

# CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study  
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

VOLUME II ISSUE I 2007

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 67-73

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*In Short - Wittgenstein's Method of Philosophical Analysis*

## ABSTRACT

The present work attempts to explicate the philosophical method of Wittgenstein, which he formulated in the *Tractatus* in order to determine the meanings of our linguistic expressions by analyzing the basic structure of the language. Wittgenstein attempts to show that traditional philosophical problems can be avoided entirely by application of an appropriate methodology. The analysis of language is one important tool of solving problems. The role of language as a central concern of Analytic philosophers is the dimension most involved in disputes about the methodology employed. My understanding about Wittgenstein's concept of language in his two philosophies is founded on the methods that he adopts. He formulated two different methods of philosophy and produced two philosophies on the basis of his theories of meaning, i.e., picture and use theories. I intend here to study about the theory of meaning that Wittgenstein developed in his *Tractatus*.

## BIOGRAPHY

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## WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Wittgenstein is one of the great philosophers of twentieth century analytic philosophy to emerge from the English speaking world. A number of examples can be given for this claim to greatness. It has been said that every great philosopher has turned the direction of philosophical discussion. Considering the works that set a landmark in the discourse of philosophical issues, Wittgenstein can be praised as a trendsetter - he has occupied his own place in the history of western philosophy, general and analytic. He changed the method and direction of philosophical pursuit twice during his life time. Stuart Shanker critically assessed Wittgenstein's contribution thus: 'To be the author of two revolutions is perhaps, unparalleled. Yet, it is not entirely unaccountable, if one considers the exceptional temperament and gift which Wittgenstein brought to his study of philosophy.'<sup>i</sup>

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>ii</sup> (hereafter refers to as *Tractatus*) is Wittgenstein's first contribution; published in 1921, just after World War I. The second found final form in his *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter referred to as *P.I.*), published posthumously in 1953, after World War II. These two major works created a new movement and turned philosophy in another direction. It may be said that without knowing Wittgenstein's philosophy, it is perhaps not possible to understand either the philosophy of language in a general sense, or analytic philosophy. His contributions to philosophy have substantially changed the theory of description and meaning, and severs the tradition from Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore within British contemporary philosophy. However, Northop Frye remarks that these two phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy are 'a distinction between two types of artistic genius', which he refers to as 'the conservative' and the 'revolutionary'.<sup>iii</sup> There are, of course, many lines of connection that show a continuous thought in the ideas of his early and later work, but the differences between them are also very clear. These differences are observed in the philosophical methods adopted by Wittgenstein in his two works. This change in the method of philosophical analysis parallels the change in the conception of language in the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

The *Tractatus* and *P.I.* are both the results of the most extreme exactitude and care, both evolved over a long period of time with constant revision, rewriting and rearrangement, and both reflect the same kind of structural thinking and desire for thoroughness and completeness. The *Proto-Tractatus*, the *Notebook* and the *Blue and Brown Books* are the rudimentary works and the basis of these two major works. But the treatment of tones and styles in these two works are indeed very different. The *Tractatus* is carefully designed just like a crystal, seemingly broken up into many facets until we see how problematic it is underneath. The *P.I.*, on the other hand, is like an ocean which has to be sounded again and again until we find its bottom, for there are depths beyond depths concealed beneath its seemingly casual tone.

The most important contribution from Wittgenstein is the introduction of a new method of inquiry into philosophical analysis; and there is considerable merit as well as self-insight. Wittgenstein changes the way of doing philosophy by giving more emphasis to the analysis of language. He defines philosophy in the *Tractatus* as 'All philosophy is a 'critique of language'. It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of proposition need not be its real one'.<sup>iv</sup> The limits of my language are the limits of my world. If we misunderstand/misinterpret the meanings of the language, then we will fail to describe the clear picture of the world. By misinterpretation of the meanings of language, philosophers are trapped in a linguistic puzzlement and that multiplies the problems. Analytic philosophers think that the main task of philosophy is either to solve or to dissolve the problems in the philosophical discourse by way of correct interpretation of meanings that describe the world. But in addition to his substantive contribution to the theory of meaning, the philosophy of mind, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, and the philosophy of psychology and of mathematics have been enormously influenced, (though in each of these cases, the results achieved are not necessarily associated with the method itself).

Erich Heller, in respect of Wittgenstein's impact on the philosophical community, succinctly pointed out the following:

Wittgenstein was also an Austrian who conquered British philosophy; but this, as befits Austrian conquests, was due to a misunderstanding. At least he himself believed that it was so. When the pages of the journal of *Mind* were filled with variations of his philosophical themes, he praised a certain American detective story magazines, and wondered how, with the offer of such reading matter, 'anyone can read *Mind* with all its importance and bankruptcy'. When his influence at Oxford was its height, he referred to it as 'a philosophical desert' and 'the influence area'. These are ironical exaggerations, but undoubtedly serious as expressions of Wittgenstein's discontent.<sup>v</sup>

The early work of Wittgenstein is mainly devoted to a study of the structural meaning of language in relation to the reality of the world. Russell's remarks that Wittgenstein is concerned with a logically perfect language and

not with any ordinary language is just true if we see that Wittgenstein is interested in the problem of description. To forbid nonsense it is enough to show that the true function of language is to describe. Metaphysics is only a pseudo-description.<sup>vi</sup> His early philosophical work, though it was more or less similar to the view of Russell's *Logical Atomism*, has influenced the emergence of the new philosophical movement of the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle. And the later work has given a new impetus in the development of ordinary language philosophy that centred on the Oxford analysis. By his own philosophical works and through his influence on several generations of other thinkers, Wittgenstein transformed the nature of philosophical activity. From two distinct approaches, he sought to show that traditional philosophical problems can be avoided entirely by application of an appropriate methodology, one that focuses on analysis of language.<sup>vii</sup> The role of language as a central concern of Analytic philosophers is the dimension most involved in disputes about the methodology employed.

The present work attempts to explicate the philosophical method of Wittgenstein, which he formulated in the *Tractatus* in order to determine the meanings of our linguistic expressions by analyzing the basic structure of the language. Wittgenstein says about the method of philosophy in his *Tractatus* that:

The correct method of philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science – i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whatever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – this method would be only strictly correct one.<sup>viii</sup>

The above philosophical method that Wittgenstein has adopted in the *Tractatus* is a logical method that determines the truth or falsity of a proposition. It relates the analysis of language for determining its meanings through which we describe the facts of the world. Language and the analysis of the concepts expressed by the language have become an important method and a central concern of philosophy. He believes that only propositions with an empirical reference have meaning at all. The Logical Positivists to a certain extent blindly followed Wittgenstein's position on the meanings of linguistic expressions. According to him, language is not conventional symbolism. The essential business of language is, to the early Wittgenstein, to assert or deny facts. Given the syntax of a language, the meaning of a sentence is determined as soon as the meaning of the component words is known.<sup>ix</sup> A proposition has meaning because it pictures the fact which it stands for or represents. Wittgenstein thinks that the essence of the proposition is to be found in hieroglyphic writing which pictures the facts it describes. The pictorial character of language remains unchanged because the logical picture or proposition is a picture either true or false of the fact. There is a commonality in the structure of both fact and picture. To understand the theory, it is necessary to examine Wittgenstein's concepts of fact, picture and their logical relations.

According to Wittgenstein, a fact is whatever the case is and also whatever is not the case. The notion of fact is treated by him as ultimate and undefinable. Any sort of picture is a fact including the fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another. He clearly makes a difference between a fact and an object. The objects are the constituents of a fact. It may be described, however, as a combination of simple objects. For example, the proposition, 'There is a tree in front of the house' may be considered as a fact. The tree and the house are different objects. These objects are the elements of a fact. This fact also has a structure in order to establish a relationship between these two different objects. At the same time, these two objects may constitute another different fact. Two facts may have the same objects as constituents but the structure or the form would differ. It shows the different forms of relationship of the objects. The fact depicts logical pictures of the different relationship of the objects. As Wittgenstein puts it: 'Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable'. 'The configuration of objects produces states of affairs'.<sup>x</sup> It is important to remember that the structure is not a separate element in a fact. The facts can be divided into Atomic and Complex facts. The atomic facts are the facts which cannot further be divided. But they are constituted as relation of different simple objects. Whereas, the complex facts are those composed of atomic facts, which can further be analysed in terms of the basic constituent parts. Thus, Wittgenstein says that the world is the totality of facts.

Another important concept in Wittgenstein's philosophy is the concept of picture. He analyses this concept in the form of model construction. He tells us that pictures present the existence and non-existence of atomic facts. He writes as follows:

A picture is a model of reality. In a picture objects have the elements of the picture corresponding to them. In a picture the elements of the picture are the representatives of objects. What constitutes a

picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way. The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.

Let us call connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.<sup>xi</sup>

Wittgenstein further analyses the essential features of a picture in terms of logical propositions. The essential features of a picture are, according to him, preserved in the proposition.

In a proposition, a thought can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of thought. I call such elements of the 'simple signs'. And such a proposition 'completely analysed'. The simple signs employed in propositions are called names. A name means an object. The object is its meaning, ('A' is the same sign as 'A'.). The configuration of objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional sign.<sup>xii</sup>

The picture and the facts pictured are according to Wittgenstein, the same in the sense that they must belong to the same genre. 'A picture can depict any reality whose form it has. A spatial picture can depict anything spatial, a coloured one anything coloured, etc.'<sup>xiii</sup> A photograph, for instance, is in space and can, therefore, repeat the exact spatial relations of the fact it pictures, a face, a tree, or whatever it is. But this seems to raise a difficulty. We may ask a question how does a proposition picture spatial fact, the proposition not being in space? Wittgenstein's answer is that the fact has a logical form and it is this logical form which has to be pictured. Every picture is thus a logical picture, though some pictures may also be spatial, like a photograph. What Wittgenstein means may be made clear by an example. The rise and fall of a patient's temperature can be shown in a graph. The graph is spatial and temperature is not. And yet the curve of the graph can represent a picture of the patient's temperature over a given period. It can be paraphrased in Wittgenstein's own example: 'A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the bound-waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world. They are all unstructured according to a common logical pattern. (Like the two youths in the fairy-tale, their two horses, and their lilies. They are all in a certain sense one)'<sup>xiv</sup>

Wittgenstein further analyses the nature of proposition by distinguishing elementary proposition and complex proposition. The elementary propositions are propositions which cannot further be divided into a basic meaningful statement, whereas the complex propositions are formed by a combination of two or more propositions with the help of logical connective. The elementary proposition is similar to Russell's molecular proposition. According to Wittgenstein, the elementary proposition corresponds to the atomic fact. It is composed wholly of names in relation with the objects. This name is a simple sign which cannot be defined in terms of language; but its meaning can only be shown. Wittgenstein says that in the molecular proposition a propositional sign is a description and represents a complex. This description must be analysed into its constituent simple symbols and expressed in a definition. The meaning of the complex signs and of molecular propositions depends ultimately on that of simple signs and elementary propositions. Wittgenstein further puts it, 'Every sign that has a definition signifies *via* the signs that serve to define it; and the definitions point the way. Two signs cannot signify in the same manner if one is primitive and other is defined by means of primitive signs. Names *cannot* be anatomized by means of definitions. (Nor can any sign that has a meaning independently and on its own)'<sup>xv</sup>

The possibility of resolving molecular propositions into elementary propositions has been called by Russell the principle of atomicity and it is of importance because it is used by Wittgenstein to show that all molecular propositions are the truth-functions of elementary propositions. The discovery of this new symbolism, the so-called truth-functions, lead to the explanation of logical truth as 'tautology'. Tautologous statements are according to Wittgenstein, the analytic statements such as ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ', 'all bachelors are unmarried males', etc. The truth of these statements can be demonstrated by logical or mathematical method without appealing to sensory experience. Their denial makes a contradiction. In one way or other they are, as Hume calls them, the relations of ideas and the logical positivists maintain as analytic or *a priori* statements. Thus, Wittgenstein holds that 'tautologous and contradictions are 'without sense' because they do not picture the world'.<sup>xvi</sup>

The contents of the *Tractatus* deal with logic in order to describe the world in terms of pictures. It is held in the *Tractatus* that any proposition presupposes the whole of language. 'If objects are given, then at the same time we are given all objects. If elementary propositions are given, then at the same time all elementary propositions are given' and 'If all objects are given, then at the same time all possible states of affairs are also given'.<sup>xvii</sup> An elementary proposition is a combination of names, and in order to understand the proposition one must in some

sense know the objects for which the name stands. In understanding any proposition at all one must know all objects and all propositions. Any proposition whatever carries with it the whole of 'logical space'. The essence of propositions is the 'essence of all description and thus the essence of the world'.<sup>xviii</sup> This essence of proposition is the same as the universal form of proposition. That there is a universal form of proposition is proved by the fact that all possibilities – all forms of proposition – 'must be foreseeable'.

Language represents, or depicts, the reality of the world in the sense of signified assertions. An elementary proposition is a picture of reality especially of a state of affairs. In a picture a certain situation is depicted. It is the way in which the structure of language pictures a possible combination of elements in reality, a possible state of affairs. In a biographical sketch of Wittgenstein, G. H. von Wright puts the *Tractatus* in a nutshell as follows: 'Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* may be called a synthesis of the theory of truth-functions and the idea that language is a picture of reality. Out of which this synthesis arises a third main ingredient of the book, its doctrine of that which cannot be said, only shown'.<sup>xix</sup>

The main concern of the *Tractatus* is to study the relationship between language and reality. Language always represents the reality of the world. S. N. Ganguly writes about the important role of the *Tractatus* in the analysis of language thus: 'The world of reality not only determines the truth and falsity of our assertions but gives content to them. Language is hooked on to reality all the time by displaying in it a form common to the arrangement of facts. This is the famous picture theory of meaning'.<sup>xx</sup> This picture theory can be explained in the following two points. Firstly, Wittgenstein holds that there is a one-to-one relationship between the proposition and the fact. It is held in the sense that there is a fundamental similarity in between the structure of language and the structure of world. This corresponding relation is not a one-to-one correspondence between the judgment and the object of judgment which has been advanced in the correspondence theory of truth. This is because the propositions contain a larger number of signs than there are elements in the facts. The proposition includes signs which are logically constant, such as 'all', 'some', 'not', etc. but this sign does not represent or stand for anything in the outside world. They are merely symbolical devices. Secondly, just as Wittgenstein holds that the structure of the fact cannot be named so he contends that the sense of a proposition cannot be stated. A proposition shows its sense, but cannot explain it. We can only translate our sense into other forms of expression so that it will be clearer than the original. Margaret Macdonald also rightly comments that 'the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thought. The result of philosophy is not a number of "philosophical propositions" but to make proposition clear'.<sup>xxi</sup> The central underpinning idea of the *Tractatus* can be summed up as 'what can be said at all can be said clearly'. Wittgenstein concludes his book with a bold remark that 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'.<sup>xxii</sup>

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