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"THE WITTGENSTEINIAN REVOLUTION AND
'LINGUISTIC' PHILOSOPHY:
SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR
EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL
PHILOSOPHY."

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ABSTRACT

The potential relevance for Education of Wittgenstein's concept of the 'language-game', and the now widely accepted view of Philosophy as an activity to be practised rather than a body of knowledge to be learned up, are investigated principally in two of the 'component' disciplines of Education, namely Science Education and Educational Philosophy. In both of these areas, it has been claimed that Philosophy is relevant and has already been incorporated in existing work. A number of sub-optimal features are outlined for both areas, however, taking several widely-used publications as examples for detailed (though not exhaustive) critical examination; and it is argued that many of the faults revealed could be ameliorated through adoption of a Wittgensteinian approach especially if combined with Kuhn's (1962) notion of the 'paradigm' differentiated into the concepts of 'Common Assumptions Paradigm' (CAP) and 'Paradigmatic Demonstration' (or 'Public Demonstration Paradigm', PDP). This new synthesis results in a conceptual schema in which each 'family' of language-games which constitutes an academic discipline (or any intellectual or societal activity), is constrained and directed by its underlying CAP; and 'revolutionary' change in Kuhn's sense is accomplished by an alteration from CAP₁ to CAP₂ (a new CA Paradigm), signalled by a Paradigmatic Demonstration (PDP) that anomalies generated within the CAP₁ l-gs but not fully storable within them, can be both stated and resolved within the l-gs of CAP₂. This revolutionary 'paradigm-shift' is shown to involve alterations in the meanings of words, such that substantial problems of translation may arise — but may not be perceived as such — between the l-gs of CAP₁ and CAP₂, the users of the former perhaps being genuinely unable to see the latter as being other than (strictly) nonsense, i.e. meaningless, or false. The 'translation problem' between teachers and taught is viewed as a possible analogue of that between the several proponent groups of different CAPs, and some of the practical implications of this for education (notably for examining) are explored. Although the main purpose of the thesis is not exegesis nor critique of Wittgenstein's philosophy in itself, some attention is devoted to issues of interpretation, especially his doctrine of 'the unsayable' as against 'the sayable', in view of the significance for education of precise differentiation between the two; also for the abstraction, in relation to this distinction, of an adequate concept of 'reason'/'rationality'. In relation to the concept arrived at from Wittgenstein's and other published writings, concepts of 'rationality' etc. appealed to by Peters, Hirst, and others of the 'London' school of Educational Philosophy, are argued as being inadequate and misleading. In Science Education,

various limitations and faults are argued as being remediable if sufficient attention is paid to problems at the methodological/philosophical level, i.e. at the confluence between Educational Philosophy and Philosophy of Science; and educational changes needed to facilitate appropriate developments on these lines are outlined and discussed.

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PREFACE

Although Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations is widely acknowledged (e.g. by Passmore 1968) to be one of the most influential works in Philosophy published in this century, its true significance was not widely perceived within Philosophy until about a decade after Wittgenstein's death i.e. until about 1960. Since that time the study of Wittgenstein has spread very rapidly indeed, and since about 1970 (say) he has become the major figure of English-language academic philosophy. Coincidentally, as will be shown in the text of this thesis, from about 1960 Educational Philosophy entered upon what I shall call 'Phase 3' of its historical development, in which it regained touch, under the influence of C.D. Hardie, D.J. O'Connor, Israel Scheffler, R.S. Peters and others, with the 'parent' discipline of professional 'pure' Philosophy from which it had been largely separated for a half-century or more. It might have been expected, then, that Educational Philosophy would rapidly assimilate to itself the increasingly pervasive Wittgensteinian approach, especially since Wittgenstein's central concept of the 'language-game', with its emphasis upon developmental issues, would appear to lend itself very readily to educational purposes. But this has not yet occurred to any great extent. Although Soltis (1978), for example, makes some use of 'game' analogies, he does not extend this to the notion of the 'language-game'; and very few Educational Philosophers appear to have employed Wittgenstein's concepts or methods. A few papers of my own, some of which explicitly specify the concept of the 'language-game', have attempted to utilize a Wittgensteinian approach — but works along such lines have so far been, quantitatively, a very small minority. The predominant approach, largely due to the influence of Peters and the 'London' school, has derived from the Oxford style of linguistic analysis. This has lasted for the two decades since about 1960; but there are now signs that the potential of London-type Educational Philosophy may be reaching its limits.

In attempting to demonstrate the utility of the language-game approach within two particular fields of the general discipline of Education, viz. Educational Philosophy and Science Education, I shall attempt a synthesis between the language-game methodology and some concepts from a work which has already proved influential within a field which could be expected to relate to Science Education, namely Philosophy of Science; the work in question is one which itself embodies a Wittgensteinian approach: Kuhn's (1962) The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. From Kuhn's basic notion of 'paradigm' I

differentiate two more specific concepts, those of the Common Assumptions Paradigm (CAP) and the Public Demonstration Paradigm (PDP). With these concepts in combination with that of the 'language-game', a theoretical apparatus is set up with which the very great complexity and subtlety of educational issues may be tackled with (one hopes) an enhanced possibility of achieving a better understanding.

A problem which is peculiarly acute in Education is the intimate and perhaps inextricable intermingling of different 'dimensions': fact and value, what is and what ought to be, long-term desiderata and immediate brute practicalities. Educational Philosophy in its resurgence linked with professional 'pure' Philosophy, while gaining in sharpened perception of various conceptual issues, has tended to follow its 'parent' discipline in becoming 'exclusivist', i.e. concentrating upon matters which are in a sense uniquely philosophical: abstract and general, and criterially indeterminate. I argue against this trend, not in wishing to lessen the specifically philosophical forces deployed on the educational front, but rather in wishing to alter their nature and, especially, to swing them away from an 'exclusivist' and towards an 'inclusivist' approach which would facilitate integration both between academic disciplines and between theoretical exploration (with 'speculative philosophy', poetry, and perhaps science fiction at one extreme of the spectrum) and realistic appreciation of practicalities (at the other). Posing the issues in terms of the 'language-game' concept as used by Wittgenstein himself enables us, as I shall argue, to embrace both ends of the spectrum within a single continuum of methodology; and when our multifarious language-games are seen as resting upon and determined by a variety of Common Assumptions Paradigms of whose existence and nature we are usually only partly aware, a number of enigmatic features of education and of intellectual activity generally can better be understood. In particular, the paradox generated by a naive realism in Science Education, that we teach falsehoods some of the time, can be resolved.

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I have indicated in the text, by citation and quotation, the published works which I have found relevant to my argument — the nature of these debts to other workers, i.e. whether they have provoked my disagreement or provided

enlightenment, will be apparent, in each case, from the context. Apart from such debts to those who have published in the various disciplines from which I have drawn, and apart from emendations made in response to Supervisory comments (for which I reiterate my thanks), the arguments of this thesis are entirely my own.

D.S.

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