

SERMON AGAINST THE TEDIUM AND INCOHERENCE OF OLP AND PRAGMATISM

I was influenced by OLP also, but Gellner's critique is pretty devastating, IMO. It's like taking a vote on whether the earth is flat, back when most people thought it was. The "point" of philosophy is (approximately) to be less stupid. To simply look at how words are currently used is just empirical linguistics. Not philosophy, which might look into the foundational concepts of empirical linguistics, as they SHOULD be understood. Taking Wittgenstein's "meaning is use" as a normative principle is a bit incoherent. For the meaning of meaning would be the typically sloppy use of meaning. As much as I love Hobbes' grim vision of human nature, his Euclidean-geometry-inspired notion of cognition as something like deductive calculation is flawed. The metaphor of mind as machine is not without value, but it misses *poesis* and the significance of metaphor itself. As Gellner points out, OLP tends to be tacitly normative, in a strongly conformist sense. It was delicious for academics who didn't want to risk saying something divisive and...interesting. I am strongly influenced by Wittgenstein, but I disagree with the way his later work tends to be used as a vague "medicine" in a therapeutic conception of philosophy. What's amusing about this is that it therefore only has value as a "parasite." This anti-philosophical reading of the later Wittgenstein tends to accidentally reinforce the brutal pre-theoretical pragmatism of world. It's an anti-philosophy for busy billionaires who already know that life is for getting what you want with whatever works. Or for engineers who want shippable

etc. It is deaf to the music of philosophy, of philosophy as intrinsically valuable to those hyper-sensitive to semantic and inferential norms. I don't at all mean to "judge" the pre-theoretical pragmatism of the world. We all enact it for much of our lives. This is the "falling immersion" discussed by Heidegger. I call it an tendency of OLP as confused when it offers its soporific as something sophisticated, when it's instead reactionary, and vents a resentment of strong philosophy, which is creative philosophy. Strong philosophy usually involves a fresh, illuminating metaphor. It usually sounds like nonsense at first, precisely because it violates (and expands) the tired, taken-for-granted framework. Of course, most nonsense is just confused. Even the revolutionary nonsense (strong philosophy) need not have a great practical relevance. People like Carnap were into Esperanto and Marx and thought of logical positivism as potentially world-saving, continuous with politics. I'm too skeptical for all that grand narrative stuff. It suffices for me that philosophy is (at least) art. Feynman said that physics requires creativity in a straight-jacket. I think philosophy is also a constrained form of art, a kind of non-fiction poetry. Indeed, if one drops the notion of a pre-articulated reality-from-no-perspective, then philosophers even forge (to some degree) the speakable structure of reality. Shelley wrote that poets were the unacknowledged legislators of the world, and philosophers are of course a strange variety of poet, the more so the more creative and unexpected they are. As Eliot explains in Tradition and the Individual Talent, we who arrive so late to the party find ourselves al-

most necessarily allusive, merely adding a brick to the wall that was already here when we arrived. I'd say that this is part of the straight-jacket.

Let me return to the main point. What am I trying to be ? What are you trying to be ? My objection to OLP and pragmatism is their futility, their redundancy. If you let go of what I'd call the fantasy of philosophy's social relevance, then (at least in my case) you have to come to terms with your strange love of what lives on as a "mere" poetry. What is good in pragmatism is actually akin to logical positivism, and has that poetic value. Indeed, William James is one of my key influences even now, but what interests me is his bold ontological speculations, which indeed violate the intuitions of common sense and would offend the prototypical OLP thought-police, who have elected themselves hall monitors in defense of a banality that needs no guardian. It's just a few inspired weirdos on the margins who take philosophy "seriously" in the way a painter takes paint "seriously." As an opportunity for a high kind of play.