not move to an ego empty of content, as in Cartesian way, but to an ego, which is already tied to the world in many ways. In *Crisis*, Husserl saw the life-world as the universal framework of human endeavor including the scientific endeavor. Life world is the ultimate horizon of all human achievement. It is pre-given in advance and experienced as a unity. As conscious being we already inhabit in the life world. Further for Husserl there is no one single life-world, but a set of interacting and overlapping worlds beginning from our “home world” and extending to other “foreign world”, the world of other culture and language.

The success of modern science since Galileo has displaced our immediate forms of lived experienced with the forms of objects as dictated by science. Husserl infact identified Galileo as the founder of the specifically modern approach to nature which was now universally present in the natural science (Dermot: 2000:181-183) Husserl thought admired the extraordinary



achievement of the science, was much more interested in the practical outlook on which science was grounded. Husserl argued that the scientific outlook emerge from a purely intellectual 'play' devoid of practical interests. He points out that serious problems will arise if, the objects produced in this play are uncritically asserted to be the real objects of our experience in the life-world (and that is what actually happen in modernity; the world of abstraction). The crises of science were mirrored by a crisis in our social world, what Husserl called the European crisis. In crisis Husserl make a detailed analyses of the life world with special interest in the scientific world of consciousness which need much guiding norms of rationality that emerges out of our ordinary non-theoretical forms of everyday lived consciousness and its practices. Last but not the least, Husserl argued in his *Crisis*, that beyond the theoretical and the natural attitudes lies a new radical attitude- one which takes seriously the critique of all values. To quote Husserl:- 'the universal critique of all life and all life-goals' aiming at transforming us into a 'new humanity' capable of absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights' (*Crisis*: 283).

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