V

Quietism? Given that Putnam's Wittgenstein falls into neither the first nor the second of the clusters of interpretations of Wittgenstein's later work that Blackburn allows for, the question arises as to how he fares with respect to the third. Here is how Blackburn characterizes the third:

> The third cluster of interpretations wants elements from the second and from the first. It properly remembers Wittgenstein's love of motley. But it leaves no unfinished business—after all, how can Wittgenstein, with his hostility to the idea that philosophy is trying to find explanations of anything, admit to a feature of our language games that needs philosophical explanation? The true Wittgensteinian reaction is just to find *more* motley.... [This] is true to much in Wittgenstein, yet its problem is obvious: it denies Wittgenstein any words to say what he wanted about the differences that the position starts by celebrating.[21]

The third cluster wants to combine an element from the second cluster with an element from the first: from the second it keeps the idea that Wittgenstein wants to show us how very different ethical or mathematical propositions are from empirical descriptions (that he wants to teach us differences), from the first it keeps the idea that he takes us as far as we should want or need to go in philosophy (that he leaves no unfinished business). The problem, according to Blackburn, is that these elements cannot be combined without further ado: a mere exhibition of differences cannot by itself solve the very problems which force themselves upon us as soon as we take these differences to heart (problems such as: how can mere ejaculations don the garb of assertions?). Blackburn congratulates Wittgenstein on having unearthed some interesting and important philosophical problems; but for this very reason he is perplexed by Wittgenstein's apparent refusal to engage in the sort of constructive philosophizing that (Blackburn takes it) these very problems cry out for.

This renders the following exegetical question urgent for Blackburn: if grammatical investigation consists in a mere exhibition of differences, and if Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations unearth puzzling philosophical questions, then why

21. Blackburn, *op. cit.*, pp. 589–90.

does Wittgenstein think that, after having completed his grammatical investigations, he leaves no unfinished business? There is one answer to this question which has of late become something of an interpretative commonplace: Wittgenstein, we are told, espouses *quietism*. This is evidently the answer which Blackburn has in mind here. Elsewhere he offers the following characterizations of quietism:

> [T]he attitude which I christen *quietism* or *dismissive neutralism*... urges that at some particular point the debate is not a real one, and that we are only offered, for instance, metaphors and images from which we can profit as we please.[22]

> [Q]uietism... [is] the doctrine associated with Wittgenstein that there is no standpoint from which to achieve the traditional philosophical goal of a theory about some concept or another (e.g. truth, experience).[23]

Is Putnam's Wittgenstein a quietist? If one rests with the characterizations of quietism provided in these passages, the question is difficult to answer. For there is an unclarity in expressions such as 'urging that the debate [about X] is not a real one' and '[asserting] that there is no standpoint from which to achieve the goal [of providing a theory about X]'—an unclarity which has done much to obstruct the possibility of an encounter with Wittgenstein's philosophy.

One way of understanding these expressions is to take quietism to be (to borrow Blackburn's apt phrase) a form of *dismissive neutralism*. There is a debate we might engage in, but, while remaining neutral towards the parties currently so engaged, we quietists roundly dismiss the entire activity of so engaging oneself. Quietism, thus understood, is a call for renunciation: there is something which would be partaking in the debate in question, but the quietist urges us instead not to partake; there is something which would be attaining to the philosophical 'standpoint' in question, but the quietist urges us instead not to try to attain it. 'Quietism' is an apt label for such a call for renunciation. The original quietists, followers of the Spanish mystic Michaelis de Molinos, were participants in the seventeenth-century Catholic

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22. *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 146.

23. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 315.

Counter Reformation. They sought to withdraw from the world of the senses, to abstain from outward activity, and to absorb themselves in continuous passive devotional contemplation and prayer, hoping by this means gradually to effect an annihilation of the will (and therewith to attain beatitude). For the original quietists, there was, of course, a clear standing alternative to the rigours of their ascetic spiritual discipline: namely, indulging in an ordinary life of activity and absorption in the world of the senses— an alternative which most people embraced, but which they chose to renounce.[24] A quietist reading of Wittgenstein similarly takes there to be a clear standing alternative to the master's ascetic credo: indulging in an activity of constructive philosophizing—an alternative which most philosophers embrace, but which the true Wittgensteinian chooses to renounce. This fits in nicely with the thought that Wittgenstein's teaching means to leave us with no unfinished business. If we are true disciples of Wittgensteinian quietism we will have no stomach for the business that the unconverted feel we leave unaddressed. To say that Wittgenstein espouses quietism, so understood, is to say that there is a form of activity that he thinks we might engage in, but he urges us instead not to engage in it, urging us instead just to *stop*—and to renounce the activity altogether.[25]

Given such an understanding of quietism, is Putnam's Wittgenstein a quietist? No. To see why not, consider an alternative way of resolving the unclarity in the expressions that Blackburn employs in his characterization of quietism (such as 'urging that the debate [about X] is not a real one' and '[asserting] that there is no standpoint from which to achieve the goal [of providing a theory about X]'). On this alternative understanding, the aim is not merely

24. The term 'quietism' first came into professional philosophy, as far as I know, through Schopenhauer who thought the followers of Molinos were on to something, and was thus happy to declare: '[I]f, in the judgement of contemporaries, the paradoxical and unexampled agreement of my philosophy with quietism... appears an obvious stumbling block, yet I, on the other hand, see in this very agreement a proof of its sole accuracy and truth.' (*The World As Will and As Representation*, Vol. II, New York, NY: Dover, 1958; p. 615).

25. Various reasons can be (and have been) given for why Wittgenstein might think we should heed such a call for renunciation (e. g. there are reasons to think we will never be able to succeed in the activity in question, the activity itself is a frivolous one, etc.). It is immaterial to my purposes to enter into this level of detail. As soon as one thinks one owes an answer to the question 'Why does Wittgenstein think we ought to try to leave off philosophizing?', one's reading of Wittgenstein qualifies as quietist in the sense here outlined.

to *urge* that we leave off debating a certain question, but to *show* that there is no question to debate—to show that a certain apparent debate 'is not a real one', that the forms of words we avail ourselves of when we seek to describe the standpoint in question only apparently describe a standpoint. Thus the aim is not simply to withdraw from the debate, but rather to attempt to bring the debate to a satisfactory resolution. Thus Putnam writes:

> Wittgenstein... did *not* wish to sweep any problem under the rug; what he was rather trying to do is see just what picture 'holds us captive'—to find the roots of our conviction that we *have* a genuine problem, and to enable us to see that when we try to state clearly what it is, it turns out to be a nonsense problem. (p. 252)

A very different way of understanding Wittgenstein, from any of the three for which Blackburn allows, is encoded in this passage.

Putnam's Wittgenstein diverges from (what I have been calling) quietism in the following seven respects: (1) his philosophical practice is not exhausted by the activity of merely describing the differences between language-games; partly because (2) genuinely grasping what such differences come to itself requires an extensive positive effort of *understanding* (one of 'trying to understand the life we lead with our concepts in each of these distinct areas'), and because (3) the achievement of such understanding is itself in service of an ulterior elucidatory aim—one of *enabling us* to see something about ourselves:[26] that sometimes we mean nothing when we think we mean something (if 'we try to state clearly what the problem is, it turns out to be a nonsense problem');[27] this activity of elucidation itself presupposes an equally extensive task of *diagnosis* ('trying to see just what picture "holds us captive"— to find the roots of our conviction that we *have* a genuine problem'); thus (5) when a problem is made to disappear it is not because we succeed in averting our gaze from the problem, leaving it unaddressed, but because *the problem itself* is made to disappear; hence (6) we are not called upon to renounce anything (but rather to see that *there is nothing to renounce* where we thought that there

26. Where it is important that this is something that each person, in each such case, must come to see for him- or herself.

27. None of Blackburn's three clusters allows one to see how Wittgenstein's own descriptions of his aim in philosophy (in passages such as *Philosophical Investigations*, §464) could be anything but misdescriptions.

was something);[28] and, finally, (7) these twin philosophical tasks of understanding and elucidation never come to an end—each of us, necessarily always under the pressure of taking thought, will necessarily always provide the philosopher (in each of us and in each other) with plenty of unfinished business.[29]

VI

Wittgenstein on Hardy. The text on which Putnam leans most heavily in his discussion is Lectures XXV and XXVI of Wittgenstein's 1939 Cambridge *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*. It is clear why the 1939 lectures provide an attractive text for Putnam's purposes. In those lectures, Wittgenstein is concerned both to deny precisely what 'realists' (in Blackburn's sense of the word) affirm and to deny what anti-realists affirm. Or, to put the point positively, in those lectures Wittgenstein is concerned to affirm both (1) that the kind of relation that mathematical propositions bear to reality is of an entirely different sort than that of empirical propositions; and (2) that this does not mean that we should conclude that talk of the truth or falsity of mathematical propositions is a misleading *façon de parler*.

In Lecture XXV, Wittgenstein begins by considering a remark of G. H. Hardy's:

> Consider Professor Hardy's article ('Mathematical Proof') and his remark that 'to mathematical propositions there corresponds—in some sense, however sophisticated —a reality'.[30] (The fact that he

28. The following passages can be read as a disavowal of (what I have been calling) quietism:

[P]hilosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless....

If I am correct, then philosophical problems must be completely solvable....

If I say: here we are at the limits of language, then it always seems as if resignation were necessary, whereas on the contrary complete satisfaction comes, since *no* question remains.

The problems are dissolved in the actual sense of the word—like a lump of sugar in water. (*Philosophical Occasions*, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993, pp. 161, 181, 183).

29. Wittgenstein never comes close to saying 'My aim in philosophy is to leave no unfinished business' or anything of the sort! In my introduction to Putnam's *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1990), I discuss some of the passages in his work which have occasioned such a misreading and why it is essential to (Putnam's understanding of) Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy that it necessarily leave unfinished business.

30. What Hardy actually says is: '[Mathematical theorems] are, in one sense or another, however elusive and sophisticated that sense may be, theorems concerning reality...' (Hardy, 'Mathematical Proof', *Mind* 38 (1929); p. 18). Hardy does not anywhere in this article speak of a '*correspondence* to reality'!