

Idealistic Moments in Late Wittgenstein

Jakub Mácha

Dept. of Philosophy, Masaryk University, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic, email: macha@mail.muni.cz

“Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different.”

Wittgenstein

It is tempting to think that at the outset of analytic philosophy Russell and Moore revolted against the neo-Hegelian movement by arguing in favor of pluralism, realism, common sense, and by defending the reality of external relations. A relation is *internal* to some of its terms for if the relation were taken away from it, then the term would no longer be the same thing. We can further define that a relation is *internal (per se)* if it is internal to all its terms, otherwise it is *external*. We could therefore say that an internal relation is *essential to its relata*.

An extreme position has been proposed by the neo-Hegelians (e.g., by Bradley, Royce or Joachim). This is that all relations are internal. This position is called *the doctrine of internal relations* and results in idealism and monism. Although Russell and Moore rejected this line of argument, some recent investigations indicate that it may be sound (see Schaffer, forthcoming).

The terms or relata in question were mostly particulars; the problem becomes more complicated if one takes universals into account (cf. Rorty 2006: 335-6) as Wittgenstein did. Wittgenstein himself was not immediately involved in this debate, even though there is an echo of it in his *Tractatus*. The notion of an internal relation is, however, central to this book. According to Wittgenstein there is the “internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world” (4.014). Furthermore, he declares he has “the answer to the vexed question ‘whether all relations are internal or external’” (4.1251). There are, however, two or three approaches to interpreting the *Tractatus* and the differences among them can be shown, *inter alia*, with respect to the notion of internal relation (cf. McGinn 2009:1). In the first interpretation, which is called “metaphysical” and advocated notably by P. Hacker (2001), the internal relation is a substantial relation of isomorphism between language and the world. Only such a sign that is standing in this internal relation to a possible object expresses a sense. The relation is internal to the sign, for if it didn’t have it, it wouldn’t be any sign at all. In the second main approach (entitled “anti-metaphysical”; see, e.g., McGinn 2009), the internal relation of depicting holds within the language. A way of symbolizing stands in this internal relation to a symbol or, in other words, a way of symbolizing is grounded in the nature of a symbol (cf. 5.473: “Logic must look after itself. If a sign is possible, then it is also capable of signifying.”) The third (so called “resolute”) interpretation says that the concept of the internal relation of depicting is inherently incoherent and has only a transitional role. It is the ladder that must be thrown away (see Diamond 2002: 70). An internal relation is strictly speaking no relation at all, and hence Wittgenstein regards only external relations as proper (4.122).

We can see that Wittgenstein had significantly employed the concept of an internal relation, and at least in the first and second interpretation he admitted the reality of

internal relations without advocating the doctrine of internal relations. In his late philosophy of psychology there is, however, a remark which may give the impression that Wittgenstein came back to the doctrine of internal relations. This remark reads:

One might even feel like this: “Everything is part and parcel of everything else” (internal and external relations). Displace a piece and it is no longer what it was. Only in this surrounding is this table this table. Everything is part of everything. [I believe Hegel meant something like this.] Here we have the inseparable atmosphere. (*Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* I, § 339)

This remark belongs to a larger sequence about the concept of an *atmosphere*, in which Wittgenstein intended to capture the mental or psychological dimension of our language. An atmosphere of a word is “a ‘corona’ of lightly indicated uses” (PI II, iv). What also could Hegel mean here (this parenthesis occurs only in an earlier manuscript)? In the very first section of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel argues that “a this Here [...] is *not* this Here, but a Before and Behind, an Above and Below, a Right and Left” (p. 64). The “Here and Now” or the “Thinghood” is constituted by relations to its surrounding and thus “it is only the sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself” (p. 62).

I will argue, that according to the metaphysical interpretation above, the late Wittgenstein can be seen as an adherent of the doctrine of internal relations and as a monist (more precisely as a *world-first* monist in the terminology developed in Schaffer 2010). On this reading, every single thing is internally related to every other thing in the universe.

In the anti-metaphysical approach, not the universe, but language is to be regarded as a unity. The “corona”, so to speak, can cover the whole of language. What is then the internal relation in question? The late Wittgenstein mentioned an internal relation in the connection with the phenomenon of seeing-as of an aspect, in order to blur the difference between thinking and seeing: “what I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is [...] an internal relation between it and other objects” (PI II, xi). When a thing A is *seen as* some other thing B, then there is an internal relation between A and B perceived and thought of. All two things would be, thus, internally related as long as one is seen as and thought of another, i.e., they can be named phenomena of the same subject or—in Hegel’s terms—of the same consciousness.

I shall conclude by maintaining that the metaphysical approach brings Wittgenstein nearer to Bradley et al., whereas the anti-metaphysical nearer to Hegel.

References

- Diamond, C. (2002), ‘Truth before Tarski’, in E. H. Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hacker, P. M. S. (2001), ‘Naming, Thinking and Meaning in the *Tractatus*’, in *Wittgenstein: Connection and Controversies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1998), *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Delhi.
- McGinn, M. (2009), ‘Wittgenstein and Internal Relations’, *European Journal of Philosophy* (early view), pp. 1-15.
- Rorty, R. (2006), ‘Relations, Internal and External’, in *Encyclopedia of philosophy*, 2nd Edition, D. M. Borchert (ed.), Detroit: Thomson Gale, vol. 8, pp. 335-345.
- Schaffer, J. (2010), ‘The Internal Relatedness of All Things’, *Mind*, forthcoming.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1995), *The Collected Works of Ludwig Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Blackwell.