

Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations

17 April, 2014

Dr. Cindy Ausec



Learning Objectives

- Explain the difference between Wittgenstein Logical Atomism and his Philosophy of Language theories
- Discuss his use of the term *language games*
- Define the terms: family resemblance, private language, and solipsism
- Explain the difference between ‘I know’ and ‘I believe’
- Discuss his attack on metaphysical representations of the mind as a mysterious medium and the notion that *meaning* is a mental process
- Explain his concept of World-views and how we pursue our activities and think our thoughts

Later Life

- Returned to the study of philosophy and for a while took part in the discussions of the Vienna Circle
- Returned to Cambridge, where he submitted the *Tractatus* as a Ph.D. dissertation and was awarded a fellowship at Trinity
- From 1947 until his death in 1951 he lived privately alone in Ireland or with friends in Oxford, Cambridge, and Ithaca, New York
- *Philosophical Investigations* was published in 1953 after his death

Logical Atomism


- Thesis that every atomic proposition was independent of every other one
 - The truth-value of “this is a red patch” is not independent of the truth-value of “this is a blue patch”
 - Thought that this showed that these propositions were not elementary & needed further analysis
 - Gave up the idea that elementary propositions were independent of each other
- Ceased to believe in logical atoms or to look for a logically articulated language

Ideals on Philosophy

- Retained his *Tractatus* view that philosophy is an activity
- Function of philosophy is to untie the knots in our thinking
- Depicts philosophy as a therapy – cures us of the confusions we nurture in our minds
- There is a philosopher within each of us

Philosophy of Ordinary Language

- The surface grammar of language concealed its true nature
- Language is interwoven with the world in many different ways
- Words both 'simple' and 'complex' have no absolute meaning - vary in meaning according to context
- Main Philosophical problem – trying to understand the *meaning* of words apart from the ways we ordinarily use them



“For a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (*PI* 43)

Philosophy of Ordinary Language

- Mistake to think that most words are names of particular things
- Language has many uses and functions
 - Giving Orders
 - Describing the appearance of an object
 - Reporting or speculating about an event
 - Making up a story
- Called these various activities *language games*

Language Games

- Used the expression to stress that words cannot be understood outside of the context in which they are used
- Games exhibit the same kind of variety as linguistic activities do
 - Card games, board games, ball games, and Olympic Games

Games

- There is nothing that they all have in common
 - Some are competitive – some are not
 - Games of skill and games of chance
 - Some games are amusing some are not
 - Tennis vs tic-tac-toe
 - Chess vs hide and seek
 - Solitaire vs Super Bowl
- ‘Family resemblance’ among the things we call games


Language Games

- “He is playing a game”
 - May be a description
 - A report, an explanation
 - Or a condemnation of his behavior

Builder's Language-game

Let us imagine a language ...The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones; there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab', 'beam'. A calls them out; --B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. --

Conceive this as a complete primitive language. (*PI* 2)



“Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.-For someone might object against me: "You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the general form of propositions and of language.“ (PI

65)

Knowledge

- “I know” vs “I believe”
 - Reasonable to say, “I believe that it will rain, but I may be wrong”
 - Not reasonable to say “I know that it will rain tonight, but I may be wrong”
 - If I know, I can't be wrong

Knowledge

- The word “know” like the word “game” has a family of uses
 - I know a secret
 - Do you know anything about foreign cars
 - I know someone in Vienna
 - We know how to do things
 - We know certain subjects
 - We know people
- None of these sorts of knowing involve special shining states of consciousness
- Philosophy shows the essence of language by bringing into view the way we use words

Metaphysics

- Attacked metaphysical representations of:
 - The mind as a mysterious medium
 - Notion that *meaning* is a mental process
- Philosophers were wrong in believing that *meaning* a sentence, and *understanding* a sentence, was a mental process
 - Underlying the utterance
 - Or accompanying the hearing

Meaning & Understanding

- “I wish he would drop dead!” – I don’t mean it
- I hum in my mind a foreign song – but I don’t understand the words
- When we talk mental images often pass through our minds
 - Do not confer meaning
 - The images are like picture illustrating a text in a book

Refutes Notion of Private Language

- Considers the way the word 'pain' functions as the name of a sensation
- Tempted to think that for each person 'pain' acquires its meaning by being correlated by the individual's own private sensation
 - Demonstrates that no word could acquire meaning in this way
 - Concluded that there cannot be a language whose words are known only to the speaker
- Language is not my language; it is our language
- Home of language is the human community

Philosophy

- **Solipsism** - the Philosophical idea that only one's one mind is sure to exist
- Refutes solipsism by showing that the possibility of the very language in which it is expressed depends on the existence of the public and social world
- Philosophy was not a house, nor a tree, but a web – not a single problem but many

World Views (*On Certainty*)

- Any *language game* presupposes an activity which is part of a form of life
- To accept the rules of a language is to agree with others in a form of life
- The ultimate given in philosophy is not an inner basis of private experience: it is the forms of life within which we pursue our activities and think our thoughts
- Forms of life are the datum which any philosophical inquiry itself presupposes

World-views

- Animals have a different form of life than humans – if they could speak we would not understand them
- Can be differences between forms of life within the human species too
 - Differences in cultures
 - Our world-picture includes propositions which look like scientific propositions:
 - Others look like empirical propositions
- These propositions are not learnt by experience – they are part of our world view

Summary

- Later in life Wittgenstein ceased to believe in Logical Atomism and proposed his Philosophy of Language theories
- Uses the term *language games* because games exhibit the same kind of variety as linguistics do
- Discussed the terms: family resemblance, private language, and solipsism
- Discussed the difference between 'I know' and 'I believe'
- Discussed his attack on metaphysical representations of the mind as a mysterious medium and the notion that *meaning* is a mental process
- Discussed his concept of World-views and how we pursue our activities and think our thoughts