REPORT ON THE WITTGENSTEIN COLLOQUIUM

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The man in whose honor this conference was held would no doubt have opposed its convening and considered it of little philosophical interest. Nonetheless, last week's Wittgenstein Colloquium was of genuine philosophical significance. The mere fact that such an assemblage of philosophers, including, G. E. M. Anscombe, Michael Dummett, Anthony Kenny and Saul Kripke, just to name a few, gathered together for five days is in itself meaningful. Something of much deeper philosophical significance did, however, emerge and it is that to which I would like to address myself.

Wittgenstein, throughout his later years and especially during the 50's shortly after his death, was considered an anti-philosopher. He was seen as an exponent of anti-metaphysical doctrines that were represented in such cryptic statements as "meaning is use," "don't think, look," and "family resemblance, not essence." Such views have been gradually changing as Wittgenstein's writings on grammar, language and knowledge are more fully and sympathetically investigated. This shift in Wittgensteinian analysis was exhibited at the colloquium in two interesting ways. The first might be labeled the "retreat to the Tractatus" while the second could be termed a "leap to greater things."

The "retreat to the Tractatus" occupied the first half of the conference and involved renewed investigations into the picture theory, realism, theory of types and logical independence of elementary propositions. I say "retreat" not in the sense of any lack of philosophical thought or depth, but as an indication of the refusal of those present to enlarge on the anti-metaphysical picture of Wittgenstein and instead to re-examine problems of a more analytical nature in the Tractatus. It is true that Max Black, the venerable interpreter of the Tractatus, was still willing to attack Dummett's paper, "Wittgenstein and Frege" for what Black saw as non-Wittgensteinian "cravings" after a general account and conception of language. Such feelings were, however, very much the exception and not the rule; as Dummett replied, "I am not

so simple-minded." Hopefully, neither are the rest of us so simple-minded as to accept such a limited interpretation of Wittgenstein.

The last two and a half days of the conference involved a "leap to greater things," as Wittgenstein's much neglected writings on ethics, religion, and aesthetics received emphasis. Although usually ignored, these areas of Wittgensteinian research produced what most considered to be the best paper of the colloquium, Frank Cioffi's "Wittgenstein and the Fire Festivals." Cioffi laid out in illuminating detail Wittgenstein's criticisms of Fraser's The Golden Bough and developed the implications that criticism has for aesthetics and religion. Similarly, D.Z.Phillips investigated Wittgenstein's influence for the philosophy of religion and ethics.

The use of such labels as "retreat" and "leap" may seem unfair and misleading for such an array of papers, but I think not and wish briefly to explain why. While it is true that Wittgenstein cannot be properly read as anti-metaphysical or anti-philosophical, a coherent and lucid alternative interpretation is not easily rendered. In fact, it seems that such an alternative, twenty-five years after the death of Wittgenstein, is only now beginning to surface. It is notable that not one of the papers at the colloquium did in fact attempt to present this alternative view. It is, however, equally as important to note that the last two papers, those by Anscombe and Kripke, did in fact lay the groundwork for such an alternative. While such a view remains in the works, the emphasis is naturally back to the Tractatus or--not so naturally--forward to the ethics, religion and aesthetics. Thus the significance of this historical colloquium on Wittgenstein might be seen as analogous to his own rendering of the importance of the Tractatus. It lies not only in what was presented, but more importantly in what was not presented.

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