

Mind (or language) and world

- Suppose realism is true. How do our judgments/assertions acquire their truth conditions?
 1. From a connection between judgments and facts.

This can't be right.
 2. From a connection between concepts and worldly items.

Concept application

- How do predicates get paired with universals?
 - This can be achieved in a conscious act in which the mind brings to consciousness the universal that will be paired with the predicate.
- How do we determine whether a predicate applies to an object?
 - The mind brings to consciousness the universal that has been paired with the predicate in order to ascertain its presence in the object.

Wittgenstein's private language argument

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign “S” and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation.—I first want to remark that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated.—But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition.—How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly.—But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign.—Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation.—But “I impress it on myself” can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'. (PI 258)

Wittgenstein's challenge

- What reasons do we have for thinking that these episodes of inner ostension actually succeed in connecting a predicate with a universal?
- How would things be different if this didn't happen?
- And even if it does, what role does that play in our practice?

The picture of a cube

What really comes before our mind when we *understand* a word?—Isn't it something like a picture? Can't it be a picture? Well, suppose that a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word “cube”, say the drawing of a cube. In what sense can this picture fit or fail to fit a use of the word “cube”?—Perhaps you say: “It's quite simple;—if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture”—But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that it is quite easy to imagine a *method of projection* according to which the picture does fit after all. The picture of the cube did indeed *suggest* a certain use to us, but it was possible for me to use it differently. (PI 139)

Methods of projection

Suppose, however, that not merely the picture of the cube, but also the method of projection comes before our mind?—How am I to imagine this?—Perhaps I see before me a schema shewing the method of projection: say a picture of two cubes connected by lines of projection.—But does this really get me any further? Can't I now imagine different applications of this schema too? (PI 141)

Wittgenstein's apparent conclusion

- We have inclinations, propensities that sustain our use of language.
- The realist wants to construe the episodes in which these inclinations are exercised as cognitive episodes, in which universals intimate to us how to proceed.
- Wittgenstein seems to be arguing that this construal is mistaken. There is nothing but the inclinations.

Wright's reading of Wittgenstein (according to McDowell)

“The picture Wright offers is, at the basic level, a picture of human beings vocalizing in certain ways in response to objects, with this behaviour (no doubt) accompanied by such ‘inner’ phenomena as feelings of constraint, or convictions of the rightness of what they are saying. There are presumably correspondences in the propensities of fellow members of a linguistic community to vocalize, and to feel comfortable in doing so, which are unsurprising in the light of their belonging to a single species, together with similarities in the training that gave them the propensities. But at the basic level there is no question of shared commitments—of the behaviour, and the associated aspects of the stream of consciousness, being subject to the authority of anything outside themselves.”
 (“Wittgenstein on Following a Rule”, 336)

McDowell's reaction

“In Wittgenstein’s eyes, as I read him, Wright’s claim that ‘for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet’ can be, at very best, an attempt to say something that cannot be said but only shown. It may have some merit, conceived in that light; but attributing it to Wittgenstein as a doctrine can only yield distortion.” (“Wittgenstein on Following a Rule”, 353)

McDowell, “Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding”

What is at issue here is the status of a position that is analogous to a kind of idealism but with linguistic practice in place of “ideas”.

When Dummett and his followers, purporting to be fighting under Wittgenstein’s banner, put forward such positive theses as that linguistic competence must consist in dispositions to respond to circumstances that are detectable whenever they obtain, they are offering [...] a meaning theoretical anti-realism, which stands to the misperceived deep doctrine as a shallow empirical idealism would stand to an analogous transcendental idealism.

References

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