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Discussion : The *It-tish* Language

Paul Langham et John King-Farlow

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DISCUSSION: THE *IT-TISH* LANGUAGE

I. THE TRANSLATION OF SENTENCES OF DISPARATE
LOGICO-EPISTEMIC LANGUAGES

Paul LANGHAM

WHEREBY (both$_j$ (both It thisplaces and It reds and It books) and $_{j\text{-}jj}$ (both It thatplaces and It blacks and It books) Thereby It Costliers $_{j\text{-}jj}$."[1] To a remark that a certain piece of music was difficult, Dr Johnson once replied, "Difficult, I wish that it were impossible!" No doubt there are many who have a similar feeling about Professor King-Farlow's continuing attempts at translating ordinary English sentences into It-tish and other alien languages. King-Farlow is not, of course, concerned with mere superficial rephrasing of English sentences in more obscure manners: He is primarily interested in demonstrating that translations can be affected between languages that embody radically disparate sets of "metaphysical" beliefs or presuppositions. If this is possible, and he would claim that it "is a matter which History and Formal Semantics, not pontification, had best be allowed to decide", then there is cause for optimism (inter alia) regarding the possibility of mutual understanding between philosophers of radically different pursuasions.[2] Although I believe that such translations are *in principle* impossible, I do not intend to pursue that line of argument here; all that I wish to contend is the more modest point, that in none of his translations has King-Farlow ever really taken on a radically disparate logico-epistemic system.

The basic metaphysical belief that underlies, or is expressed in, It-tish is that the universe consists of one unique substance or one unique individual, or — from the point of view of logic — that there is one and only one logical subject to all well-formed assertions. Although there may appear to be a diversity of existents, this is merely an illusion; although a spoken or written sentence may have as its grammatical subject some individual other than It, when analysed the proper logical subject will always turn out to be 'It'. All translations from ordinary English into It-tish require a rephrasing such that the grammatical subject of the It-tish *translans* is

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1. John KING-FARLOW, "Monism, Naturalism and Nominalism: Can an Atheist's World-View be Logically Expressed?" *Laval théologique et philosophique,* volume XXIX, no 2 (June, 1973), p. 123.

2. Cf. KING-FARLOW, "On Making Sense in Philosophy and Rhetoric (A Reply to Professor Peter Schouls)", *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* volume 4, no 1 (Winter, 1971); and "Two Dogmas of Linguistic Empiricism", *Dialogue,* volume XI, no 3 (1972).

'It' no matter what the grammatical subject of the *translandum* was. Translations of this kind are obviously possible, even though they may turn out extremely long and complex — as is evidenced by the openning sentence in It-tish. The crucial question is: Do we have a genuine translation or do we merely have a transliteration of a sentence, i.e., have we managed to transfer the content of the sentence to a different logico-epistemic system or have we simply rephrased it and left the underlying logico-epistemic system unaltered?

In order to decide this question, let us consider some of King-Farlow's examples and translation techniques. 'Cain kills Abel' becomes in It-tish 'It kills Cainly: Abelly'. To the man on the Clapham omnibus 'Cain kills Abel' is a sentence about one individual performing an action involving another individual. In It-tish, of course, there is only one individual, It, and therefore *one and only one agent who can act*. Nonetheless, the MOTCO may regard 'It kills Cainly: Abelly' as an acceptable translation, because he can surreptitiously interpret it as a rephrasing of a standard English sentence; he puts in the individuals, he does not confuse it with 'It kills Cainly: quinckly', for example. The It-tish is at least a transliteration: Is it, however, a genuine translation? I think that it is obviously not. Who bears the blame in the Clapham court of law for the killing of Abel? Cain! In the It-tite court of law It must carry the can — if there are cans to carry. But this can make no sense to our MOTCO. The transliteration is simple, but the depth-meaning and the depth-implications have not been touched.

A similar obstacle faces the It-tite who attempts to translate his monist views into a pluralist language. Mandarin It-tites, King-Farlow suggests, might become interested in quantification logic.[3] They will introduce certain suffixes into their language that "minister to the use of 'universal quantification' within a monist framework", i.e., they do the work of '(x)'. Nothing seems required to do the work of '(Ex)'. But both (x) and (Ex) are part-and-parcel of the logic of a pluralist metaphysics, *they do not make sense in a monist framework*. What would 'for all x' mean to an It-tite? There is only It. What would 'there exists an x mean'? These would be unintelligible locutions.

These same Mandarin It-tites decide to set up a Royal Commission to compose some work: "The Commission's Members are given a decade to turn out a book that will cover plenty of appropriate linguistic ground."[4] This sounds very much like our pluralist world. *They* set up *a* Commission; *a decade; a* book; appropriate, as opposed to inappropriate, irrelevant. Not only do these monists always think in pluralistic terms, *they* even have a king or a queen. That King-Farlow is accepting transliterations for translations from English to It-tish and is setting up an "alien" language that is really merely non-ordinary English and is accepting transliterations back from this to English is easily seen. What King-Farlow's technique requires is that one say to oneself, 'Imagine a situation in which the world is exactly the same, except that I speak a monist language'. But being a monist makes a world of difference; the concepts that one employs, one's entire world, the way "one" acts, all change. In a

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3. *Monism, Naturalism and Nominalism*, p. 130. Not only quantification may be "missing" in a monist logic, there is no guarantee that even true and false would exist.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

monist world there are no individuals, not even surreptitious ones. The It-tite is not someone speaking pseudo-monism while thinking pluralism, he is a *bona fide* monist. All this points to the conclusion that there is no radically different logico-epistemic language involved; it is just our pluralistic framework talked about in a rather bizarre and utterly uneconomic way.

When considering mutual understanding between disparate philosophic positions or between theists and atheists, the same applies. Either one conjures up systems that are not really disparate at all or there will be depth-meanings and depth-implications that will be untranslatable. Briefly: To be a theist is not simply to be an atheist whose world includes a god; belief in a deity radically affects one's entire world-view. No translation of genuine theist statements can be obtained in a language that does not possess the relevant logico-epistemic concepts for dealing with them; and an atheist language does not.

II. LANGHAM, TRUTH AND LOGIC

John KING-FARLOW

PROFESSOR Paul Langham writes as an extreme relativist. His last paragraph and his reference to the recent exchanges between P. A. Schouls and myself in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* make it fair to assume that his reactions to "Monism, Naturalism and Nominalism" echo the following thesis, *L-T. LANGHAM-THESIS: If one does not ACCEPT wholeheartedly a set of convictions, of which, e.g., C3 and C15 are members, then it is impossible for one even to UNDERSTAND C3 and C15.* Being something of a believer myself in man's potential objectivity and in what Aquinas would call the *Natural Light of Reason*, I find myself baffled! If Langham is right to feel sure about L-T then he would be behaving weirdly — (by his own goodly assumptions) — in trying to communicate with philosophers whom he believes not to share his convictions. But if Langham is right to feel warranted in trying to communicate with philosophers of different convictions, then it is bizarre indeed for him to be simultaneously abjuring the point of his own heroic efforts by *advocating* versions of L-T.

1. Suppose that two editors and advocates of bilingual communication, Emmanuel Trépanier II and John King-Farlow III, were agreed to meet (like Napoleon and the Tsar) on a raft between Ottawa and Hull. Suppose that they drank champagne together, exclaimed "Je ne peux pas vous comprendre: you can't understand me!", shook hands and flew home by helicopter. If Trépanier and King-Farlow were of different philosophical orientations, then this would be the BEST sort of communication for THEM, according to Langham's L-T. But, extraordinarily enough, and happily enough, I know that what Langham would *like* is an increase in philosophers' attention to the philosophical contributions of many nations, cultures and movements. He thinks apparently that a hermeneutic approach based on L-T is required. But L-T, alas, is an illusory aid to *rational* communication.

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2. Langham, it also seems, sometimes prefers to follow Protagoras' extreme view that each man is the measure of all things. In the article of mine which he attacks there is, (if I or many a reader be the measure), a crucial section called " 'Seeing as' and the Gaining of Monist Visions" — see *Laval theol. et phil.* XXIX, 2, 132–134. In this section I did actually take note, (by my measurements), of what Langham thinks that I did not consider: his point that mere changes in linguistic forms need have no philosophical significance. *By themselves alone,* I was glad to admit, such changes ·may be useless for articulating a Monist philosophy. It is necessary to employ such means as the *meditative techniques* which I describe, or a variety of other means, in order to arrive at the beginnings of a Monistic vision (Gestalt) of reality.

3. Professor Langham also seems to be rather Protogorean about (what my measurements indicate to be) frequent and explicit mentions of another reason for working out the rudiments of a Monist logic and semantics. (See pages 126–127, 132–133, 139). I mention there the great influence of Bertrand Russell on the evolution of Anglo-Saxon philosophy since 1900. Russell held that it was impossible to combine respect for science, mathematics and ordinary experience with Monism or Monadology — or with any form of the Absolute Idealist thought which influenced the English-and-French-speaking worlds greatly in his first forty years. Russell offered a new system of logic and an interpretation of it. He took both to be Reason's indispensable tools. He took both to show that a consistent and adequate approach to logic rules out Monism as an ontological option for reasonable men. I have gone to some technical pains to show why Russell at his most influential was seriously wrong about logic and metaphysics, although Langham writes as if nothing of philosophical importance was at stake.

4. If Professor Langham alternates between (A) System-Circle-Relativism, which rules out fruitful argument between men allied to opposed Circles of Systematic Thought, and (B) Radical-Individualistic-Relativism, which enables the Protagorean reader to decide for himself what he cares to find and to be unable to discover in an article, I shall be hard put to try engaging Tweedledy-A without enraging Tweedledy-B and *vice-versa.* Perhaps some other readers are easier to convince.