CHAPTER VI

WITTGENSTEIN, AND IDEALISM
Wittgenstein, as I shall argue in this Chapter, is, in a fairly recognizable sense of the term, "an idealist." In both the works earlier and later he has developed what might be called his own form of idealism. It might appear very strange that Wittgenstein could use the language of idealism. It is sometimes argued by a section of scholars that Wittgenstein is an anti-metaphysician. The logical positivists treated the Tractatus Logico Philosophicus as their bible and tried to get intellectual support for their anti-metaphysical position from it. The positivist position that metaphysics is meaningless, is claimed to be implied in The Tractatus. The Philosophical Investigations has also been interpreted in the similar manner by some scholars. Metaphysics is a muddle. Metaphysical theories are results of conceptual confusion.

We wish to show that Wittgenstein, as a matter of fact, continues the Germanic tradition of transcendental idealism. Before we argue out this position it will not be out of place to spell out in brief the idealistic thesis. "Idealism" popularly means belief in and commitment to "ideals." In this sense we sometimes say that so and so is man of ideals, that means he is committed to
certain values and lives up to it. Idealism in this sense stands for certain values, beliefs and attitudes. But idealism as a philosophical theory has usually the following forms viz.,

(i) epistemological idealism,
(ii) metaphysical idealism, and
(iii) transcendental idealism.

Epistemological idealism relates to theory of knowledge. Metaphysical idealism relates to theory of reality. According to epistemological idealism the object of knowledge is dependent for its existence on the knowledge of the percipient. It got its classic expression in Berkeley. Berkeley was an epistemological idealist. For him esse-est-percipi. This means existence is perception. A thing cannot be said to exist if it is not perceived. This theory of perception compelled Berkeley to maintain that the external world is nothing but a series of perceptions.

Metaphysical idealism is a doctrine which claims that the nature of the object of knowledge is of the nature of mind. In other words the subject and the object are of the same type. The knowing subject and the object of knowledge belong to the same category. This type of
idealism is sometimes known as metaphysical idealism. Hegel and Bradley are metaphysicians in this sense. Epistemological idealism is sometimes known as subjective idealism. Subjective idealism, historically speaking has resulted in solipsism. To use Perry's words, it has resulted in what is known as ego-centric-predicament. Objective idealism, has reduced matter to objective mind. Hegel argues that the world is an externalization of the spirit. Mind categories are the ultimate categories. But Hegel did not use mind in the subjective sense as a specific apparatus of knowledge of an individual.

But both the two types of idealism are reductionist in nature. Epistemological idealism reduces the world to a series of perceptions. Metaphysical idealism reduces matter to mind. The type of idealism which Kant advocated may be characterized as transcendental idealism. According to Kant there are certain ultimate, basic and fundamental conditions of human experience and knowledge. These conditions are transcendental in nature. That is to say they are not created or manufactured by us. They constitute the basic furniture of human knowledge. Without these categories and concepts no knowledge is possible. But at the same time we cannot transcend the limits set by these categories. These
categories not only make our knowledge possible but set a limit to human knowledge. In other words they determine the nature and limits of knowledge.

In spite of the differences between epistemological, metaphysical and transcendental idealisms there are similarities among them. In other words they share in certain common points. Ideas or concepts are central to knowledge. Unfortunately the epistemological idealists used ideas in the sense of image or mental contents. To use Bradley's words the British empiricists psychologized logic. They treated logical issues as if they were psychological ones. Ideas in the sense of images or mental contents are not the subject matter of philosophy. The British empiricists confused between logical and psychological issues. Bradley makes a distinction between ideas as images and ideas as meanings. Ideas in the sense of meaning can be studied by philosophers and the idealists study concepts or ideas.

Bradley examines the categories of knowledge. He came to the conclusion that reality cannot be known through categories. He treated them as make-shift devices. Ideas are of no use in knowing reality. Ideas present before us appearances not reality, that is why Bradley recommends a
non-categorial mode of understanding. It is a type of understanding where concepts and categories cease to operate. Bradley spells out in detail the contradictions inherent in ideas or categories.

Wittgenstein can perhaps be characterized as a transcendental idealist of the Kantian type. In both the works Tractatus Logico Philosophicus and Philosophical Investigations transcendental idealism is inherent. It is not visible on the surface. One can dig out the idealistic structure submerged in both the works. Let us first discuss the idealistic position held in the Tractatus Logico Philosophicus. The Tractarian world is a totality of facts. These facts correspond to the elementary propositions. Facts for Wittgenstein are both actual and possible. The totality can be exhausted only by actual and possible facts. The elementary propositions lie submerged under ordinary language. At this stage language pictures reality. The ideal language much talked of in the Tractatus is not a constructed ideal language. It is a language discovered by a particular type of analysis. The elementary propositions are treated as the pictures of reality. According to Wittgenstein both language and reality have isomorphic structure. This means that the multiplicity in elementary
propositions correspond to the multiplicity in the facts. But this structure shows itself. That is why Wittgenstein claims that which can be shown cannot be said. This is the unsayable. The structure of the world is reflected in the structure of the language. This shows itself therefore it cannot be put into words. This is in fact the unspeakable. At this point Wittgenstein resembles Kant. Like Kant he sets a limit to human thought and communication. Kant warns us against transgressing the sphere of phenomena. Any transgression of the bounds of phenomena will result in antinomies. But at the same time Kant points out that there is an eternal impulse in man to transgress the bounds. Poets and mystics have always tried to transgress the bounds of the sayable and the speakable. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* may be characterized as a treatise concerned with setting up of boundaries to the world. Similarly Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* can be characterized as a treatise concerned with setting up of limits of meaningful discourse. Wittgenstein maintains that the limits of my language are the limits of my world. This has puzzled subsequent commentators. Some of them have read solipsism into it. But we wish to point out that Wittgenstein is not a solipsist. His argument that
where of one cannot speak there of one must be silent is not symptomatic of solipsism; rather it tells us not to transgress the boundary of speech and communication. Language sets a limit to thought and communication. Any attempt to go beyond the boundaries of communication is to land oneself in absurdities. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* maintained that only genuine propositions are descriptive ones. The propositions of natural sciences belong to this category. They constitute the area of the sayable. As Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* gave a metaphysical defence to Newtonian mechanics, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* was trying to delimit the scope and boundaries of descriptive propositions of natural science. Wittgenstein is not a subjective idealist. He does not treat the external world as a series of perception in the mind of the percipient. The following arguments could be given on his behalf. The subject of knowledge can never be made the object of knowledge. This is a position which is usually accepted by the transcendental idealist. The transcendental idealist make a distinction between the 'ego' and the 'transcendental self.' The ego may be treated as an object of knowledge but the transcendental self can never be treated so. Kant made such a distinction. Accor-
According to him the self is a transcendental unity of perception. It cannot be caught in the process of perception. Its existence is logically postulated to account for the unity of perception. The Upanisadic text is full of such references. It has been argued in the Upanisads that 'I' or the 'transcendental self' cannot be treated as an object of knowledge. All knowledge is possible because of this transcendental self. The self is a unity of perception. That is why it cannot be treated as an object of perception. In the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara the self has been treated as a transcendental principle. It is not amenable to ordinary modes of perception. No categories can be applied to it because of the simple reason that the application of all categories are made possible because of this principle. Wittgenstein treats the self as Kant treats it. Therefore Wittgenstein can be treated as a Kantian in his treatment of the self. For him the 'I' or the self is a formal concept. There are no objects corresponding to these concepts in the world. Wittgenstein does not reduce the self to a series of impressions in the manner of David Hume. Hume reduced self to a string of impressions. His famous argument is that when one looks within, one never comes across what is known as the self.
One only comes across a particular sensation or other but never what is known as the self. Hume committed the mistake which many other empiricists have done. The empiricists treated the self as an object and later on were disappointed when they did not find it. This is as good as raising the dust and complaining that one cannot see things. The formal distinction between subject and object compels one to posit that the self can never be made as an object of knowledge. The Advaïtins were aware of this fact. They made a distinction between perceptual consciousness and witness consciousness (Sāksicaitanya). The witness consciousness can never be caught in the process of perception. Any attempt to perceive it in the manner of an object will lead to infinite regress. The empiricist forgot to recognise the logic of perception that it is based upon a postulate of transcendental self. The omission of this fact has led empiricism to solipsism. There is no element of empiricism, consequently of solipsism, in Wittgenstein. He is neither an empiricist nor a solipsist. He is a transcendental idealist.

As we have pointed out Wittgenstein is not an empiricist he is not a realist too. He does not treat the
world as a totality of things as a realist would do. Nor
is he an advocate of common sense view of the world as
G.E. Moore would like to uphold. His treatment of the
world is Kantian in nature. The Kantian world is a cata-
gorised or conceptualized world. The world that we know
Kant would argue that it is not the world per se. It is
a world categorised. The world becomes intelligible to us
through these categories. The categories so to say give
a shape to the world. One comes across similar views in
the Tractatus Logico Philosophicus of Wittgenstein. He
treats the world as a totality of facts. These facts
consist of objects. The fact is a configuration of objects.
But how did Wittgenstein arrive at this? In answer to this
it can be said that Wittgenstein arrived at this theory
of the world through extensional analysis of language.
He treats language as truth functional. A truth function
is a compound proposition whose truth value can be deter-
mined by the truth values of its component propositions.
Thus in the process of analysis we arrive at elementary
propositions. A compound proposition is decomposable
into elementary ones. An elementary proposition lies
hidden behind the compound proposition. The elementary
propositions in their turn picture facts. The elementary
propositions can be, with some reservation likened to Kantian categories. As the Kantian categories are empty without the content so is the case with elementary propositions. The categories of Kant give a shape to the world. But the world and the elementary propositions according to Wittgenstein have the same structure. They are isomorphic in nature. The elementary propositions, so to say, are the categories of knowledge. They are impersonal and objective in nature. They are not like the subjective impressions of the Human variety. In other words they cannot be treated as a string of fleeting impressions. The elementary propositions have an objective status even though Wittgenstein refused to give an example of it. But what is the nature of the world without these elementary propositions? As the world for Kant cannot be made intelligible without the categories similarly the world for Wittgenstein is unintelligible without elementary propositions. The elementary propositions in a way give a shape to the world. This is an idealistic position.

The *Philosophical Investigations* also has an idealistic undertone. This is the line of continuity between *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. In
Philosophical Investigations language has been treated as a form of life. It is a prism through which we look at the world. What does it mean? Wittgenstein's remark that there cannot be 'seeing' as such but always 'seeing as' is a pointer in this direction. This means that there cannot be any 'seeing' in perception without application of categories. This is really a Kantian position. Knowledge is conceptual. Without concepts and categories no knowledge is possible. An object is an object only when it is seen through a category. The world cannot be said to exist for us unless we apply these categories. The world without the categories is the Kantian nou-menon which is unknown and unknowable. It is through the network of language games that the world becomes intelligible to us. The difference between Kant and the later Wittgenstein is that Kant believed in fixed categories whereas the later Wittgenstein does not believe in the fixity of categories. For him language is a form of life. Sometimes the old language games become obsolete and new language games come into being. Wittgenstein's language games are the counterparts of Kant's categories with the difference that Kant's categories are fixed and static and Wittgenstein's language games are dynamic in nature. Language
games grow, become obsolete and new language games come into being. But the fact remains that the world is intelligible to us only through language games. Language has been treated as a form of life. This is an idealistic thesis in disguise. This means that language and life are inalienably connected. To understand life means to understand language game and to understand language game means to understand forms of life. Language cannot be understood without relating it to human context and situation. Wittgenstein in the manner of F. H. Bradley treats the world as an organic whole. Bradley points out that to understand one thing is to relate it to other things. This is in short the cardinal feature of idealism. The idealist like Hegel maintains that the world is organically related. Any idea contains limitless possibilities. The idea of being for example not only contains limitless potentialities but also the idea of its self-annihilation that is non-being. 'Being' even contains the idea of 'non-being.' This might look very strange and contradictory. How is it that both 'being' and 'non-being' which appear contradictory in the surface go together? This cannot be understood without unearthing the Hegelian philosophical motives. We wish to point out in this connection that Hegel
was concerned with exploring the limitless potentialities of basic ideas of thought. Ideas constitute an organic unity, so does thought. Thought and reality have the same structure. This brand of Germanic idealism is very much present in Wittgenstein's work. Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* narrates an incident in the following manner. Suppose somebody comes across a nail on the way but how do we recognise it as a nail. A nail is a nail only when it is related to certain other things. This means that the idea of purely unrelated object is a myth. All language games are internally connected. According to Wittgenstein experience is semantic in nature. Non-categorised pure experience without any semantic touch is a myth. In other words pure experience is not possible at all. An experience in order to be an experience has to conform to the categories. It can be said in this connection that the totality of language games is actually the totality of facts for us. In the *Tractatus Logico Philosop hicus* Wittgenstein thought that these language games in the form of elementary propositions are fixed for all time to come. But in *Philosophical Investigations* he comes to the conclusion that there are infinite and innumerable language games. Therefore there are
innumerable ways of looking at the world. It is the language games, the modes of representation that bring us closer to the world. Without these language games the world will not be world for us. It is only through language games we know the world and talk about it. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein characterizes these totalities as both actualities and possibilities. The world is totality of facts both actual and possible. It is interesting to note that in the totality of facts Wittgenstein included possible facts. Why did he do so? In answer to this it can be said that logically speaking the totality has to include possibilities. Without this totality will not be complete. The actual language games do not exhaust the totality of language games. The totality of language games is constituted by both possible and actual language games. This is the meaning of totality. In this connection we wish to point out that this is much more a Hegelian brand of idealism that is recognizable in the works of Wittgenstein. It is very difficult to say whether Wittgenstein read Hegel and Kant and was influenced by their writings. But the fact remains that the Germanic idealistic element can be discovered in Wittgenstein.
One of the major themes of idealism is that the world is a system of ideas or concepts. These ideas are not subjective impressions of human mind but objective in nature. As Hegel points out that the world is an externalization of ideas. The world is ultimately a system of ideas. Virtually there is no distinction between the ideas and the world. Now the question is what is the nature of these ideas? Are the ideas language bound, context bound or they are independent of language and context? Answers to these questions will open up new dimensions. If it is argued that language conditions thought then one will argue with Sapir and Whorf that our perceptions are determined by our language. In other words this will lead to linguistic determination of human perception. One will be forced to accept the view that the categories of language are the categories of reality. Some philosophers have pleaded for this view. Russell argues that the linguistic structure of Indo-European languages has been conducive to subject predicate logic and substance attribute metaphysics. In this connection he further argues that language devoid of nouns and adjectives perhaps will not have substance attribute metaphysics. Substance attribute metaphysics is contingent upon linguistic facts.
Sapir and Whorf go to the extent of saying that language not only determines reality but the world view as well. There is a close and intimate connection between the structure of language and the structure of thought and reality. Is Wittgenstein Sapirian? Does Wittgenstein accept the Sapir Whorf hypothesis? These questions are of fundamental importance. We wish to point out that Wittgenstein is not a Sapirian. He will not agree with Sapir and Whorf that the categories of reality are dependent on linguistic categories of specific languages. The views of Sapir and Whorf tie reality to specific languages. Thus it will lead in the direction of not only metaphysical relativism but cultural relativism too. In other words linguistic relativism will ultimately lead to ethnocentricism. There will be as many pictures of reality as there are languages. Sapir and Whorf accord place of primacy to linguistic categories and these categories are language specific. Therefore it can be said that different linguistic groups will have their own picture of reality as determined by their linguistic categories. But what is the status of these linguistic categories? To this question, Sapir and Whorf will probably tell us that the linguistic categories are autonomous in nature. In
that they determine and condition our thought. The linguistic categories condition the nature of reality by way of conditioning the nature of thought. For Sapir and Whorf there is only a one way traffic between language and reality. But this will not be acceptable to Wittgenstein. To interpret Wittgenstein as a Sapirian is to commit a mistake. It is true that for Wittgenstein experience is semantic in nature. It is true that perception and knowledge is category based but these categories are not contingent upon specific languages. Though the categories and concepts are expressed by and embodied in languages, yet they are not dependent on languages. This means that categories and concepts are independent of any specific languages which embody them. In this sense Wittgenstein may be characterized as a Kantian but not a Sapirian. There is a sense in which it can be said that the basic categories and concepts are not language dependent. They are trans-linguistic and trans-cultural in nature. The twelve categories of Kant and seven categories of Kanada belong to this type. The Vaisesika Padarthas and the Kantian categories are not linguistic in nature. They are the categories of thought, speech and communication. These categories cannot be explained in accordance
with the Sapir Whorf hypothesis. There is a sense in which there is a bedrock of human thought and knowledge. Kant and Kanada seek to discover such a bedrock. These categories may be termed as basic, primary and fundamental categories. These primary categories are not language bound, context bound or culture bound. They are trans-linguistic and trans-cultural in nature. As opposed to these, there may be a group of categories known as the secondary ones. The primary categories do not change, they are stable and fixed. To use Strawson’s word they are basic or primitive categories. The secondary categories are amenable to change. In a certain sense these categories can be said to be bound to context and culture. The derivative meanings of words in the Sanskrit language is a case in point. A close look at the formation of compound (Samāsa) and morphophonemic analysis (Sandhi) of words in Sanskrit language tells us a lot about the social and cultural condition prevalent in ancient India. There is a rule regarding compound formation in Sanskrit language. It is this: an expression denoting a group of people who are treated as untouchable (anirvāsitasudra) cannot be compounded with expression denoting higher class. This grammatical rule and consequently the expression
anirvāṣitasudra are indicative of the social and cultural conditions prevalent in ancient India. But this does not go to prove the Sapirian hypothesis. It simply indicates that there is a constant interplay between language and thought in the sphere of secondary concepts. Sometimes new thoughts give rise to new grammatical and linguistic categories. It may so happen also that these grammatical categories shape our perception and thought. At this stage the question of cross cultural communication and understanding becomes prominent. How do people belonging to one culture understand others belonging to another culture? To this question a solipsistic answer may be given. It may be argued that one cultural and linguistic group in principle cannot understand another for the simple reason that both of them have two distinct and different linguistic categories. We want to maintain in this connection that this position will not be acceptable to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein surely believes in infinite and innumerable number of language games. He will even go the extent of conceding that different linguistic and cultural groups have their specific language games. But what are the language games? Are they really private, to such an extent that one group cannot
understand another? The idea of linguistic privacy and solipsism goes against the very idea of language games. Language games are public. To say that language is a 'game' is to say that it is governed by rules, and to say that it is governed by rules is to say that others can understand it. It is true that certain cultural categories prevalent in one group cannot easily be made intelligible to others. There might be difficulties, inhibitions and obstructions in the way. But this does not go to prove linguistic and cultural solipsism. To understand another group may be very difficult but not impossible. The logical impossibility of cross-cultural understanding is a myth for the simple reason that it goes against the very idea of language games. The Oriya proverb that 'mature girls and ghee should not be kept for a long time at home,' may appear very ludicrous to an outsider. They may think that these people are barbarians, uncultured and uncivilized because they do not want to keep their daughters and ghee at their home. One who passes such judgement fails to take into account the culture and tradition of the people who have this adage. What we wish to suggest is this: to understand one culture
is to understand the form of life and way of life of the people; otherwise misunderstanding and misinterpretation are likely to ensue. As a matter of fact many European scholars passed such types of biased judgements on Asiatic civilizations in the beginning of 19th century. Different language games are not isolated islands. They criss-cross and overlap each other. This shows that language games are interconnected. Different language games have contact points. This interconnection among language games makes it possible for one culture to be intelligible to another. To overlook this is to misunderstand Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is an idealist but never a solipsist. To read solipsism in Wittgenstein is to misinterpret and misunderstand language games.