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The Case for Anti-Antirealism: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Aristotle on Language and Essence

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ABSTRACT: My aim in this paper is to examine the view of language that is presupposed by many forms of realist and antirealist argument misses the mark, and that a more nuanced, Heideggerian view of language allows us to avoid many disputes about realism and antirealism. I utilize Wittgenstein and Aristotle as a means of fleshing out an alternative conception of the relationship between language and things, and argue that this alternative transcends the realism/antirealism debate.

1. Introduction

In a previous publication, I characterized ‘essentialism’ as “the view that there are things in the world that are constituted by certain essential properties, discoverable by some means of investigation, be it through conceptual analysis, empirical investigation, or some mixture of the two.”¹ An essentialism is ‘realist’ if the properties and objects picked out by a given means of investigation are thought to exist apart from human agency, and not in virtue of it. Thus, a realist account of gravity would maintain that gravity is an actual force in nature, that it has been discovered by human inquiry, and that this inquiry has revealed gravity—at least in broad outline—as something that exists regardless of anything that human beings do. An antirealist account, on the other hand, would claim that the thing we are calling ‘gravity’ is a useful fiction—that it collects and organizes experiences in a way that enables us to accomplish particular tasks on particular occasions. The fact that we organize experience this way, however, is of little consequence (or, at any rate, *ought* to be of little consequence) to our

¹ Wisnewski (2003), 37.

metaphysics.

I take *both* of these views to be compatible with essentialism, where we take certain properties (socially constructed or not) to be those properties in virtue of which a thing is what it is. On this view, then, there might be an *essence* to certain socially constituted entities (like marriage and money), despite the fact that these things would not fall into a realist's ultimate (non-human) ontology. That there is such a non-human realm is, of course, beyond question. What is at issue in the conversation that occurs between realist and anti-realist is whether or not there is anything at all that can justifiably be said about said world once we subtract our agency from it. John Searle has argued² (mistakenly, I think) that we cannot make sense of *any part* of the world unless we postulate some set of brute facts that lie beneath all institutional (i.e. socially-constructed) ones. He characterizes this view as 'External Realism.' I have elsewhere distinguished two different versions of 'External Realism' as Searle uses that phrase. I will again refer to these as ER1 and ER2:

ER1 The world consists of states-of-affairs, accurately describable in our current language, which do not depend on human agency in any way.

ER2 In order to have a language, we must presuppose that there is a world, independent of human representations, which is capable of being conceptualized in myriad ways.³

'Realism,' as I am using the term (and as I think it is very frequently used), refers to ER1. As I have previously argued, I do not think that ER2 follows from ER1, nor do I think that one must reject ER2 if one rejects ER1. Distinguishing these two versions of 'realism' allows us to see in more detail what is at issue in debates between realists and antirealists:

Disagreements arise between realist and anti-realist when we begin to assess divergent recommendations for understanding the world in a particular way. Whereas the realist wants to claim, in line with ER1, that there is *one* correct articulation of how things stand, the anti-realist doubts that there is some such definitive articulation. The anti-realist is sensitive to the fact that our descriptive vocabularies emerge in historical contexts, that our theories answer contingent questions, and that science and politics are never mutually exclusive. He thus doubts the truth of ER1. He doubts that the states-of affairs that comprise the world are neatly articulable in a way that is independent of the circumstances (historical and otherwise) of the speaker.⁴

² See Searle (1995).

³ Wisnewski (2005), 78.

⁴ Wisnewski (2005), 79.

My aim in this article is to examine one of the assumptions common to *both* realism and antirealism. As in those previous publications already mentioned, my interest here is to demonstrate how the debate between realist and antirealist is, in large part, an artifact of false oppositions that fail to capture the complexities of the problems at hand. My primary focus here will be to show that a certain (overly-simplistic) conception of language lurks at the heart of much anti-realist and realist argumentation, and that refining this conception of language allows us to clear away a lot of conceptual confusion.

One assumption endemic to certain forms of *both* realism and antirealism is that language and being are (for the most part) unrelated things—that what *is* and what can be said belong to different categories. This assumption is a condition for the possibility of one typical anti-realist strategy. The strategy involves pointing to the contingent nature of our current descriptions of the world, arguing that these descriptions are best explained in terms of our interests and goals, and that, were our goals to change, different descriptions of the world would work equally well. If our theories are subject to revision in this way, it is concluded, these descriptions most likely do not correspond to items independent of our current conceptual needs.⁵ Advocates of this type of view usually prefer names other than ‘antirealism,’ though adopting names like ‘internal realism,’ ‘neo-pragmatism,’ and ‘conventionalism’ tends to breed more confusion than it prevents.

Identifying exactly which philosophers embrace exactly what version of the above argument, however, is not my aim here. My aim, rather, is to spell out how this argumentative strategy relies on a questionable view about the relation between words and things, being and language. I will *not*, however, argue that realism gets this relationship right. As I hope to show, both realism and antirealism (at least in their most popular forms) rely on a conception of language that forces a strong distinction between language and being—between what *is* and what can be said—and it is precisely this common assumption that requires further investigation. If language is but an idle overlay to things, the fact that our descriptions can change according to our interests is evidence against realism. If language *is not* such an idle overlay—if it *discloses* the world, even if in varying ways—the argumentative strategy against realism fails. While I will not provide a definitive argument for the (Heideggerian) view of language I propose as an alternative, I do hope to make clear that there is a question *prior to* (or, as Heidegger would have it, *more primordial than*) the question of realism and antirealism. It is this question that must first be addressed if we are to proceed forward with any confidence.

⁵ Champions of this view include Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam, to name only two. See Putnam (1990) and (1992). See Rorty (1989).

2. One Argument for Antirealism and the View of Language it Presupposes

There are several standard arguments employed for roughly anti-realist conclusions. Perhaps the most typical involves an appeal to the plasticity of our language, along with an inability to determine which of many possible descriptive systems we are justified in employing when we describe the world.

The quandaries are familiar: in what sense is the *fundamental* description of a tree a biological description, or a description in terms of physical parts, rather than, say, a poetic description? It does no good to emphasize that the biological description of the tree is one that can be accepted by many people (I assume here, with Alexander Pope, that genius—even in poetry—is “what oft was thought, but ne’er so well express’d”). Thus, *good* poetic description, at any rate, will *also* be accepted by many people). Likewise, one cannot simply say that the biological description captures the ‘essence’ of the tree—unless of course one is willing to beg the question. Finally, even if we grant that a description in terms of physical properties—and one that avoids poetic language—is best suited to describing a tree, this still does not settle the question of what the appropriate level of description *is*. Will it be in terms of biological processes, or atomic activity, or will it occur at some other (as yet undisclosed) level?

Let us call this the argument from levels of description. The argument, to restate it plainly, goes as follows: First, we point out that alternate descriptive vocabularies can be plausibly employed to describe a phenomenon (say, a tree). Second, we claim that these alternative descriptions are not different *in kind*: we have clusters of features across divergent descriptions. Finally, we conclude from this that the sorts of descriptions we employ will depend on our purposes, rather than on some fact of the matter about the thing being described.⁶

This sort of argument is often unfairly lampooned on two fronts. First, it is claimed that the conclusion of ‘antirealism’ does not follow. Second, it is claimed that the argument commits us to an absurdity: i.e., it commits us to the view that language ‘makes the world.’

These criticisms would both be devastating if they had anything going in their favor.

⁶ See LaPorte (1998) and Grayling (1982).

But they do not, so they are merely distracting sophistic flashes of anger. It is true that ‘antirealism’ does not follow *with necessity* from the above premises. But to raise this objection is to miss the point of the argument. The argument aims at providing antecedent plausibility to an antirealist intuition. It does not hope to do more. In a similar vein, the anti-realist might object that the mere fact that some statement is empirically verifiable does not *necessarily entail* that the thing verified is ‘really real’ (in Bertrand Russell’s sense of that term, whatever it is). After all, justification and truth are two different things; it is possible to verify falsehoods (provided we do not take ‘verify’ as a success term). The realist would here be right to respond that verifiability is a reason in favor of realism, even if it is not definitive. Likewise, the antirealist can point out that the existence of levels of description speaks in favor of anti-realism, though this alone should certainly not be regarded as proof.

In response to the second (unfair) objection, we need only point out the following: the antirealist view I am here articulating should not be conflated with the (strange) view that language makes the world, as the second objection contends. I have heard this sort of objection raised as follows: ‘Saying x does not make x true. The world doesn’t depend on what we say; what we say depends on the world.’ Allowing that this does not cover every possible sentence (i.e. it would not cover sentences like ‘I am saying this sentence,’ which would be made true by saying the sentence), this ‘objection’ (if it can be called that) sounds exactly right: things are not made true simply in virtue of singular utterances. But notice that *no one* claims that—and it is certainly not an implication of the argument given above. For the antirealist view I am considering, the problem is precisely that we do not *know* what to say: there are multiple ways to describe the world, and there does not seem to be a guide to determining which sort of descriptions ought to be employed other than our interests and purposes. So, it’s right to say the world doesn’t depend on our utterances—but acknowledging this is not yet to affirm any version of realism. The world, after all, could have no definitive structure—it could defy every possible attempt at adequate description.

Now, at this point, the realist often insists that there *must be* one way that the world is. The fact that we cannot determine the content of the world is an epistemic problem, not an ontological one. This sounds perfectly reasonable. The problem *is* epistemic. But it is a deeper problem than this objection suggests. If we cannot know the way the world is, presumably it follows that we cannot know whether or not the world is one way, or many. To put it cutely, the problem isn’t only that we cannot know *which* river we are stepping into; the problem is also that we cannot even know if it is *one* river or an infinite number of them. It is this skeptical realization that makes the antirealist ontologically humble.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, I think that this argument relies on a

suspect (albeit natural) picture of language. The view implicit in the above argument (as well as in the realist's objections) is that language is simply a tool we employ to describe the world around us: if language describes the way the world is independently of us, we are realists. If it does not—if it depends fundamentally on our interests and purposes—we have reason to reject the realist posture.

In the remainder of this paper, I want to consider an alternative view of language to the one being presupposed in much of the realism/antirealism debate. I want to consider the view that language is *not* simply an idle overlay to things, that it *is not* merely the froth atop of being—that it doesn't sit idly on top of a world of things. By utilizing some of the insights of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, I hope to make a plausible case that language must be construed as intimately connected to and disclosive of what *is*. It is my contention that these philosophers enable us to re-think our assumptions about the relation between what *is* and what can be said in a manner that is useful for navigating the dispute between realists and anti-realists. If there is a fundamental relation between our language and being—if language isn't an arbitrary addition to the way the world is, but instead discloses the world—we have a reason to be against *both* realist and antirealist accounts that rely on distinguishing being and language.

3. Rethinking Language with Heidegger: *Logos* as Disclosure⁷

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that all of the standard representations of the term 'logos' are either wrong or unhelpful. The two standard tactics for dealing with this problematic term involve either 1) simply paraphrasing the term with another, often equally opaque term, or 2) translating the term in multiple ways in an attempt to capture its multiplicity of meaning. Neither strategy is successful, on Heidegger's view. Paraphrasing 'logos' simply does not advance the philosophical conversation. Likewise, translating the term in multiple ways only promotes confusion. To get clear about this word, we need to investigate it afresh.

As 'discourse', Heidegger claims, 'logos' means "to make manifest what one is talking about in one's discourse" (56). This 'making manifest' Heidegger characterizes as 'letting something be seen.' (Note that the Greek term, φαίνεσθαι, is also the root of

⁷ Heidegger consistently emphasizes the disclosure of being through language. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on Heidegger's treatment of *logos* in *Being and Time*: *Logos* collects the world and enables it to display itself.

phenomenon). Logos pulls things out of obscurity into focus; it enables us to *see* what is under consideration. In this sense, speaking about something is also a letting what is talked about be seen: speech directs our attention to the thing that is spoken about. Hence, it is a way of making manifest what is.

In one respect, this reading of logos is intuitive: language can direct our attention to the world, and in this respect, it can bring entities into our phenomenological field. But to be true to Heidegger, we must press beyond this intuitive point. Heidegger has in mind something more complicated than simply directing attention when speaking about the making manifest inherent in Logos. Nevertheless, this is a good place to start thinking about the way in which language can gather the world under particular rubrics; the way in which our talking about the world can make the world *sharable*.

One thing to note about the notion of Logos as making-manifest is the implications this view has for our conception of truth. Typically, people think of a *sentence* (or a proposition) as true. We can say that a sentence is true if that sentence corresponds to a state of affairs in the world. Heidegger claims that this way of conceptualizing truth is in fact derivative. The more fundamental notion of truth is closely linked to *Logos* construed as letting something be seen. The most ontologically basic conception of truth is truth as *aletheia*: a form of seeing (*noein*) things for what they are. The basic form of truth thus has nothing to do with sentences. Rather, it has to do with seeing things that make themselves manifest.

Of course, this is mere assertion. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring this in more detail, as the notion of truth as linguistic is central to the brand of anti-realist argument I am here concerned with. Heidegger claims that there are three things traditionally associated with our conception of truth: 1) truth is linguistic (i.e. that assertions are those things which can be true or false), 2) what makes an assertion true or false is the relation it bears to that which it is about--it either 'agrees' with the world or fails to do so, and 3) Aristotle managed to set us straight about truth.

Heidegger aims to unearth a more primordial notion of truth than the one captured in these three theses. There is little (traditional) argument for his alternative conception of truth—a situation that is, perhaps, unavoidable. The force of Heidegger's alternate notion of truth and logos lies in its ability to enable us to see more clairvoyantly the phenomenon under description—something no argument alone *could* accomplish. That Heidegger's alternate conception of truth *should* be vindicated in this way (if it is vindicated) stands to reason. Indeed, Heidegger's account is an *instance* of the very point he is attempting to make. Certain kinds of linguistic activity enable us to *understand*—to see perspicuously that which is talked about. In such instances, *logos* does not merely penetrate beneath the surface of things; it also makes the hidden manifest.

Rather than thinking that this capability is part of the mere orthography of a sentence (as some direct reference theorists seem to suggest), Heidegger encourages us to see that the capacity to engage Being in this way is fundamentally a part of our Being-in-the-world (it is this mode of Being that leads Heidegger to speak of Dasein as a ‘clearing’). As Cristina Lafont has put this point, Heidegger “seeks to develop a perspective which is no longer that of an *observing* subject over *against* the world it objectifies, but rather that of an *understanding* Dasein which always already finds itself *in* a symbolically structured world.”⁸ All language use must be understood against this background.

“Asserting,” Heidegger says, “is a way of Being towards the thing itself that is” (260). The question we must pose concerns whether or not this type of Being uncovers the Being of the thing in question. “What is to be confirmed is that such Being uncovers the entity towards which it is. What gets demonstrated is the Being-uncovering of the assertion” (261). Whereas the philosophical tradition has claimed that true assertion reveals something about the way the world is, Heidegger here offers us a look at what this view of truth misses: our true assertions are self-referential. They reveal something about the mode of Being of an assertion itself—namely, that it can uncover something which, before the assertion was made, was hidden (covered). As Heidegger puts it,

What is to be demonstrated is not an agreement of knowing with its object, still less of the psychical with the physical; but neither is it an agreement between ‘contents of consciousness’ among themselves. What is to be demonstrated is solely the Being-uncovered of the entity itself—that entity in the how of its uncoveredness. This uncoveredness is confirmed when that which is put forward in the assertion (namely, the entity itself) shows itself *as that very same thing*. ‘Confirmation’ signifies the entity’s showing itself in its selfsameness. (261)

Logos (Rede) uncovers entities, allowing us to see them as they are. Heidegger claims that this conception of truth is to be found in the Greeks—in the notion of *aletheia*—and that it has been covered-over by notions of truth as linguistic, and of language as mere accessory. Language is a constitutive part of our Being-in-the-world, *not* merely a tool that we can take or leave. Indeed, it is the conception of language as mere accomplice to insight that leads us to become *forgetful* of Being—that leads us to ignore that what we *are* is a perspective on the world that lets the world be seen.⁹ But, Heidegger cautions,

⁸ Lafont (2000), 29.

⁹ Lafont (2000) has argued that a growing awareness that language cannot be understood as a tool is what led to Heidegger’s *Kebr*, and that this marks a continuation of some early themes in *Being and Time*. As will be obvious to the reader, I also think Heidegger’s turn is not a decisive break with the work carried out in *Being and Time*.

In citing such evidence we must avoid uninhibited word-mysticism. Nevertheless, the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of the most elemental words in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from levelling them off to that unintelligibility which functions in turn as a source of pseudo-problems. (262)

This analysis of *logos* and *aletheia*, Heidegger claims, does not simply abandon the philosophical tradition. As he insists, “in proposing our ‘definition’ of ‘truth’ we have not shaken off the tradition, but we have appropriated it primordially” (262).¹⁰

The business of thinking, then, is not simply to reject what we have come to think of as the significance of language and truth. Rather, it is to unearth the origins of this conception—to show how it is that this conception has arisen out of a more fundamental understanding of language and its ability to disclose being. The business of thinking is to restore to language its power to house being—to get us beyond the conceptualization of language as a mere instrument. This is a point that dominates much of the later Heidegger’s thought, but it is already present in the pages of *Being and Time*. The conception of language as a mere instrument leads to an inability to understand ourselves, or, indeed, even the world around us. It leads us, as Heidegger says, to become forgetful of Being.

Language, on this view, when it is construed as mere instrument, inhibits the very thinking it makes possible when it is understood in its fullness—as disclosive of what is, as that which lets things appear to us as they are. The emasculation of language when instrumentalized in this way is nicely articulated by Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason*:

The more ideas have become automatic, instrumentalized, the less does anybody see in them thoughts with a meaning of their own. They are considered things, machines. Language has been reduced to just another tool in the gigantic apparatus of production in modern society.... Meaning is supplanted by function or effect in the world of things and events. In so far as words are not used obviously to calculate technically relevant probabilities or for other practical purposes, among which even relaxation is included, they are in danger of being suspect as sales talk of some kind, for truth is no end in itself.¹¹

I do not mean to suggest, in quoting Horkheimer, that anti-realists and realists are mere salesmen. I do mean to suggest that the persistent instrumentalization of

¹⁰ One can read Heidegger’s own assertions here as revealing the Being of truth—as uncovering something from our collective history which has been covered up through philosophical exercises. Heidegger’s use of the *logos* has itself been an instance of *aletheia*.

¹¹ Horkheimer (1974), 15.

language is a condition for the possibility of conceiving language as merely the froth atop of Being, and hence it is a precondition for the type of arguments for realism and anti-realism that are here of interest. It is when we view language as merely the thing employed in light of our purposes and interests—as one more tool to manipulate the world—that we no longer see the relation in which *logos* stands to *things*. In this precarious situation, we come to forget the disclosive power of language, its power (as Heidegger would say) to house Being. In this respect, as Anthony Rudd has skillfully pointed out, “on this matter, Heidegger seems close to Wittgenstein. It is our being-in-the-world, our practical activities, that determines the sense we make of the world, and therefore lies at the roots of our language.”¹²

As Heidegger reminds us, we must avoid uninhibited word-mysticism. I would add that we must avoid *inhibited* word-mysticism as well. In talking of language as the house of Being, Heidegger is often accused of just that. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate, with the help of the unlikely pair of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, that Heidegger’s view of language requires nothing magical at all, and hence, that the accusation of word-mysticism is misplaced.

4. The Importance of Practice in Disclosure: Or, How to Get Help from Wittgenstein and Aristotle

Heidegger, I contend, is routinely—though not always—unfair to Aristotle. I will not let this stop me from using Aristotle to help make sense of Heidegger’s view of the relation between word and thing. The notion of language that Heidegger employs is *not* entirely absent from Aristotle’s work. Indeed, as I hope to show, there is a way in which we can read Aristotle that makes language as disclosure *central* to the corpus.

I will begin where Aristotle’s editors begin: with the works of logic, and of those, with the *Categories*. Aristotle’s *Categories* is a perplexing work—primarily because it is not clear what we are to make of it. As Newton Garver puts it, we are “perplexed about what *kind* of activity it is to distinguish categories, whether it is an activity that belongs to metaphysics or to linguistics” (61). The term ‘category,’ of course, is a transliteration of the Greek term meaning ‘predicate.’ Categories are predicates.

This suggests that to distinguish categories (predicates) is at least partially a linguistic endeavor: predicates can be distinguished in terms of their functions within a language. That is, we can distinguish them in terms of the roles they perform within particular

¹² Rudd (2003), 207.

contexts, the sorts of questions that can be posed of them, and the sort of responses we can give to those questions. To predicate, in this sense, is to engage in a type of speech act—a type which is, as Garver points out, “basic to science and other truth-seeking linguistic activities” (64).

All of this is to say that one category can be distinguished from another in much the same way that one speech act can be distinguished from another: we can mark distinctions (and I here again borrow from Newton Garver) according to 1) discourse conditions (“the circumstances in which [speech acts] are appropriate”) and 2) discourse possibilities (“the sort of questions and comments that can be made in response to [speech acts]” (65)).¹³

It is important to see why this reading of the *Categories* is *not* presupposing the very view of language that we have been attempting to bracket: to distinguish categories is to do something linguistic, but it is not to do something *merely* linguistic. As is by now old-hat to us, speech acts are not merely linguistic devices: they exist in contexts, have significance only within our practices, and are interwoven into our daily activities. Perhaps surprisingly (at least for those who think the linguistic turn in philosophy produced genuine progress), a remarkably similar view is found in Aristotle. As Michael V. Wedin characterizes *Categories*, it offers “a theory of underlying ontological configurations for standard categorical statements. For every such statement, it tells us what fundamental things must exist and in what relations they must stand in order for the statement to be true.”¹⁴ This means that the best way to think about categories is to regard them as capturing, to borrow a phrase from Wittgenstein, “language and the action into which it is woven” (PI, 7).¹⁵

Distinguishing categories is thus *not* a linguistic endeavor, but neither is it a straightforwardly metaphysical endeavor. In spelling out what predicates are utilized in speech, we notice what ontology our description of the world presupposes. To speak is thus already to presume a world that is disclosed in the very language one is speaking. The problem with our attempt to understand the categories (or, for that matter, the *Metaphysics*) is that we insist that a theoretical endeavor must be one or the other—i.e. that it must be *either* about how we speak *or* about the world; about *convention* or *reality*. But perhaps the distinction in question, like so many other relics of the philosophical

¹³ For example, ‘Substance’ does not admit of more or less. Thus, “if the question [of more or less] could be raised the predicate would belong to some other category, where this feature is positive or neutral rather than negative” (65)

¹⁴ Wedin (2000), 12.

¹⁵ Garver (1994) makes this connection even more directly: “Language games are Wittgenstein’s categories” (72).

tradition, has done more harm than good. Perhaps—I will dare to say it—the distinction between convention and reality is, at least in many respects, an artificial one.

This view, I think, is actually Wittgenstein's. Wittgenstein outright rejects the distinction between the linguistic and the real; between the essence of a thing and its grammar. As Wittgenstein says at PI 371 "*Essence* is expressed by grammar," and then at PI 373 "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is." Michael Luntley helpfully captures Wittgenstein's notion of grammar:

Grammar is the structure of the subject's attitude to the world and it is a transcendental requirement that the subject's attitude have this structure. It is not an empirical fact that the subject's attitude is structured by grammar and neither is it an empirical achievement by the subject that it's attitude is so structured. ...the existence of grammar is not a fact about the world. It is not something to be discovered. That grammar exists is a condition for the possibility of our discovery of things...The existence of grammar is something that is shown, not said, for there is no storable account of the source of grammar. Grammar consists in the subject seeing the world aright.¹⁶

Like Aristotle's categories, the idea of 'grammar' in Wittgenstein spells out those conditions of understanding that make our utterances intelligible. Embedded in our language is a picture of the world that makes discursive relations with the world possible. It is thus a mistake to ask questions about conventional 'categories' or conventional 'grammar' that might or might not adequately capture an agency-independent (and language-independent) reality: the categories and Wittgensteinian grammar are simply the site in which the world reveals itself to us. Categories and grammar are thus *not* optional linguistic tools that might correspond or fail to correspond to the world. The entire metaphor of 'correspondence' has already misunderstood the basic relationship of *logos* and *ontos*—of language and being. Categories, in Aristotle, articulate the way the world *presents* itself to us. They are not linguistic. Likewise, Wittgenstein's 'grammar' is not a structure we impose on the world when we encounter it. Rather, the world presents its structure to us, and this is captured in the grammar of our language.

To investigate the logic of language is thus not merely to engage in a linguistic enterprise. To assume that one could engage in such an enterprise likely presupposes the view that language is fundamentally distinct from what it expresses, whether 'what language expresses' is a propositional content or a thing in the world. This sort of distinction masks the sense in which language brings things into focus: it enables us to

¹⁶ Luntley (2003), 21.

see what we could not see; it gathers the world, displaying things perspicuously.^{17, 18}

It is precisely with this in mind that we can understand Wittgenstein's use of terms like 'language-game' and 'form of life.' Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a language-game very early on in *Philosophical Investigations*. It is "the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven," (PI 7). The introduction of the notion of a form of life comes shortly after, and at first blush appears to be closely related to, if not equated with, what was earlier described as a language-game. "To imagine a language," Wittgenstein says, "is to imagine a form of life," (PI 18). While we are right to see that these are connected, the equation of the two would be a mistake. A language, we might say, represents a form of life, but a form of life is not exhaustively explained by a language. Indeed, as Wittgenstein goes on to explain, "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life," (PI, 23). Imagining a language is thus not merely imagining some mechanism of reference (though language does often refer), it is also to imagine something that we *do*--an activity, or mode of activity, which partially constitutes the sort of life we lead. "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing," (PI, 25).

The similarities with Heidegger here are striking: human beings are animals with language. This means, not merely that we use language, but that it constitutes an essential part of the way we act in the world and with one another. Moreover, the tasks to which we put language are varied. We not only use language to describe things, but to make contracts with one another, ask questions, engage in social ceremony, express emotion, come to understand ourselves, relate the past to others, and so on. Each of these contexts, while not having rigid borders, contains its own basis in ways of acting that reflect our shared histories.

This obviously isn't to say that the way we use language is the *only* way to use it. Rather, it is to say that our use of language reflects our participation in practices that existed long before we did. No one decided that red would be *that* color, nor would it

¹⁷ Garver (1994) claims that Wittgenstein has made many grammatical insights in the philosophy of mind. "Wittgenstein provides insight into what kinds of psychological things there are, by reference to discourse possibilities pertaining to the psychological predications we make" (71). He then says: "That this work follows the line Aristotle established in the *Categories* seems too obvious to require further comment" (71).

¹⁸ The continuity between the early and the late Wittgenstein should not here be overlooked—though it should also not be exaggerated. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein presents us with a philosophical account of both what *is* and of what can meaningfully be said. His treatment of the conditions of meaningful speech is not simply an exercise in the philosophy of language—it is also an engagement in ontology. Language *pictures* the world, as well as marks its limits. The very nature of a thing consists in the manner in which language captures and expresses that thing.

make sense to ask how we know that the color we call red *really is* red. The question reflects a misunderstanding. Our collective history has made it the case that *this* color just is what we call red. There is a right way to use color terms, determined by the practice of color predication and the color of things. There is no relevant convention/reality contrast to be drawn here. Our uses of language—as well as its specific disclosive ability—emerge out of those activities which are part of our natural history together.¹⁹ We need not ask the classic epistemic question concerning such language-games.²⁰ They are the way they are; we either play them or we do not.²¹

This analysis shows us *part* of what is involved in the (Heideggerian) notion that the language we speak houses being—that *logos* is fundamentally disclosive. Our phenomenology is formed, transformed, and maintained *at least partially* in the practices we mutually engage in—in our everyday going on together. These practices are characterized by a common way of encountering the world—a common significance—that is articulated in *Rede* (*logos*). Unless this is taken for granted, it is impossible even to *pose* questions of reality or irreality, let alone answer them. That the world is disclosed to us in a particular way, and that language (construed broadly) is a means to this disclosure, is presupposed in all of our interaction. It is in this sense *both* that language is the house of being *and* that essence is expressed by grammar.

Allow me to utilize Horkheimer once again, this time as a bridge between Heidegger's notion of *logos* and Wittgenstein's notion of a form of life. Philosophy, Horkheimer contends:

Must become more sensitive to the muted testimonies of language and plumb the layers of experience preserved in it. Each language carries a meaning embodying the thought forms and belief patterns rooted in the evolution of the people who speak it. (112)

Critical theory, normally hostile to ordinary language philosophy, here enables us to see what a philosophical project like the later Wittgenstein's gets *right*. By examining

¹⁹ I follow Newton Garver's take on a form of life: there is only one with which Wittgenstein is concerned, and it is the human form of life. I read 'world-picture' as roughly the same as 'form of life.' For an extended debate on these matters, see Wilhelm Lutterfelds and Andreas Roser (1999). For an extended treatment of how this view relates to the question of ethics, see Wisniewski (2007).

²⁰ This is not to say, of course, that we must merely remain silent about these games. We can clarify these games, and the clarifications we offer are subject to criticism in various ways.

²¹ I do not mean to suggest with this remark that it is always easy to know exactly what we are doing when we participate in language games (what rules we are following, for example). It is enough, according to Wittgenstein, that we move through language without many major snags. None of this implies that we might completely articulate each of our language games without remainder. Rather, the need for articulation is here secondary.

the language through which we disclose the world, we also unearth the basic features of our experience. And, given that experience without any object is senseless, we also learn about *the world*, where this is construed in the Heideggerian sense of the context of significance in which we come to understand ourselves and those things with which we interact. Language, construed in this manner, is much more than the froth atop of being—it is a constitutive part of the way we understand being—it a fundamental element of experience through which the world reveals itself.

5. Concluding remarks

If the alternative view of language I have articulated is even minimally plausible, we have reason to think that arguments of the sort discussed in the first section of this paper do not warrant anti-realism. A focus on the contingency and plasticity of language ignores one of its fundamental features: language gathers and discloses the world. Any argument that fails to acknowledge the disclosive capacity of language (a failure found in the argument from levels of description), will require a *defense* of the alternative view of language put forward. Such defenses are indeed made, though they often rely on anti-realist assumptions. Hence, these defenses do not prove helpful—or, more carefully put, they are no more helpful than any other circular argument.

But it must be remembered that I am *not* endorsing realism—at least not the sort of realism that is routinely contrasted with anti-realism. Realism makes the *same* mistake as antirealism in trying to understand the relation between words and things: viz., it regards the two as fundamentally separate *kinds* of things, ignoring the manner in which what *is* is disclosed in what can be said. The position I advocate, then, is an anti-antirealism. Perhaps surprisingly, this is *not* identical to realism.

Anti-antirealism, then, is a position which rejects *both* realism and antirealism (as defined in the beginning of this article) by refusing to adopt the simplistic view of language these views presuppose. Rather than thinking of language as something that must either a) get the world right by correctly corresponding to ontological structures that exist wholly apart from human agency, or b) construct the world without every touching it, the anti-antirealist thinks of language as that through which the world displays itself. In this respect, anti-antirealism accepts Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's insistence that language shows the world rather than simply trying to assert it. If the structure of the world as it must be experienced is presented with and through our language, then either asserting that language corresponds with the world (realism) or that it does not (antirealism) is to misunderstand the fundamental relations between words and things. As I have hopefully shown, we have alternative ways of

understanding this relation which will force us to rethink the very issue of realism and antirealism, at least insofar as these views gain traction through arguments about how language tracks (or fails to track) a world understood as pre-linguistic.

While there is much more to work out in the relation of the conception of language found in Wittgenstein and Heidegger to the questions that constitute the realism/antirealism debate, I take myself to have here made the preliminary steps. If we are to settle the dispute between realists and anti-realists, we had better get clear on the view of language presupposed in much of the argument. More importantly still, we had better determine whether or not this view of language is cripplingly simplistic, and hence of little value to assessing the relation between word and thing, *logos* and being.

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