



EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL REFLECTIONS FOUND IN WITTGENSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHY: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

What is language? How does the language function? What is the metaphysical and epistemological ground of language? Many such language-related questions have largely occupied the philosophers' attention for the last few decades. A group of philosophers considered that there was no progress in philosophy because it was deeply surrounded by the domination of speculative metaphysics. Metaphysics or metaphysical statements are neither true nor false. So, the question of their meaningfulness as either true or false merely does not arise. In philosophy, there was no new concept besides the existing ones and the so-called metaphysical concepts were being discussed for hundreds of years. So, philosophers fought to free philosophy from metaphysics. During this period, western philosophy came to be called linguistic philosophy, because it underwent a sort of change by bringing language to the center of a philosophical point of discourse. According to Wittgenstein, language becomes a means of communication in the form of life. So, to understand a language, one should have to understand the objects as referred to by the words in a form of life. The objective of this paper is to define the Wittgenstein's epistemological and metaphysical reflections of language.

Key Words: Language, Picture theory, Language Game, Form of life & speculative metaphysics

Introduction

Language is a living phenomenon and throughout all over the world, human beings use language to express their views. To understand the nature of language, one has to take care of concern about metaphysical and epistemological issues involved in the concept of language. What is language? How does the language function? What is the metaphysical and epistemological ground of language? Many such language-related questions have largely occupied the philosophers' attention for the last few decades. Nevertheless, the lengthened dominant trend witnessed a strong reaction at the very beginning of the 20th century. A group of philosophers considered that there was no progress in philosophy because it was deeply surrounded by the domination of speculative metaphysics. Metaphysics or metaphysical statements are neither true nor false. So, the question of their meaningfulness as either true or false merely does not arise. The question then is: if metaphysics as a whole is supposed to be meaningless or metaphysical sentences are held to be meaningless, then what would be the ground of metaphysics?

In philosophy, there was no new concept besides the existing ones and the so-called metaphysical concepts were being discussed for hundreds of years. So, philosophers fought to free philosophy from metaphysics. During this period, western philosophy came to be called linguistic philosophy, because it underwent a sort of change by bringing language to the center of a philosophical point of discourse. We all know that the function of language is communicating. One can, communicate, express, share his feelings and thoughts with other people through language. Thus, language becomes a means of communication in the form of life. So, to understand a language, one should have to understand the objects as referred to by the words in a form of life in Wittgenstein's sense.

Early Wittgenstein's Concept of Language

Russell, Moore, and many other philosophers talked against speculative metaphysics. The early Wittgenstein, as a committed student of Russell, carried out the anti-metaphysical status of language. He was the first analyst who had argued for more extreme concept that metaphysical questions are from their very nature unanswerable.

For Wittgenstein, the primary function of philosophy is to clarify our languages and it is not a source of truth of the universe. All meaningful discourses, says Wittgenstein, is empirical in nature and metaphysics is not the part of the empirical world. So, the question of meaningfulness in the case of metaphysical sentences simply does not arise. In *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*(TLP), he accepts the view that the propositions relating to mathematics and logic are tautologous and these sentences do not make any reference to the world. According to him, the metaphysical sentences are neither propositions of empirical science nor tautologies of logic and mathematics, consequently, they are meaningless. Wittgenstein holds that the world is represented by thought, which is a proposition with a sense, since, they all — world, thought, and proposition — share the same logical form. Hence, the thought and the proposition can be the pictures of the facts. Wittgenstein sees the world as consisting of facts, rather than the traditional, atomistic idea of a world made up of objects. Wittgenstein opens the TLP with this argument that 'the world is the totality of facts, not of things' (TLP 1.1). One might think that the world is the aggregate of all things and that this is the best view of what the world is. What does Wittgenstein mean by the sentence that "the world is the totality of facts"? He accepts that a fact is the existence of states of affairs (TLP 2) and the totality of facts determines what the case is and what not the case is (TLP 1.12). For example, "Tokyo is the capital city of Japan", and "There is no person that is taller than 3 meters" are facts for Wittgenstein - the former he calls a positive fact and the latter he calls a negative fact. Both positive and negative facts constitute the reality (TLP 2.06), because, positive and negative facts stand in logically complementary relation (TLP 2.05).

Wittgenstein's famous dictum for thoughts and propositions, is —"the picture is a model of reality" (TLP 2.12)¹. Pictures are made up of elements that together constitute it. Each element represents an object and the combination of objects in the picture represents the combination of state of affairs. The logical structure of the picture, whether in thought or language, is isomorphic with the logical structure of the state of affairs that it represents. More subtle is Wittgenstein's insight that the possibility of this structure being shared by the picture (the thought, the proposition) and the state of affairs is the pictorial form. "That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it" (TLP 2.1511)².

Wittgenstein maintains that language is a part of the human organism (TLP 4.002). He thinks that when we talk about the world (especially in philosophy) is misleading to imagine and is apart from a certain point of view. In other words, Wittgenstein denies the fact that there is a world that is independent of our language and we experience such a world through a causal relation with it. He rejects that there is a transcendental view, a God's eye view, though, from that point of view, we can think of a fact. For Wittgenstein, there is no picture that is true *a priori* (§ 2.225).

According to Wittgenstein, logic itself gives us the structure and limits of what can be said, and logic is based on the idea that every proposition is either true or false. To develop the structure of world-thought-language and to rely on the one general form of the proposition, Wittgenstein may assert that all meaningful propositions have the equal value. Here, he has ended the journey with the caution of what can (or cannot), and what should (or should not) be said, leaving outside the area of the sayable propositions of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics.

Later Wittgenstein's concept on Language

Later Wittgenstein has described reality within the frame of language. Outside it there is nothing else. In the *Philosophical Investigation* (PI), he has emphasised on the use of language or the rules of a particular language game. To him, Language game and the games are surely rule-governed activities. He defines that particular game has the particular rules and by this way, he has tried to establish the uniqueness of a particular language-game, which is acceptable in a particular form of life. Language has a certain structure, it is rule governed and its rules are self-defined. Wittgenstein accepts that language is the universal frame of reference in which all human activities can be taken place. Language is not only the form of life but also the form of existence. According to him, life, language, and the world all make one unique whole such that we cannot separate one from the other. For Wittgenstein, neither the self nor the subject belongs to the world. He holds that language and its grammar cannot be justified by anything outside language since nothing exists outside language.

The *use of language* is something that cannot be taught, i.e. we cannot use language to teach it in the way that could be used to teach someone to play the piano and we cannot use language to get outside language (PR, sect.6). In that sense, the use of language is self-governed in the way that the rules are autonomously real in the language-game.

He say's "To understand a sentence means to understand a "Form of Life" and "to understand a language means to be a master of a technique" (PI, 199). Such mastery cannot be projected beyond what is described in the "particular circumstances" of a given activity (PI, 154). A sentence cannot be spoken or understood outside of all languages.

¹ TLP 2.12 = In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself.

² TLP 2.1511= That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.

Through clarification of logical notions, we can reveal what ontological notions we have. When we talk about what exists, we have to use language and the logic of language. We can apprehend ontological problems within the language and ontology is the internal character of the language. Wittgenstein does not think that there exists something beyond the world, the totality of facts. In other words, Wittgenstein does not suppose that there is something behind facts.

Wittgenstein's basic problem is of language, but at the same time, he has emphasised on the multiplicity and heterogeneity of both language-games, and the social contexts of which they are a part. He thereby rejects the linguistic essentialism. Language "is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten" (*PI*, 23). Wittgenstein focuses instead on the "forms of life" or social practices within which language is actually being used in various ways. Rather, "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (*PI*, 19); and to look at the way a word is being used "does not mean that I want to talk only about words" (*PI*, 370), but that it is necessary to look first of all at the social contexts of language use. To insist on ordinary language is to reject sign-centered or language-centered theories. Wittgenstein focuses on the "forms of life" or social practices within which language is actually being used in various ways. So, he returns to ordinary language since it is more applicable in the usual philosophical sense.

Wittgenstein's argument is based on the holistic characterization of meaning, where it has been accepted that no meaning can be given to the notion of a correspondence between a meaning and a machine structure. It is not that the semantic correspondence thesis is necessarily false, but it is senseless. According to Wittgenstein, a sentence 'acquires' meaning not by being paired with a structure of meaning particles, but by its role in a 'background language'. Wittgenstein accepts behavioural concept of language learning system. Children learn their native language without understanding the meaning of those words. To define this he has given an example, that if an adult person asked a child "How old are you?" and the child holds up three fingers without knowing that each finger stands for a year -- or even what a year is. He accepts that "language game" has several related meanings. Individual games have their own unique rules. There are different rules for interpreting words in the different language games. To him, Grammar is not abstract; it is situated within the regular activity with which language-games are interwoven. "... the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (*PI* 23). Wittgenstein is prepared to accept that "The rules of grammar are arbitrary in the sense that the rules of a game are arbitrary. It seems to us that by the concept grammar he means the following: (1) Grammar determines meaning; meaning is not read off the world. (2) Grammar is unverifiable, i.e., any attempt to justify a choice of grammar by verification will be circular. It is neither right nor wrong, neither correct nor incorrect. (3) The meaning of a word, sign, etc., is determined by the grammatical rules and these rules are arbitrary. (3) Grammar gives the rules for the use of words, but what is affected through their use is a contingent matter, which grammar says nothing about it.

The concept of the meaning of an expression is a holistic one, i.e. an expression has a meaning only in the context of the language to which it belongs³. The meaning of an expression is a correlation of understanding, it is what one understands when one understands the expression and knows what it means. The criteria for understanding an expression fall into three broad kinds: correct use, i.e. use in accordance with the established rules for the use of the expression, giving correct explanations of the meaning of the expression in context, and responding appropriately to the use of the expression by others.

Wittgenstein accepts the behaviourist concept of language and he has accepted the 'form of life', where a group of people decide to use a certain type of language for their particular community. There, the children learn those particular rules from their parents or elders. Wittgenstein has tried to establish two different training exercises which could be used to help out children in learning the so called primitive language game. In one of these, the adult will try to point out to objects and names them and in the other the adult simply utter the word (such as "beam") and the child repeats the word mechanically after the adult. These are familiar exercises for teaching any language to a child. In any lessons of language the following process may occur: the learner names the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone.--And there will be a still simpler exercise: the pupil repeats the words after the teacher--both of these being processes in teaching of language. When the child first gets the knowledge to speak a simple word like "dog" the term does not necessarily fit into its schema of things so that one can use the term as more learned language users do. We can imagine that the child's word "dog" might initially be applied to a range of inappropriate things, not only cows and pigs, but it might be used to mean something else (where the child encountered the dog.) Here, we realise it because we are so familiar with the concept "dog" that we could well presume that the child was using it within the rules of our language when the child is not doing so.⁴

Wittgenstein in the *TLP*, concentrates on the structural and semantical aspects of language. But in *PI*, he shifts his attention to the functional and pragmatic aspect of language. His dictum "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for use"- brings into prominence the communicative dimension of language. In *PI*, Wittgenstein shows that our language does have multiple functions and forms. Meaning can be determined in various ways depending on what activity is intended to be performed by its use and the context of its use. He compares language with a tool box. As the tool box contain varied sorts of tools, and each of them is meant for specific functions, similarly language performs various sorts of function. The rule of one "language-game" cannot be applied to another language game. There are multiple forms of language, and multiple ways of interpreting their meanings. 'Expressions of a language may be used correctly or incorrectly. They are correctly used if they are used in accordance with the received explanations of their meaning. The meaning of an expression is also a correlate of explanation — it is what is explained by an explanation of meaning. An explanation of meaning is a standard for the correct use of the expression — a rule for its use.'⁵ Even Wittgenstein also accepts the view that language

³ Allen and Turvey (ed.) *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p.59

⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, P.6

⁵ Allen and Turvey (ed.) *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*, p.60

can not be taught, it is self-illuminated process. According to Wittgenstein, in a certain sense, the use of language is something that cannot be taught, i.e. we cannot use language to teach it in the way in which language could be used to teach someone to play the piano.

Conclusion

In Wittgenstein's philosophy, we have seen that he has defined Language as a "multiplicity", involved "countless different kinds of use" (PI, 23). He would propose to say that to understand a sentence means to understand a language and to understand a language one should be a master of a technique (PI, 199). Such mastery cannot be projected beyond what is described in the "particular circumstances" or in the particular "form of life". Wittgenstein does not think that there exists something beyond the world, the totality of facts.

Wittgenstein would propose to say that the use of language is self-governed in the way the rules are autonomously real in the language-game. Rules are internally related to the structure of language and the world. It seems that Wittgenstein's language is based on empirical or epistemological ground. In the PI, he has accepted the behaviourism for understanding the native language as such. Wittgenstein, in his PI, investigates the nature of language to use it as a therapy. The language that we ordinarily speak, often leads us to form a picture of reality and this picture deceives us in some form of generalized world-view. Handling the concept of language is the ultimate aim of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein on TLP considers that the language and the reality (world) share the same logical structure. So by analysing the logical structure of language, we can clear up the logical structure of reality. Atomic propositions, according to Wittgenstein, can not further be analysed into proposition but to the elements, called the 'logical proper names' and these logical proper names refer to the simplest element of reality called 'objects'. The entire analysis of the Logical Atomists leads to a form of Referential theory of meaning. For the logical proper names must be hooked to the referent- 'object'. The atomic propositions are a picture of atomic facts.

According to Wittgenstein, language has no metaphysical status, it is rule-governed activity. He emphasises on the fact that language and its grammar cannot be justified by anything outside language since nothing exists outside language. A sentence cannot be spoken or understood outside of all of language, nevertheless, Wittgenstein derives the idea that the whole of language is therefore in some sense present at every moment. In language, Wittgenstein holds, there are "countless different kinds of use of what we call symbols, words and sentences. He rejects the linguistic essentialism. He defines Language not as something fixed and given, but new language-games may come into our existence and others may become obsolete and get forgotten (PI, 23). In PI, Wittgenstein focuses on the "forms of life" or social practices within which language is actually being used in various ways.

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