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How to Do Things with Wittgenstein:
The Applicability of His Ideas within Philosophy and Beyond

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APHANTASIA AND THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGINATION: A WITTGENSTEINIAN EXPLORATION

> People might exist who never use the expression "seeing something with the inner eye" or anything like it, and these people might be able to draw and model "out of imagination" or from memory, to mimic others etc. Such a person might also shut his eyes or stare into vacancy as if blind before drawing something from memory. And yet he might deny that he then sees before him what he goes on to draw. But what value need I set on this utterance? Should I judge by it whether he has a visual image?
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> (Wittgenstein, 1981, § 624)

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In one of his famous imagined thought experiments, Ludwig Wittgenstein invites us to consider the case of people who claim to have no mind's eye, no visual representations in the mind. What credit ought we give to such a claim? Should we take at face value this type of subjective report about what goes on (or fails to go on) in an individual's mind? If there were people who claimed to have no mental imagery, could we, and should we, believe them, especially in cases where they appear able to perform acts which we generally deem to rely on some type of mental imagery, such as imitating the expression of another person or drawing a face? While Wittgenstein set this out as a fictitious thought-experiment, within the broader framework of a philosophical attempt to redefine the role of imagination grammatically and move away from internalist conceptions of mental representation,[1] the problem has taken on new meaning with the discovery that an important number of individuals have a condition that Zeman, Dewar and Della Sala (2016) coined in 2015, "congenital aphantasia"—an absence, from birth, of visual mental imagery (sometimes combined with the absence of other forms of mental sensory representation or quasi-perceptual experience), voluntary and most often spontaneous,[2] in conscious states. Although the condition had been described as early as 1880 by Francis Galton (1880), it received little attention until a 2010 publication in *Discover* magazine about the topic (Zimmer, 2010), which incited individuals with the condition to contact researchers and launched serious exploration of the condition. Understandably, this has led to debates about the condition, with some researchers suggesting that there may be a psychological component involved in certain cases (Vito, Bartolomeo, 2016). Others suggest that rather than a difficulty with metacognition or introspection (where the subject would have mental images but not be aware of them), what characterizes the phenomenon of aphantasia is "low-level sensory visual imagery" (Keogh, Pearson, 2018, p. 58).

Research on aphantasia over the past decade has largely focused on attempting to understand the physiological and neurological mechanisms of the condition. One of the major difficulties associated with the

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[1] For a detailed analysis of Wittgenstein on the problem of imagination, see Gauvry, 2017.

[2] Some subjects report spontaneous mental imagery with no capacity for voluntary mental imagery. Many individuals with aphantasia also report being able to dream in images.

study of aphantasia is the fact that as a mental phenomenon, it is difficult to observe objectively. It is therefore not surprising that the scientific community has proven skeptical about its reality. Just as Wittgenstein responded to his question as to whether we ought to believe the utterances of individuals claiming to have no inner representations that we could not rely on their claims alone (1981, § 624), so too the scientific community has demanded other forms of proof. Until recently, there appears to have been general consensus in medical and scientific literature that aphantasia could only be a rare and pathological condition; Botez et al. indeed expressed surprise in an 1985 publication reporting the case of an individual with a complete deficiency of mental imagery from birth, and especially at the fact that this person was still able to recognize objects and demonstrate cognitive capacities in the same ways as others (Botez, Olivier, Vézina, Botez, Kaufman, 1985). As a subjective phenomenon, however—and one which impacts the individual's experience of the world—a philosophical and linguistic approach to the issue may be required to come to a better understanding of the experience of individuals with aphantasia and the ways in which the condition affects them. It is this type of approach that I wish to develop in this article through a Wittgensteinian-inspired investigation.[3]

An incommunicability surrounding the concept of mental imagery?

Speaking about mental phenomena has always been problematic, both in philosophical and in scientific literature, and fraught by the methodological problem of having to rely on subjective reports. This occasioned a generalized discredit of the notion of mental imagery, until more recent techniques developed objectively measurable methods of study, and led to a resurgence of the concept (Pearson, Naselaris, Holmes, Kosslyn, 2015). Current debates (Tye, 1991) in cognitive sciences and philosophy revolve around the pertinence of the notion of mental imagery, and the question as to whether mental representations are essentially propositional or imaged in nature. With the increasing attention to conditions such as aphantasia and hyperphantasia (hyper-vivid mental imagery) in research in cognitive sciences, Joel Pearson and Stephen M. Kosslyn have recently argued that it

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[3] It should be noted that I will not be drawing directly on Wittgenstein's analysis of the imagination or of representation here, but merely on his method.

is time to put an end to the imagery debate and recognize the "heterogene-ity of mental representations" (Pearson, Kosslyn, 2015).

The aim of this article is not to take a stand on the imagery debate, but rather to offer a Wittgensteinian critique of the debate itself, suggesting that what has been understood as an empirical problem of understanding the nature and functions of mental representations may really be a gram-matical one (i.e., a problem of communicating meaningfully about mental imagery among individuals with varying experiences of mental images and meaningful use of related concepts), or at the very least, may be confused by our grammar, or the apparent conformity of our language, which leads to conceptual confusions. As Bill Faw has argued, one of the difficulties inherent in the literature on mental imagery, and the two competing claims that either mental images play a fundamental role in all cognitive processes, or that no one thinks in mental images, seems to arise from the assump-tion "that what is in one's own mind is in everybody's mind" (Faw, 2009, p. 45). And yet paradoxically, the subjective perspective at the origin of many theories about mental phenomena gives rise to skepticism about subjective claims as such. Debates around mental imagery often call into question the subject's claims or knowledge about himself and what goes on in his mind. Faw remarks, notably, that one of the challenges he has often encountered is outright "disbelief that I (or anyone) *can be* a wakeful non-mental-imager—that I must be mistaken (or worse!) when I report that when I close my eyes I see nothing" (Faw, 2009, p. 46).

The disbelief or discredit that is thrown upon statements about one's internal states or mental phenomena opens up to an important question: is it possible to communicate meaningfully about the "inner" or the "mental"? Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, argues that if "language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in defini-tions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (2001, § 242). As an external medium, language therefore can never be purely "private" (Wittgen-stein, 2001, § 243), it must always rely on external criteria for measurement. Wittgenstein's point, of course, is not to deny that there are such things as inner representations or sensations, but rather that our ability to identify these relies upon the use of shared public language. He questions whether it would make sense to say that pain is something private, "that it is only from my own case that I know what the word 'pain' means" (Wittgenstein, 2001, § 293). The idea that pain is something private or internal, although

fundamentally anchored in our assumptions, must be called into question by the way in which we learn to identify pain, use expressions, and generally communicate through our language games (i.e., "language and the actions into which it is woven" [Wittgenstein, 2001, § 7]).

This, however, does not entail that Wittgenstein is a "behaviorist in disguise" (2001, § 307). What Wittgenstein is pointing to in these examples is, to the contrary, the fact that what we often take to be empirical or epistemological problems—problems about *knowing* what goes on in the mind—ought to be analyzed differently. The question is not whether we all share the same inner experiences or sensations, whether we all identify exactly the same sensation as pain or see the color red in the same manner, but whether we are able to meaningfully express ourselves and communicate with others through our language use. Yet it remains a real question whether concepts relating to inner states can be understood by someone who has never experienced them. Wittgenstein asks: "Could someone understand the word "pain", who had *never* felt pain?—Is experience to teach me whether this is so or not?—And if we say "A man could not imagine pain without having sometime felt it"—how do we know? How can it be decided whether it is true?" (2001, § 315).

Wittgenstein offers no clear response to these queries, yet he suggests that the problem is not essentially one of empirical proof. To return to the problem of aphantasia, I would suggest much of the skepticism about the absence of mental imagery arises from impossible demands for justification that what individuals report about their own mental states is indeed true. Questions that persons who claim to have no capacity for mental imagery often encounter both from scholars and non-scholars revolve around incredulity that anyone could be able to perform normal daily tasks, such as identifying colors or recognizing shapes and faces, if they have no inner model or representation to compare them to. These individuals' outward ability to *behave* in certain ways leads to the conclusion that they must also possess the *inner* or mental capacities that most associate with the ability to perform certain acts. When they affirm that they do not, they are then asked to justify how they can perform these activities without the assumed necessary capacity—justification which they are generally not able to provide.

What is often presented as an epistemological problem ought perhaps instead to be understood as a question of grammar in the Wittgensteinian sense, or a problem of meaningful language use. Wittgenstein directly

evokes the problem of imagination: "One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word 'imagination' is used" (2001, § 370). Aphantasia presents us with an interesting path for exploring the issue, since it poses a serious challenge to our language games: the person with aphantasia who attempts to describe his condition to others who do have capacity for mental imaging can only do so by taking up the language games of those with mental images—by making reference to concepts and expressions which he has no experience of, and thus perhaps to which he does not associate any specific meaning. If we admit that imaging is indeed a specific type of activity or process, distinct from other faculties such as thought and perception,[4] or activities such as drawing or narrating, then we must assume that the process cannot be fully understood by someone who does not have the capacity to engage in it. Although such a person may be able to acquire a certain conception of what is being referred to by the term "mental images" by analogy through reference to visual impressions or external images (drawings, etc.), he may very well have no full grasp of the concept of mental images in the same manner as a person for whom these are an integral part of his mental life. Would he then be able to communicate meaningfully about the concept?

One of the astounding facts about the discovery of the prevalence of this condition is that adult individuals who learn about it may come to realize that their whole lives, they have been hearing, reading, and often themselves using expressions such as "imagination," "seeing in the mind," "hearing in the head," or "visualization" while having a completely different conception of these concepts from others. This was indeed my own case, like many other people with the condition who have reported that they only learned there was something different about them when they read or heard about the discovery of aphantasia, or that they had noticed something different in response to the ways in which others *use expressions* like mental image, seeing in the mind, etc., but had not given much thought to the matter. Before stumbling upon the notion, it had not ever occurred to me that "visualizing" was something that other individuals could actually do, that it corresponded

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[4] Indeed, the real aim of Wittgenstein's remarks about imagination is to offer a grammatical account of how imagination is distinct from both visual impressions (perception) and thought—he articulates ways in which the grammar of imagination is specific, insofar as it is related to the will (one can call up an image at will, whereas one cannot will to 'see' an object that is not present), and to creative activities.

to a particular type of mental activity which I myself had never engaged in; in other words, that it was not merely a metaphorical way of expressing a more general command to "think about" something, but corresponded to a distinct type of mental activity.

This example is of course anecdotic, yet it opens up to a serious philosophical consideration as to how individuals such as myself, who have never had any type of visual representations in the mind, play the ordinary language games involving expressions such as "seeing things in the mind's eye", or respond to orders such as "visualize the face of your friend." The language of imagination is prevalent everywhere in daily life, we are constantly solicited to "represent, "imagine" or "visualize." How is it, then, that some individuals are able to hear and even use these expressions themselves, without realizing that they are not referring to the same experience or activity that others are engaging in? How is it possible that it does not occur to them (as it had not to me) that these words have a meaning for others which is absent for them? How is it possible that neither these individuals themselves, nor their multiple interlocutors, had ever realized that they were not understanding one another? For as Wittgenstein points out, understanding the meaning of an expression or an order is not a merely conceptual endeavor—it requires being able to act in particular ways, being able to respond through particular forms of behavior. As Wittgenstein writes: "Suppose I give someone the order "Imagine a red circle here"—and now I say: understanding the order means knowing what it is like for it to have been carried out" (2001, § 451). A person with no capacity for generating mental images would have no means of knowing "what it is like" to produce such a mental image. He would not be able to respond to the order, or even, I would suggest, understand it.

However, this failure to understand may not be in any way evident outwardly, and this is perhaps one of the real challenges with regard to understanding mental processes. Wittgenstein argues that an "'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria" (2001, § 580), and yet the case of aphantasia challenges the possibility that such outward criteria may be readily available for determining whether our concepts about the inner or the mental are really understood. This fact seems to be at the heart of the skepticism surrounding aphantasia: individuals with aphantasia do not act in *outwardly* different ways in daily life from individuals with a capacity for producing mental images, the condition may not even constitute a notable difference

for them. This could incite one to hypothesize that mental imagery does not play as significant a role as much research has suggested, or perhaps no role at all. This hypothesis fails, however, to take into account the fact that the loss of mental imagery in individuals who previously had this capacity provokes a strong perturbation of behavioral responses and psychological distress, suggesting that mental imagery, for those who have it, does play an important role. It also fails to consider significant research about the role that mental imagery plays in many aspects of human life, such as the development of motor skills through the use of visualization techniques (Fontani, Migliorini, Benocci, Facchini, Casini, Corradeschi, 2007), skills acquisition, language comprehension and abstract reasoning (Kosslyn, Behrmann, Jeannerod, 1995), or decision-making processes (Gaesser, Schacter, 2014) and interpersonal communication (Storlie, 2015).

Rather than discredit the notion of mental imagery, therefore, it appears imperative to take into consideration the variety of human experience and mental or cognitive processes, and to attempt to understand how outward behavioral patterns may mask significant differences amongst individuals. To do this, we must take into account the ways in which our individual experience leads us to draw general conclusions that we ought to call into question. While more reserved about the role of personal experience in the *Philosophical Investigations*, many of Wittgenstein's notes in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* suggest that when speaking about mental phenomena, the conclusions drawn "must be something you know from your own experience; and in that case it is something that may be true for you and not for other people" (1980, § 87). Bill Faw (2009) has suggested that the variety of intuitions about mental imagery, from those who defend that it is a central and integral part of every human experience to those who reject it, depend on varying abilities and capacities for producing mental images. Within the scope of this debate, however, there is a serious challenge as to how individuals with these differing capacities can communicate about these differences at all. How the experience of aphantasia can be explained to those individuals who do have (often vivid) mental images? Can this difference be communicated through language?

The problem of (negatively) describing aphantasia

It may be difficult (or even impossible) to conceive of a world without mental images to those who have them—just as difficult as it is for subjects with aphantasia to conceive of a world where speaking of seeing something in the "mind's eye" or hearing music in one's head corresponds to any real experience. Skepticism about aphantasia, I would suggest, may arise in many cases from a linguistic difficulty: the fact that any attempt to describe the condition can only make use of concepts or expressions that are themselves meaningless for the individual with aphantasia. To illustrate this, we can turn to several telling descriptions of the condition offered by individuals with aphantasia. Nicholas Watkins describes his experience in the following manner:

> I think the best way I can describe my aphantasia is to say that I am unaware of anything in my mind except these categories: i) direct sensory input, ii) "unheard" words that carry thoughts, iii) "unheard" music, iv) a kind of "invisible imagery", which I can best describe as sensation of pictures that are in a sense "too faint to see", v) emotions, and vi) thoughts which seem too "fast" to exist as words. […] I see what is around me, unless my eyes are closed when all is always black. I hear, taste, smell and so forth, but I don't have the experience people describe of hearing a tune or a voice in their heads.

> (Watkins, 2018, p. 44)

This description poses some interesting conceptual challenges. What exactly is being referred to by the notions of "unheard words" or "invisible imagery"? If there is something there, must it not also have some perceptual content? The difficulty seems to be that the only way to describe the condition is negatively, by making reference to an *absence* of representational content or to the non-perceptual character of experiences, while paradoxically attempting to describe precisely that content in the language of perception and representation.

Another now famous report of the experience of aphantasia from Blake Ross evokes mental content in terms of thought and semantic memory:

> If you tell me to imagine a beach, I ruminate on the "concept" of a beach. I know there's sand. I know there's water. I know there's a sun, maybe a lifeguard. I know *facts* about beaches. I know a beach when I see it,

and I can do verbal gymnastics with the word itself. But I cannot flash to beaches I've visited. I have no visual, audio, emotional or otherwise sensory experience. I have no capacity to create any kind of mental image of a beach, whether I close my eyes or open them, whether I'm reading the word in a book or concentrating on the idea for hours at a time—or whether I'm standing on the beach itself. And I grew up in Miami.

(Ross, 2016)

While this description is perhaps less conceptually problematic, it does pose a serious linguistic challenge: what does it *mean* to claim, "I have no capacity to create any kind of mental image," for a person for whom "mental image" does not correspond to any lived experience or coherent concept? What does it mean to be able to speak only through negations about one's abilities (or their absence)? It is apparent here that the individual with aphantasia who is asked to describe his condition finds himself in the difficult position of attempting to explain to others what his mental states and cognitive abilities are *lacking*; he cannot communicate his experience otherwise than through concepts referring to experiences that are not his own.

Wittgenstein does not speak directly of aphantasia, but he does evoke the problem of meaningfulness with regard to related conditions which challenge the possibility for meaningful communication about mental representations. One of these is the case of synesthesia; evoking the case of being able to see that "vowels have colors," he notes that while one individual may very well grasp this directly, another person "neither perceives these colors nor understands what is meant by that change of aspect" (Wittgenstein, 1980, § 40). For a person who has never had the experience of perceiving colors associated with vowels or words, the language game of synesthesia is essentially meaningless, at best an intellectual curiosity. Another case is that of the person blind from birth, who has never had the experience of seeing; how could this person speak about sight? He may very well be able to grasp the fact that there is a difference between himself and those who can see, and even be able to speak about this difference: "A blind man can say that he is blind and the people around him sighted. 'Yes, but doesn't he after all mean something different from the sighted man when he uses the words "blind" and "sighted"?'" (Wittgenstein, 1981, § 618). The question Wittgenstein asks here is, "can one part of language not be explained to him? Or rather not be described?" (1981, § 617). Wittgenstein offers no

definitive answer to this question, but I would suggest that, indeed, some parts of language cannot be explained, that some persons[5] with aphantasia *cannot understand* what it would mean to perform certain types of activities such as forming images in the mind. My intent here is of course not to suggest that aphantasia constitutes a lack of some fundamental capacity, a pathology or a handicap. It is rather to point out that the language that we use to speak about mental processes constitutes a fundamental difficulty for our ability to observe and study these.

Language games and behavior

I have suggested that one of the major challenges with regard to explaining aphantasia is that persons with the condition are generally asked to justify or explain their absence of mental imagery, thus making reference to what can for them only be a meaningless concept. A more fruitful approach to the study of the condition and may be to examine the ways in which individuals respond or react through practice to the language games of imagination in ordinary life situations. What do they actually *do* when they are told to imagine the face of a friend or a rising sun (two standard examples from the Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire)? How do they respond when they are told to "visualize"? What activities do they perform? In his remarks on language and language games, Wittgenstein consistently establishes a link between understanding and practice. Understanding a rule or an order is equivalent to knowing "how to go on" (Wittgenstein, 2001, § 179) once one has grasped the rule, understanding the meaning of a proposition or expression is equivalent to being able to use it or respond in appropriate ways. This link between language and practice can help clarify what it is like to have aphantasia, and move us away from theoretical or empirical debates about mental images, to an acknowledgement of the richness and variety of human experience.

We are only just beginning to understand the implications of research into imagination and the plurality of ways in which individuals navigate their mental experiences. Visual mental imagery has long been thought

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[5] Given that aphantasia is a spectrum disorder affecting individuals differently, my intent here is obviously not to generalize about the condition. As Adam Zeman has pointed out, moreover, many individuals participating in his studies "had some understanding of what imagery was like, as they *dreamed* visually" (Zeman, 2020, p. 700).

to be an essential component of human existence; as Adam Zeman notes: "Our capacity to detach ourselves from the here and now, to enter the virtual worlds of memory and prospection, the fictional world of a novel, the creative worlds of science—or just to daydream—defines our human existence. And for most of us visualization is a key facet of imagination: The discovery that some people get along fine in the absence of visualization, and indeed, apparently, without *any* sensory imagery, is striking" (2020, p. 706). That this is viewed as "striking" by many may well account for the fact that aphantasia is generally described in negative terms in scientific research, associated with "inabilities", "lack" of certain capacities, or even pathological states. Recent research suggests, for instance, that persons with aphantasia demonstrate "a significantly lower ability to remember specific life events in general", and "a near total inability to imagine future hypothetical events in any sensory detail" (Dawes, Keogh, Andrillon, Pearson, 2020).

While these findings may be empirically true (and, personally, I admit that I identify with them), what is problematic here is that our scientific understanding of aphantasia appears influenced by some prior preconception of what is necessary to lead a "normal" fulfilling life, have a rich sense of self or to be able to "get along" in existence, which depends on mental imagery (cf. Fox-Muraton, 2021). These preconceptions have a long philosophical history; in his phenomenology of the imagination, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre suggested that a consciousness unable to imagine could only be a consciousness "stuck in the world" (2005, p. 353), "totally bogged down in the existing and without possibility to take hold of anything other than the existing" (2005, p. 359). The intuition that a capacity for mental imagery plays a vital role in many psychological and existential constructions of self, memory and relation to the world leads to the conclusion that its absence must necessarily constitute an inability or a lack. Yet the very fact that aphantasia has gone so long unnoticed, that it does not appear to impact individuals' lives in significant ways, and that persons with aphantasia do not consider themselves "sufferers" (Kendle, 2017, p. 3) should invite us to reconsider our theories about self, memory and the role of mental imagery, and the ways in which we interpret research findings on aphantasia and related conditions.

One way to go about this would be to interpret the differences between individuals with aphantasia and others with mental imagery in grammatical rather than cognitive or psychological terms—in other words, to recognize

that what persons with aphantasia lack is essentially the possibility to play certain types of language games related to imagination, visualization or representation. There may indeed be ways in which aphantasia entails that certain types of activities cannot be performed in response to linguistic cues—for example, such a person may not be able to respond to a command such as "visualize a ball of fire" or "call to mind your best friend's face." This does not mean of course that he would not be able to respond at all to this type of order, but rather that his response behavior might be distinctly different from that of individuals with mental imagery. For example, when asked to visualize a sun rising, a person capable of developing a mental image may actually see the sun in movement, while the person with aphantasia would not find this to be a meaningful order at all. If he does, he may respond in different ways, such as narratively recounting an event, or thinking about the sensations that such an experience would procure. If we suppose that the order to visualize is not merely a specific "task," but rather intended as part of a larger goal, such as arriving at a meditative state, it may very well be that the actual visualization could have a physiological and neurological effect that the absence of visualization does not, enabling the first individual to enter a meditative state while the latter may find the cue distracting. Ought we, however, to conclude therefrom that the person with aphantasia is incapable of meditating simply because he is not able to summon up a mental image? He may very well be able to arrive at a similar state through alternative techniques. The "inability" of the person in question only concerns his responsiveness and reaction to certain linguistic cues. He may be unable to perform the specific task that is asked of him—visualizing the rising sun, here—but we ought not to conclude from this alone that he is incapable of mobilizing the type of attentiveness or attention required for meditating.

The example may appear trivial, but it takes on great importance with regard to the methodology used in cognitive sciences to study phenomena such as aphantasia and its relatedness to issues such as episodic memory. In the study published by Dawes et al. (Dawes, Keogh, Andrillon, Pearson, 2020) concluding the link between aphantasia and episodic memory, one of the tools used was an Episodic Memory Imagery Questionnaire, asking participants to recall events or scenes from their life experiences and to rate their ability to "see" these ranging from no image at all to clear as normal vision. Unsurprisingly, participants with aphantasia scored very low

on these tests—when one is incapable of forming mental images, how can one be expected to do so on command? Yet again, ought we to conclude from this that persons with aphantasia have impaired cognitive skills or memory? While they may be incapable of performing certain types of tasks, such as "reliving" an important event, "seeing" themselves at a particular point in their lives, they might rely on other alternative strategies such as semantic memory. They may be able to recite an entire conversation they had with a friend at a particular point in time, without being able to conjure up any representation of where that conversation took place. The detail and accuracy of their memories may be just as good or even superior to those of individuals with visual memory, despite the focus on different aspects of a situation. Again, the "inability" here resides in their incapacity to respond to a particular type of linguistic command and the terms in which it is formulated. Linguistic cues which request that persons with aphantasia imagine, represent or visualize are not ones to which they can respond, but there are no grounds for us to make any further conclusions from this fact.

The problem, I would suggest, is that all research on mental imagery and its consequences relies precisely on the language of mental imagery, of imaging, visualizing or representing in the mind's eye, and that these "language games" are ones that persons with aphantasia cannot play. They impose a non-symmetrical dialogue where the person with aphantasia is asked to account for or explain his condition and his experiences in terms which may be meaningless to him, or to perform tasks of which he is incapable. It is just as meaningless to ask a person with aphantasia to imagine a beach as it is to ask a blind person to see the beach that is before him. And yet we do not conclude that the blind person, simply because he is unable to perform this task, has less knowledge of the beach than others, merely that his experience and the sensory pathways he uses to acquire this knowledge may be different.

The need for an account of the variability of human experience

I am not suggesting that there may not be significant ways in which aphantasia might affect an individual's experience, but rather that the common focus on negative description or understanding aphantasia through the "lack" of mental imagery or "inabilities" limits our possibilities for grasping these differences. As Wittgenstein writes: "It is conceivable, […] and also important for us, that some people might have a completely different

relation to pictures than we do" (1980, § 481). What we can learn from cases such as aphantasia is that there is an extreme variability and diversity in human (mental) life and experience. Beyond aphantasia, this also includes of course the great variability in capacity for forming vivid mental representations among individuals. The belief that mental images play certain roles or have certain functions leads us to assume that their absence must be a deficiency or defect, and yet as Wittgenstein points out there is no way of demonstrating that there is any causal link between what might be going on in the mind and our abilities to perform certain actions, and no way of guaranteeing that our inner states and representations are consistent and effectively correspond to our outward judgments. Why do we assume, for example, that being able to identify a color or a shape is a capacity that relies on some mental representation—having a "sample" of that color or shape somewhere in the mind? Even if we do have one, how could we be certain that this sample remained consistent and really could inform us about the outside world? As Wittgenstein remarks, even if this were the case, my already carrying the pattern around with me would be only a causal explanation" (1981, § 210) but could not instruct us about how such activities could be meaningful for us. Why do we assume that "knowing" and "recognizing" rely on internal representations—that to be able to recognize a person we must have some type of mental image of that individual stocked in the mind to consult? Yet, Wittgenstein asks:

> Couldn't there be people who could describe a person's features in minute detail from memory, who would even say that they now suddenly know what he looks like—but who would empathically deny, when they were asked, that at that moment they in any way "saw" the person "before them" (or anything like that)? People who would find the expression "I see him before me" *totally inappropriate*? This seems to me to be a very important question. Or even: the important question is whether this question makes sense. – What reason do I have, after all, to believe that this is not the case for all of us? Or, how can I decide the question whether someone else (I'm excluding myself for the time being) is really "forming a visual image" of somebody, or is merely able to describe him in visual terms (to draw him, etc.).
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1980, § 144)

Wittgenstein's point here is not that mental imagery does not exist, but rather that there is no proof or reason to suppose that it is necessary. A person who claims to have no mental representations, to never see anything in the mind's eye, may very well be able to recognize his friend on the street, offer a description of him or even produce a recognizable drawing. And likewise, someone with a capacity to form mental images may not be able to accomplish all of these tasks. Why do we assume that these capacities depend on the ability to retain a mental image? A person lacking the capacity to form a mental image may very well not be able to "see the schematic cube as a cube" in his mind, but Wittgenstein notes that it "would not follow from this that he could not recognize it as a representation (a working drawing for instance) of a cube" (2001, § 183).

There are of course documented cases of individuals for whom the loss of mental imagery has entailed severe cognitive and psychological difficulties. One example is the case of Monsieur X., a patient of Jean-Martin Charcot, who suddenly lost all memory of forms and colors and ability to call up visual mental images (Bernard, 1883). Monsieur X. was then unable to recognize his family and even himself, and the city in which he lived. His loss of mental representation led to great emotional turmoil, and daily astonishment at what he saw around him, with his impressions seeming always novel. The case of Monsieur X. seems to reflect much of the research and speculation about aphantasia today—questions about how it is that an individual can identify objects or recognize others or his surroundings, and the relation between mental imagery and memory and projection. One might well question the pertinence of this analogy, however, on the grounds that Monsieur X.'s case is a quite particular one: it is that of an individual who had previously relied his on photographic memory, and the loss of this imagery requires that he relearn to navigate his environment. Persons with congenital aphantasia, who have never experienced visual imagery, will have developed these alternative cognitive strategies from birth.

What we can learn from this case, however, is that there does appear to be a significant *experiential* difference for which we have yet to offer an account between modes of consciousness involving inner vision or mental images and a world without a mind's eye. The loss of mental imagery, as Monsieur X. himself reports, is a loss of "meaning," more than of skill or capability; when asked to imagine three different objects, he responds that "although knowing perfectly well how to distinguish the three very different

things and knowing well what is being referred to, they have no meaning for me from the perspective of inner vision" (Bernard, 1883, p. 11). This may represent a serious challenge to Wittgenstein's famous "beetle in the box" argument,[6] which suggests that what is inner or mental "has no place in the language-game at all, not even as a *something*", since what is in the box may be constantly changing, or "the box might even be empty" (Wittgenstein, 2001, § 293). Aphantasia could be described as a state in which the box is always empty; and although this may not affect individual's capacities or outward behavior, it is clear that it does entail a significant difference in meaning that has yet to be fully explored.

What we ought to learn from cases of aphantasia is that we, as human beings, experience meaning in a multiplicity of ways. As Wittgenstein remarked: "We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike" (2001, § 191). Recent scientific research on aphantasia and related conditions have made important contributions to our enhanced understanding of the "remarkable, often unsuspected, variety of […] imaginative experience" (Zeman et al., 2020, p. 438) and opened up to greater possibilities for taking into account the diversity and variability of human life. However, it is important that the research methodologies used also take into account their own limits and the ways in which they may influence, through their language games, the types of responses they solicit and conclusions they formulate.

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[6] Wittgenstein invites us to consider what the consequences would be if we assumed that "private" sensations such as pain were identifiable in the way objects might be if we assumed everyone possessed a particular sample in the mind (or in a box) to which they referred—in this case, a beetle. The question he asks is whether it makes sense to think that this could play some role in our language games, since if we all had a box which no one else could look into, how could we guarantee that what was in the box was not something different for everyone, or even whether the object in any given individual's box was not constantly changing?

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Abstract

Congenital aphantasia, or the complete absence of mental imagery, is a topic that has recently aroused the interest of researchers in many fields including philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences. While it is generally supposed that we all have

rich mental lives full of imaged representations, estimates suggest 2–3% of the population may have never formed an image or seen "in the mind's eye." This paper aims to address the skepticism surrounding aphantasia, the challenges in communicating about mental imagery, and the research methods used in cognitive sciences today through the lens of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The paper argues that 1) communicating about mental imagery involves language games that persons with aphantasia may not be able to play (i.e., makes reference to expressions and concepts that are meaningless for them, such as "visualize," "form an image," etc.); 2) that as a consequence aphantasia, in present research, is only describable negatively (as lack or incapacity); 3) that rather than a cognitive or a psychological issue, aphantasia can be understood as a grammatical one; and 4) that we need to find new ways to explore the impact of conditions such as aphantasia, and to be able to appreciate the rich diversity and variability of human experience.

ARTICLES

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HOLISM AND ATOMISM
IN *TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS*

Introduction

The new Wittgenstein movement has introduced a range of topics into the centre of a philosophical debate on Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, such as the distinction between substantial and austere conception of nonsense,[1]

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[1] For a discussion on these two conceptions of nonsense, see Diamond (1995, especially ch. 2 and 3), Conant (1998, 2002). Hacker (2000, 2003) and Glock (2004) present a scathing critique of the new approach to nonsense.

a strong and weak reading of the context principle,[2] continuity or its lack thereof in Wittgenstein's philosophical endeavor.[3] Resolute reading also prompts questions about the significance of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* for our present-day conception of philosophy and what the correct method of enquiry should be. My essay could be seen as a part of the discussion on the unity of Wittgenstein's philosophy, what this unity amounts to and the relevance of Wittgenstein's early thought for his later development.

The notion of holism is usually associated with Wittgenstein's conception of language given in *Philosophical Investigation* (Wittgenstein, 2009) and *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1969). According to this, the Wittgensteinian form of holism, a symbol or an expression has meaning only in the system of non-linguistic conventions, practices, and performances. It performs a role in our form of life. This role endows a sign with its meaning. To understand a word is to understand its use in the whole system of language games. Nonetheless, holistic elements are also present in *Tractatus Logico--Philosophicus*. This was indicated by Max Black as early as the 1950s at Gilbert Ryle's seminars (Pears, 1990, p. 165). The topic of holism occurs in Black's classic book *A companion to Wittgenstein's "Tractatus"* (Black, 1966), Ryle's scattered papers (2009c, 2009d), and David Pears' short essay from 1990 (Pears, 1990). In recent years, James Conant (and others) started to contrast the holistic interpretation of the *Tractatus* with the traditional logical atomism of that early work.[4] In my essay, I present the main strands in the holistic reading of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and try to adjudicate between different conceptions concerning the role of anti-atomism in this book. In effect, I pose questions such as: how much of Wittgenstein's later semantic doctrine was present in his early writings, how deep the continuity between the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* was, and where the main thread linking the early and late thought of Wittgenstein lies.

In the first part of my work, I identify the fragments of the *Tractatus* that pose a question concerning the relation between the standard attribution of logical atomism to the early Wittgenstein and holistic

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[2] Apart from the works from the previous footnote, see Bronzo (2011, 2013), Dain (2006).

[3] See especially Conant (2004), Diamond (2006).

[4] I indicate all important works for this topic in the part "Forms of Holism in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*", but see in particular Conant (2002) and Diamond (2000).

ways of thinking of language. Then, I present three interpretations available in the literature of what Tractarian holism is. Next, I champion one of these readings and try to establish good reasons for this. In the conclusion, I indicate consequences of embracing this form of holism for an overall reading of Wittgenstein's work.

David Pears on Holism

In the paper *Wittgenstein's Holism*, David Pears distinguished two main groups of remarks from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that can be presented as intrinsically holistic in character.[5] According to him, the first group can be summarized as containing the thesis that "names are not isolated tags, but words which already contain all their possibilities of combination with one another" (Pears, 1990, p. 165). In support of his thesis, Pears adduces remarks linking objects with the necessity of occurrence in some state of affairs or other:

> If I know an object, then I also know all the possibilities of its occurrence in atomic facts. (Every such possibility must lie in the nature of the object.) A new possibility cannot subsequently be found (TLP, § 2.0123).[6] Every thing is, as it were, in a space of possible atomic facts. I can think of this space as empty, but not of the thing without the space (TLP, § 2.013).
>
> Only the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning (TLP, § 3.3).

The idea goes as follows: every object can occur in a specified set of states of affairs. Therefore, an object is related to a system of possibilities of combinations in the state of affairs. Every state of affairs is a combination of objects. The possibility of occurrence in atomic facts constitutes the form of the object which means that objects contain this possibility of all their combinations in the states of affairs as their forms (TLP,

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[5] However, he ascribes the origination of this position to Max Black (Pears, 1990, p. 165).

[6] As a standard, for references to Wittgenstein's work, I use the abbreviation TLP for *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and then mention the number of the thesis. I use the bilingual German/English edition of TLP translated by C.K. Ogden.

§ 2.14–2.141). An object is something simple and indivisible, but it has an invisible nexus of connections to an abundance of states of affairs. An atomic meaning of simple names generates holistic networks of its possible occurrences in elementary sentences. A name has content, its meaning, i.e., an object; and form, i.e., it is the common mark of a class of propositions (TLP, § 3.31–3.311).

The second group of remarks that is related to the topic of holism concerns the idea of the inseparability of a proposition from the logical space in which it is located (Pears, 1990, p, 165).

> The proposition determines a place in logical space: the existence of this logical place is guaranteed by the existence of the constituent parts alone, by the existence of the significant proposition (TLP, § 3.4).

> The propositional sign and the logical co-ordinates: that is the logical place (TLP, § 3.41).

> The geometrical and the logical place agree in that each is the possibility of an existence (TLP, § 3.411).

> Although a proposition may only determine one place in logical space, the whole logical space must already be given by it. (Otherwise, denial, the logical sum, the logical product, *etc*., would always introduce new elements—in co-ordination.) (The logical scaffolding round the picture determines the logical space. The proposition reaches through the whole logical space) (TLP, § 3.42).

Each proposition presents a possible situation. Every situation, however, is located in the whole space of realized and unrealized states of affairs. A proposition occupies a place in a set of propositions that are logically interconnected. If the sense of a proposition is to be determined, then a relation of this proposition to all other propositions in the logical space must be already established. Each proposition has a fixed set of inferential relations to other propositions. The truth conditions of all possible combinations of propositions are in this way determined. Therefore, there is an intrinsic connection between the sense of proposition p and its occurrences in propositions such as $p \wedge q$, $\neg\neg p$, and $p \vee \neg q$, etc.[7] Though each sentence of a natural language

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[7] The reader may feel inclined to protest at this point. According to the *Tractatus*, elementary sentences must be logically independent (TLP, § 4.211). There are no

presents only one situation, it is related to a whole network of sentences in the space of possible combinations.

I want to add a third class of theses from the *Tractatus,* which are important for our assessment of the relation between logical atomism and semantic holism in Wittgenstein's early thought. These remarks link the symbol/sign distinction with the idea of meaningful use and its role in logical syntax. Several commentators have already discerned an important role for the notion of *Gebrauch* in the logical syntax of language in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Conant, 1998, 2002; Kremer, 1997; Livingston, 2004).

> In order to recognize the symbol in the sign we must consider the significant use (TLP, § 3.326).

> The sign determines a logical form only together with its logical syntactic application (TLP, § 3.327).

> If a sign is not necessary, then it is meaningless.[8] That is the meaning of Occam's razor (If everything in the symbolism works as though a sign had meaning, then it has meaning) (TLP, § 3.328).

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logical connections between Wittgenstein's exemplary pictures of facts. If sentences "p is red" and "p is black" are contradictory, this means that they cannot be elementary propositions. The independence of elementary propositions implies the independence of states of affairs. Hence, the world is the mosaic of independent atomic facts; language is a set of independent elementary propositions. These are the main points of atomism. Holism characterizes non-elementary sentences and situations (i.e., functions of states of affairs). Therefore, holism and atomism are two independent elements of the Tractarian view. I agree with the main elements of this reasoning. However, this argumentation does not show that holism is an insignificant part of the early Wittgenstein's view. If we consider the natural language, there are inferential relations between non-elementary propositions and elementary propositions. Each non-elementary proposition is correlated with a set of elementary propositions that constitutes its analysis. Moreover, elementary propositions are the bases of truth-functional operations that generate the set of all sentences of a natural language. Holism rather than atomism is already the main feature describing Wittgenstein's view of natural language in the *Tractatus.*

[8] In the original German text, Wittgenstein uses an adjective *gebraucht* which allows the reader to recognize the connection between this thesis and the previous ones concerning the use—*Gebrauch*—of a sign: "Wird ein Zeichen nicht gebraucht, so ist es bedeutungslos".

> What signifies in the symbol is what is common to all those symbols
> by which it can be replaced according to the rules of logical syntax
> (TLP, § 3.344).

In the center of Wittgenstein's later philosophy lies his slogan that meaning
is use (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 25). It is possible to argue that he put stress on
the meaningful use of signs in a sentence much earlier, not only on repre-
sentational capacities of expressions. From this point of view, a meaningful
use is what transforms a sign into the symbol. The sign is the symbol (i.e.,
a meaningful expression) if it has a role in the logical syntax. The logical
syntax presents possible relations of symbols in a language. If an expres-
sion has no application in the network of possible uses of sentences to states
and denies the state of affairs, then it is meaningless. This is the signifi-
cance of Occam's razor. The application of a sign endows a sign with the
meaning and a logical form. In this way, the themes characteristic for the
late thought of Wittgenstein such as the notion of use, its connection to the
idea of logical grammar (syntax) and of being a symbol turn out crucial to
the reading of Wittgenstein's early writings.

What is the relation between holistic elements of Wittgenstein's work
and logical atomism? How should we understand the notion of use that
appears in §§ 3.326–3.328? Is there really no tension between the Tractarian
atomistic conception of an elementary proposition and the all-encompassing
logical space? In the next part, I present three different accounts that try to
answer these questions and provide a coherent view of such notions as use,
logical syntax, and the logical space.

Forms of Holism in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

In my view, it is possible to distinguish three alternative views
concerning holistic elements in the *Tractatus* that can be found in the
secondary literature. These positions are:

I. **Minimal Holism**, which is the view supported by Elisabeth Ans-
    combe (1963), Max Black (1966) and David Pears (1990).
II. **Moderate Holism**, presented in James Conant (1998, 2002, 2004),
    Cora Diamond (1995, 2000) and Gilbert Ryle's (2009c, 2009d)
    writings.

III. **Radical Holism**, which is proposed by Gilead Bar-Elli (2005), Michael Kremer (1997, 2001, 2002), and Paul Livingston (2004).[9]Minimal Holism is the earliest and most modest view of these three. On the other hand, the newest and most controversial form is Radical Holism. I will describe Minimal Holism first, then Radical Holism, and finally, Moderate Holism.

Firstly, minimal holists acknowledge the existence of holistic elements in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but they claim that there is, in fact, a tension between these parts of Wittgenstein's doctrine and the "official atomism" (Pears, 1990, p. 167; Black, 1966, pp. 8, 10). There are two aspects to this pressure. Simple names have a very demanding role in the *Tractatus*. As to the atomistic requirement, names should not generate any connections between elementary propositions. The simplicity of names guarantees that the sense of an elementary proposition is determinate and independent from accidental features of the world (TLP, § 2.0211, §3.23). The truth of the proposition stating the existence of a simple object cannot imply truth or falsity of any other elementary proposition. On the other hand, names should so freely combine to form all elementary propositions. The form of objects must determine all their possible combinations in the state of affairs. The combinability of objects with one another depends on the implicitly holistic logic (Pears, 1990, p. 166). This aspect of atomism/holism dialectics exposes the second problem with the role of simple names in elementary sentences. It seems that there is a conflict between the logical independence of elementary propositions and their role in the description of the world. If the richness of our experience is to be described, then elementary propositions cannot be mutually independent. The simplicity of names should not generate logical relations between elementary propositions, but this implies that they would be unable to describe any interesting aspect of the world. Nearly every statement of facts in the world leads to an

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[9] The boundaries between these three positions are sometimes fluid and the choice whether philosopher X belongs to position Y or Z is not completely determined. I prefer to treat each of these stances as a general way of thinking about Tractarian doctrine that can be rationally championed and defended. However, each position has an exemplary representative about whom we can say categorically that they instantiated it (minimal holism—Black, moderate holism—Diamond, radical holism—Livingston). See also footnote 15.

exclusion of some other facts. The *Tractarian* conception of simple names essentially contradicts this very conclusion.

Furthermore, minimal holists take the ontological parts of the *Tractatus* "seriously".[10] They promote realistic and representational reading of the work as a whole. The role of objects as the meaning of simple names is fundamental and inescapable. Therefore, minimal holists underplay the importance of Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the notion of use in fixing the semantics of an expression. According to this traditional view of names in the *Tractatus*, each (real) proper name stands for a simple object. The meaning of a name is a co-ordinated object. This idea is fundamental to the early Wittgenstein's whole philosophy of language (Black, 1966, pp. 93, 127). Moreover, this view of the *Bedeutung* of names lies at the heart of the *Tractarian* conception of analysis; it drew on Russell's interpretation, but without the British empiricist epistemology that inspired Russell (Anscombe, 1963, p. 49).[11] Wittgenstein sketches his view of names and objects as its meanings due to process of analysis in the following way:

> In propositions thoughts can be so expressed that to the objects of the thoughts correspond the elements of the propositional sign (TLP, § 3.2).

> These elements I call "simple signs" and the proposition "completely analyzed" (TLP, § 3.201).

> The simple signs employed in propositions are called names (TLP, § 3.202).

> The name means the object. The object is its meaning. ("A" is the same sign as "A".) (TLP, § 3.203).

> The object is simple (TLP, § 2.02).

The conception of simple names in the *Tractatus* is based on the idea that simple names just stand for objects which are their *Bedeutungen*. Contrary to Frege's conception (Frege, 1892a), a name only represents an object, and it does not describe it in any way. However, Wittgenstein believes that

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[10] The contrast here is meant with an "ironic" or just "resolute" reading of them (Diamond, 1988, p. 11; Kremer, 1997, p. 108).

[11] For Russell's conception of names, see Russell (1910–1911). The influence of the empiricist position on Russell's view is easily discernible in Russell (1905, 1911, 1912).

ordinary proper names function as Russellian descriptions; therefore, they are not real names (TLP, § 5.02).

Lastly, according to proponents of Minimal Holism, "use" and "application" should be read as a "logico-syntactical application", that is, a category based on the rules of logical syntax. This means that by "application", Wittgenstein did not intend "role in life", "use", "practice of the use" in the sense of *Philosophical Investigations*. His employment of *Gebrauch* has a rather logical and syntactical flavour in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Elisabeth Anscombe characterized logico-syntactical application as that kind of difference between the syntactical words which concerns a logician (Anscombe, 1963, p. 91). Then, her view was accepted by Black and commented in a straightforward way:

> In the *Tractatus*, application does not mean "use" in the sense of the *Investigations* (cf. Anscombe, 1959, p. 91 – I agree with her that "application" means "that kind of difference between the syntactical roles of words which concerns a logician").
>
> (Black, 1966, p. 115)

Minimal holists accept the view that the fundamental change in Wittgenstein's philosophy after the return to Cambridge was his new conception of what the use of an expression is. His employment of this term in the *Tractatus* was syntactical. Each expression has a logical role which is closely related to its meaning, but is not identical to it. For instance, in ordinary language, "Ludwig Wittgenstein" has a logical role of a proper name, it is used to talk about some person and its meaning is this person, i.e., an object called Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the two sentences, "Mr. Green is green" and "Mr. Green is Mr. Green", the word "is" has different logical roles. It performs a role of the predicate in the former and it is an identity symbol in the latter.

Now I will describe Radical Holism to demonstrate how different this reading is from the standard one and to contrast it with Minimal Holism. The stark contrast between these two approaches in regard to the *Tractatus* should be of interest for its own sake for a historian of philosophy.[12] It raises also the question as to whether the change in views between

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[12] From one point of view, the difference between Minimal and Radical Holism goes deeper than the contrast between the resolute and standard reading of the *Tractatus*. Both

the early and late Wittgenstein has more a substantial or, rather, a predominantly methodological dimension.

First, radical holists claim that the function of use theory of meaning is more basic than the role of the representational account of the sense of propositions and meaning of simple names. Minimal holists emphasize that elementary propositions represent states of affairs in the world and names are representants of worldly objects in a proposition. According to radical holists, the representational dimension of the *Tractatus* is tempered by Wittgenstein's view of logical syntax. The intra-linguistic principles governing the notion of meaning are rooted in use and reflect or express ways in which language is used.[13] These intra-linguistic rules governing the use of expressions soften the realistic character of objects and prompts to see the talk of them as rather a transcendental framework for the possibility of language than as a full-blown metaphysical description of the world (Bar-Elli, 2005, pp. 2, 9–12[14]). Paul Livingston claims that "the metaphysically realist" view of the early Wittgenstein's philosophy of language is incorrect and adds:

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moderate and radical holists usually prefer the resolute approach but, as I will demonstrate later, moderate holists have some points in common with minimal holists too. The positions of moderate and minimal holists can be presented in mutual opposition.

[13] "Meaning" here is a translation of *Bedeutung*. This is the standard procedure in translating the *Tractatus*. However, it has some obvious shortcomings. The meaning of a simple name is an object; therefore, "meaning" seems to mean here "denotation", "reference". For Frege, who has used *Bedeutung* in a similar sense, the *Bedeutung* of the name "Julius Caesar" is an object, something saturated, namely Julius Caesar (Frege, 1891, 1892a, 1892b). On the other hand, Wittgenstein speaks of the *Bedeutung* of expressions where it should be obvious that they do not refer according to the *Tractatus*, namely in the case of negation (TLP, § 5.451) and numerals (TLP, § 6.232). Hence, Peter Caruthers (1989, p. 28) and Brian McGuinness (2002) propose to use the notion of semantic content. The translation of *Bedeutung* as "meaning" is the most neutral and the least theoretically loaded.

[14] Bar-Elli argues that Wittgenstein does not answer the question "what is a name and how is it individuated" in ontological terms (i.e., in terms of the relation to the object denoted by the name), but in terms of use. Ontological concepts do not serve as criteria by which to identify words and uses, since they are not assigned independently of them. In this perspective, the correlation of a name and an object is not a separate act and a genuine relation, but an aspect of logico-syntactic rules (Bar-Elli, 2005, p. 10).

> [T]he early Wittgenstein was actually more closely an adherent of the doctrine expressed by the slogan "meaning is use" than was the later Wittgenstein; and an understanding of the central role of this doctrine in the theory of the *Tractatus* is essential to understanding Wittgenstein's philosophical method, early and late.
>
> (Livingston, 2004, p. 34)

Livingston emphasizes that the possibilities of significant use define the essence of a symbol. We cannot understand what a symbol is without understanding the ways in which the signs that comprise it are significantly used in a proposition (Livingston, 2004, p. 39). He adduces in support of his view § 3.326: "In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense". However, in his very next remarks, Wittgenstein says that "a sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logico-syntactical employment". Therefore, a minimal holist would oppose, Livingston's claim to the use theory of meaning is unwarranted, since the use of a sign that makes it the symbol is not the role in language games appearing in Wittgenstein's later writings, but logico-syntactical use, application that concerns a logician. Here comes the second difference with the more traditional reading of the *Tractatus*.[15]

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[15]   I admit that it is not an uncontroversial matter whether Kremer should be counted as a radical or a minimal holist. His general way of thinking about the *Tractatus* is arguably quite close to both Diamond's and Conant's views. However, when it comes to details, there are readily apparent differences. Kremer acknowledges that himself (2001, p. 46). Some of these differences are decisive. Firstly, Kremer claims that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* proposed a broader than merely representational view of meaning. According to this view, "meaning, in general, is use or function in language, and the representing of objects is only one specific form of meaning" (Kremer, 2002, p. 284). Having a meaning is a matter of having a function in the language, a use; the function of representing objects is derivative and secondary (Kremer, 2002, p. 283; cf. Kremer, 1997, p. 87; 2001, p. 69). This shows that Kremer's characterization of Tractarian doctrine fulfils the first distinguishing mark of radical holism. Secondly, Kremer claims at one go that the linguistic meaning in the *Tractatus,* as well as in Wittgenstein's later works, can be equated roughly with use. This notion of use characterizes the use which we make of propositions "in life", i.e., their use in the process of inference from significant propositions to significant propositions (Kremer, 2001, p. 56; Kremer, 2002, p. 300). This shows that Kremer does not want to restrict the use to its syntactic aspect. Thus, he agrees in this respect with Livingston and Bar-Elli.

The supporters of Radical Holism claim that "use" and "application" should not be treated as a logico-syntactical notion, but in a way close to the *Investigation*'s role in life. They explicitly reject the minimal holists' view that use in the *Tractatus* means a logico-syntactical application. Use should not be treated as a syntactical notion isolated from the actual practice of ordinary speakers of language. This claim has a weaker and a stronger variant. According to the weaker version, the purely syntactical interpretation of what transforms a sign into a symbol is incorrect, and Wittgenstein opts for a "thicker" notion that includes the actual use of sentences in making true and false statements in actual situations. However, this "thicker" view of application is not identical with the notion of use well-known from *Philosophical Investigations*. The common point with the later view lies in its non-reductive and normative character (Bar-Elli, 2005, pp. 4, 6, 18). On the other hand, on the stronger view, *Tractarian* notion of use was as rich as that embodied in the slogan "meaning is use". The scope of the rules of logical syntax must reflect the total range of possible meanings in ordinary language, and it is similar in this respect to Wittgenstein's later conception of logical grammar (Livingston, 2004, pp. 45, 50).

> Anscombe, for instance, interprets the phrase "logico-syntactic employment" as meaning "the kind of difference between the syntactical roles of words which concerns a logician" rather than gesturing toward "role in life", "use", [or] "practice of the use" in the sense of *Philosophical Investigations*. But actually there is no reason to think that Wittgenstein intended the scope of the rules of logical syntax shown by logical reflection on the use of symbolism in ordinary language to be any smaller than the total range of possible meanings in ordinary language.
>
> (Livingston, 2004, p. 49)

In the process of clarification and elucidation of meaning, we can rely on all possible methods to explain the meaning of an expression. The practice of analysis exposes patterns of use implicit in ordinary language. The rules of logical syntax emerge from the explicitation of these ordinarily implicit patterns of use.

The third main claim of Radical Holism is even more surprising. According to the proponents of this stance, Tractarian theory of meaning is actually very close to the view that the meaning of a term must be determined holistically by the inferential place (the conceptual role) in the

network of propositions in which it can significantly figure.[16] This view is instantiated in the following ways. Firstly, the doctrine of the *Tractatus* embodies an inferentialist program of analysis because it advises beginning with ordinary judgments of the meaning of propositions, and proceeds from identifying the semantic relations of propositions to identifying their logically distinct terms. In this respect, Wittgenstein's early views anticipate Willard V.O. Quine's and Wilfrid Sellars' semantic holism (Livingston, 2004, p. 54). Secondly, the *Tractatus* involves the conception of the *Bedeutung* as a contribution to the inferential role; accordingly, a name is a name of a simple or a complex object in virtue of which logical relations hold between propositions involving it and propositions involving other names:

> […] "a" names a complex just in case proposition of the form "ϕ(a)" imply propositions of the form "Ψ(b)" for some b's (the constituents of a); "a" names a simple just in case propositions of the form "ϕ(a)" do not imply propositions of the form "Ψ(b)" for any b's. Thus mutual independence of elementary propositions is a consequence of Wittgenstein's conception of a simple name.
>
> (Kremer, 1997, p. 98)

The inferential position of an expression determines the meaning of a name. The character of the name does not depend on its representational relation to the world, but relies on a contribution to the inferential role of a proposition. Hence, the program of the *Tractatus* embodies what might today be called an inferentialist program of analysis (Livingston, 2004, p. 54; Kremer, 1997, p. 113).

How different from these two readings is Moderate Holism? In what does it see the main difference between logical grammar and logical syntax? What kind of view of the ontological parts of the *Tractatus* does it propose? I will try to address the main features of the moderate holists' view now.

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[16] Hence, both Bar-Elli and Kremer emphasize that Wittgenstein uses the German verb *kennen* and not *wissen* when he speaks of knowing an object in a state of affairs (TLP, § 2.0123-1). This choice suggests an ability, a practical mastery of use. Bar-Elli (2005, p. 13) concludes: "[t]herefore, the only way of knowing an object is by understanding all sentences that contain its name, or in which he is in some way denoted". Kremer (2002, p. 290) accompanies him: "[t]hus, to know the possibilities of an object's occurrence in atomic facts is to know how to use the name of that object in propositions".

Moderate holists accept the logical and syntactical characteristic of such Tractarian notions as "use" and "application". Hence, they agree in this respect with minimal holists and they tend to speak of logical roles and the syntactical application of symbols (Conant, 2002, p. 404; Diamond, 1981, p. 9). The notion of *Gebrauch* is understood by them in the traditional fashion. Use of signs transforms them into symbols which serve such logical roles as being an object, being a concept, being a relation, *etc*. The criterion of identity for such roles is that they can be interchanged in all cases *salva veritate* without the change of the truth-value of the propositions. On the other hand, moderate holists reject ontological and/or psychological criterions of objecthood.

> If what we view as the leftover expression in one sentence can be taken to be an argument expression – if logic will allow such an identification— logic will insist that the expression now viewed as leftover, now viewed as argument, makes the same contribution to the truth or falsity of what is said. Logic will thus insist that it carry with it in the two cases the same rules for substitution *salva veritate* in sentences.
>
> (Diamond, 1984, p. 361)

If we are to discern the symbol in a sign, we need to discover what contribution it makes to the sense of the proposition in which it figures. We need to know what logical role it performs in the context of a proposition. What we want to discover is thus not seen at all if we look at the mere isolated word. We have to look at the working parts of the proposition stating or denying some state of affairs (Conant, 2002, p. 385). The recognition of the use of an expression consists in examining its logical role in a proposition, and thus in discerning what symbol is embodied in a perceptible sign. The same perceptible sign "is" can perform different logical roles in the context of different propositions.[17] To recognize the symbol, an examination of its logico-syntactical application is necessary, and not psychological ideas which speaker tends to associate with some signs.

An anti-metaphysical stance is characteristic for the moderate holists. They treat ontological categories as ultimately dispensable and

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[17] See an example on p. 6 of the propositions: "Mr. Green is green" and "Mr. Green is Mr. Green". See also Conant's discussion of the distinction sign/symbol in Conant (2002, pp. 398–405).

redundant. Because of this dispensable nature of the ontological discourse, speaking of objects as meanings of names has a transitory character. At the end of the *Tractatus*, the realist position has to be dropped (Diamond, 1984, p. 355). Furthermore, the reader has to recognize that the idea of ontological classifications of objects is self-undermining. There is simply no such thing. What an expression stands for is exposed in the logical role of an expression and this is an intrinsic matter of logic since logic must take care of itself (TLP, § 5.473). Metaphysics tries in vain to be the highest-order science that describes the world apart from our use of an expression. As we saw, this use of an expression consists in attending the logico-syntactical application of an expression and describing its role as a symbol. Metaphysics cannot replace examining the logical roles of symbols. A metaphysician is under the illusion that contemplating the nature of concepts can be a substitute for examining its use, i.e., logical role in a proposition describing the world in some way. This critical aspect of the Tractarian conception of the nature of philosophical enquiries was already discerned by Gilbert Ryle.[18]

> The conceptual enquiries that constitute philosophy are in an even worse plight than those that constitute Formal Logic. For the philosopher has apparently to try not just to deploy but to describe the concepts with which he is concerned. He has to try to say what Pleasure and Existence are. He has to try, necessarily in vain, to attach object-characterising predicates to non-object mentioning expressions. But by no prestidigitation can the live verb "enjoys" or the live verb "exists" (except in inverted commas), be made grammatical subjects to live verbs. The philosopher's description of a concept is bound to terminate in a stammer.
>
> (Ryle, 2009d, p. 195)

We have to take Wittgenstein's appeal to throw away the ladder seriously (TLP, § 6.54). After throwing it away, we stay with the concept script and we are supposed to recognize that the idea of a logical classification of things is confused (Diamond, 1984, pp. 355, 365). Realism turns out to be incoherent since it presumes a view from the outside of logic and

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[18] James Conant links Ryle's description of Tractarian method of enquiries with his further examination of holistic strands of thought in the Tractatus (Conant, 2002, pp. 432–433 (fn. 35), pp. 446–447 (fn. 91)). For a discussion of Ryle's view of logical atomism, see Gaskin (2013). See also Ryle (2009a, 2009b) for his own characterization of the nature of philosophical enquiries and logical syntax.

language. The objective of the *Tractatus* is therapeutic; it aims to show that a position in which we are outside logic is an illusory one (Diamond, 1988, pp. 8–9, 22–23).

Finally, according to moderate holists, there is no tension between representational and holistic elements in the early Wittgenstein's thought. Tractarian holism is based on the logico-syntactical notion of use and is of limited character since it is controlled by logical and truth-functional relations in language. Though the meaning of an expression cannot be described as a conceptual role, every sentence has determinate logical relations to all other sentences. All sentences are within a common logical space in which relations between expressions are determined compositionally. The meaning of a sentence is abstractable, but not separable from its position within the common logical space. The metaphor of the logical space is meant to explicate truth-functional and logical relations between propositions (Diamond, 2000, pp. 269, 271). Firstly, each elementary sentence can occur as the basis of truth-functional operations. The elementary proposition is a possible argument for a truth-function. It must be already fixed in the logical syntax of language which the possible combinations of elementary propositions are in these truth-functions. Hence, the proposition reaches right through the logical space. Secondly, logical relations of the given proposition must also be determined completely. As I already explained, each sentence has a fixed set of inferential relations to other sentences.[19] There is an intrinsic connection between the sense of sentence p and its occurrences in sentences such as p ∧ q, ¬ ¬ p, and p ∨ ¬ q, *etc*. Though each sentence of natural language presents only one situation, it is related to the whole network of sentences in the space of possible combinations.[20]

What is the holistic position of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*?

In the previous part, we have seen three different forms of holism that one can find in the literature devoted to Wittgenstein's early work. These positions

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[19] See pp. 28–29.

[20] In TLP, §3.42, Wittgenstein states that "[a]lthough a proposition may only determine one place in logical space, the whole logical space must already be given by it. (Otherwise, denial, the logical sum, the logical product, etc., would always introduce new elements—in co-ordination.) (The logical scaffolding round the picture determines the logical space. The proposition reaches through the whole logical space)".

differ from one another as to the interpretation of the term "logical syntax", the role of ontological parts of the *Tractatus* and the understanding of what conception of meaning Wittgenstein proposed. Now, I want to espouse moderate holism and indicate some points in favor of this position. My main intention is to point to what is interesting in this form of holism and to establish some fundamental insights which that view offers us.

The first fundamental belief which correctly forms a part of moderate holism doctrine is the view that Tractarian "use" clearly means the "logico-syntactical application", and not a "role in life". I think that in favor of this stance are reasons of both a textual as well as substantial nature. Firstly, Wittgenstein's remarks both from the very *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Notebooks 1914–1916* explicitly or indirectly speak of "syntactical use". These are particularly clear examples:

> Names signalize what is common to a single form and a single content. Only together with their syntactical use do they signalize one particular logical form (NB[21], p. 53).

> What signifies in the symbol is what is common to all those symbols by which it can be replaced according to the rules of logical syntax (TLP, § 3.344).

In fact, Wittgenstein introduces the topic of use in theses § 3.326/3.327 where he seems to apply the phrases "significant use" and "logical syntactic application" interchangeably. He smoothly passes from the first one to the second one without any additional explanation. Moreover, in a letter to Ogden, he explicates § 3.326 "significant use" as use "in accordance with the laws of logical syntax".[22] The syntactical nature of this characterization is clear again here.[23]Secondly, an attempt to treat notion of use as a role in life leads to a contradiction since there is no way of dispensing with the syntactical notion of use and with the notion of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*. Basically, every reading of this work must admit a role for logical syntax and correlated with it a logico-syntactical notion of application of a sign (TLP, § 3.33–3.334). The proponent of the richer notion of use (i.e., radical

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[21] I use the abbreviation NB for *Notebooks 1914–1916*.

[22] This observation and the quoted text are due to Kremer (1997, p. 113).

[23] For other fragments where the syntactical characterization of use can be discerned, see NB, pp. 59, 61, 64 (two times).

holist) must either claim that Wittgenstein applies the word "use" in two different senses in his work or acknowledge that the traditional approach towards the concept of use in the *Tractatus* is correct. The claim that there is a systematic ambiguity in the meaning of phrases "use" and "logical syntax" in Wittgenstein's work does not appear very attractive. Therefore, there are both exegetical and textual reasons to state that the significant use means a logico-syntactical application in the early Wittgenstein's thought.

For the sake of the second argument, let us adopt some stricter definitions. In a seminal book, Fodor & LePore define holism as the claim that generic semantic properties are holistic.[24] One can provide as examples of generic semantic properties the property of having some content, reference or expressing some proposition or other. Then, we can distinguish between atomistic, molecular[25] and holistic properties. An atomistic property is one which might be instantiated by only one thing. On the other hand, a property is molecular only in the case that if anything has it, then at least one other thing does. Finally, holistic properties are properties such that if anything has them, then lots of other things must have them too (Fodor, LePore, 1992, pp. 1–2). Semantic holism is the doctrine that the property of having meaning is holistic in the sense that no expression in a language can have it unless many other (nonsynonymous) expressions in that language have it too. It is the view that there can be no atomistic languages. The conception of meaning from *Philosophical Investigations* is a clear (and famous) example of this kind of semantic holism (Fodor, LePore, 1992, p. 6). Is the Tractarian view of meaning another one?[26] There are compelling reasons for a negative answer. The first is connected with the analytic/synthetic distinction. Fodor and LePore present the argument that if someone accepts the analytic/synthetic distinction, then there is no implication from a property being molecular to a property of being holistic.[27] Roughly, if the property of having a belief is molecular, then having the belief p implies at least one other belief q. For instance, if Smith has the belief p, he must have other beliefs not identical to p. This is the first premise. The second premise goes as follows. There is no principled distinction between the propositions that

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[24] See Pagin (1997) for an alternative definition of semantic holism.

[25] Fodor and LePore also call them "anatomic" properties.

[26] Radical holists are obliged to give a positive answer.

[27] One can find the details of this argument in Fodor, LePore (1992, pp. 22–32).

Smith has to believe to believe p and the propositions that Smith does not have to believe to believe p. Therefore, the conclusion is: the property of having a belief is holistic, i.e., Smith must have many, many other beliefs apart from the belief p, if he has the belief p.[28] Now, the problem for a radical holist with this argument is that Wittgenstein accepted the analytic/synthetic distinction; hence, there is a principled distinction between the propositions that Smith has to believe to believe p and the propositions that Smith does not have to believe to believe p. The second premise is false, and the argument is incorrect. In short, Wittgenstein accepted the analytic/synthetic distinction in the *Tractatus*. If so, then there is no reasonable step from Tractarian semantics to semantic holism, because if I know the proposition p, then I have to know all propositions analytically connected with it, but I do not have to know the whole language or nearly the whole language. Therefore, Wittgenstein cannot be a holist in the strong sense, which we know from *Philosophical Investigations*.

The second reason against a holistic reading of the semantic properties in the *Tractatus* is more of a textual nature. The characteristics of names, complexes, and propositions indicate that they are molecular concepts. Firstly, being an object/being a name is a molecular property in Fodor and LePore's sense, since if one object has it, then at least one other entity has it too. Wittgenstein claims that "every statement about complexes can be analyzed into a statement about their constituent parts, and into those propositions which completely describe the complexes" (TLP, § 2.0201). This assertion says that propositions concerning complexes should be further analyzed. We can present the contextual analysis of the complex "aRb" having a property φ as $\varphi(aRb) = \varphi(a) \wedge \varphi(b) \wedge aRb$ (NB, 4; cf. Kremer, 1997, p. 97). The complex "aRb" is analyzed into an object a that has the property φ and an object b that has the property φ too. Hence if I know that there is a name for the complex object, then I know that there are at least two other objects a and b which have the property φ and stand in relation R to each other. To know the meaning of the complex "aRb", I do not have to know the meaning of the whole or nearly the whole language, but I have to know the meanings of "a" and "b". Hence, the property of being a name

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[28] The set of sentences which we have to know to be a holist in Fodor and LePore's sense is not specified. The clearest case is that when the knowledge of the whole language is required. However, it is not a necessary condition (Fodor, LePore, 1992, p. 2).

is a molecular property. Secondly, it is true at most that being a proposition is a molecular property in Fodor and LePore's sense, but it is not a holistic one. According to the early Wittgenstein, it is true that if I understand the truth conditions of the sentence p, then I must understand the truth conditions of many other sentences; but it is not true that I must understand the whole language to understand the truth conditions of the sentence p. For instance, if I understand the sentence p, then I must understand the set of sentences such as ⌐ p, p v q and ⌐ ⌐ p, but not the whole language. I have to know all the sentences that are logically (and analytically) connected with the sentence p, however this set is highly restricted.[29]

Two previous points speak against Radical Holism. What about the minimal holists? Is their position tenable? Is their view coherent? In my opinion, minimal holists wrongly see a tension between atomistic and holistic elements in the *Tractatus*. Their position comes from an overtly anachronistic view of names and its relation to facts. This view of names prompts minimal holists to be unable to acknowledge the centrality of the category of (logico-syntactical) use for the significance of the whole work. They accept an outdated vision of the ontological parts of the *Tractatus* which leads to an overtly atomistic view of language. According to this view, metaphysics has primacy over an examination of the logical roles of expressions. It overemphasizes the role of objects as the meaning of names in elementary propositions while ignoring what logical analysis really was for Wittgenstein, namely an examination of the inferential relations between propositions in the logical space.[30] Minimal holists' emphasis on atomism in the opening parts of the work obstructs an understanding of the rest of the *Tractatus*. It stops us from discerning that holistic elements are complementary to its initial atomism, for instance in Wittgenstein's conception of quantification, logical space, and their relation to compositionality.[31]

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to indicate the relevance of my discussion on the topic of holism for an overall reading of the early and late Wittgenstein. As we

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[29] Here we can see the connection with the first reason for a non-holistic reading.

[30] For a discussion on this conception of logical analysis, see Diamond (2000, pp. 268–272) and Kremer (1997, pp. 96–99).

[31] For these three themes, see Diamond (2000, pp. 268–276, 2002, pp. 272–273).

have seen, my paper champions the necessity of discerning holistic elements in the doctrine of the *Tractatus*. However, the early Wittgenstein's holism does not perform the role of theory of meaning based on the notion of an inferential role. Also, the early and the late Wittgenstein do not share an identical view of what the use of an expression is. This is meant to demonstrate that the unity of the early and the late Wittgenstein's philosophy does not lie in a shared conception of meaning (e.g., a strongly holistic one) or any other conception. If we are to see the continuity in Wittgenstein's thought, we have to look in a different direction. After all, the author of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations* claims that his activity is not that of proposing a theory, but it has a therapeutic character. Searching for the common ground of the early and late form of therapy should not consist in waiting for a rung of the ladder, which was there both when Wittgenstein was young and old. The aim of Wittgenstein's work is to let us see the world from a different perspective and this perspective can be attained only by rejecting a body of doctrine, and not by embracing its particular part. What was constant for Wittgenstein was rather the aim of philosophizing and (partly) its method, but not this or that particular theoretical belief.

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Abstract

The aim of my paper is to describe and evaluate different conceptions of holism in Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. I distinguish three readings of holistic elements in this work: i) Minimal Holism (E. Anscombe, M. Black, D. Pears); ii) Moderate Holism (J. Conant, C. Diamond, G. Ryle); and iii) Radical Holism (G. Bar-Elli, M. Kremer, P. Livingston). The conclusion is that the most viable option is Moderate Holism since it embraces the logico-syntactical notion of use, rejects an anachronistic interpretation of Tractatarian ontology and allows us to see that the holistic elements are complementary to the initial atomism of the work. Moreover, I point to the consequences of the topic for the overall reading of Wittgenstein's early and late work.

ARTICLES

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WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PSEUDO-PROBLEM OF EVIL

Introduction

In contemporary debates among analytic philosophers, the problem of evil is divided into two categories: the logical and the evidential problem of evil.[1] The logical problem of evil attempts to show that the co-existence of evil and God leads to an inconsistency. The logical argument attempts to refute God's existence by a deductive argument. J.L Mackie (1955) introduced the logical problem of evil in the analytic philosophy. The debates following his article led to the abandonment of the logical

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[1] For an overview of the logical and evidential problem of evil, see McBrayer, Howard-Snyder (2013).

problem of evil and instead philosophers engaged with the evidential problem of evil. William Rowe (1979) pioneered discussions on the evidential problem of evil among the analytic philosophers. While the logical argument of evil aims at showing the impossibility of the existence of God in a world containing evil, the evidential argument aims at showing the improbability of God's existence.

Evils have been categorized into two groups: moral and natural. By moral evil, we mean evils that are inflicted on sentient beings by human beings. Robbery, backstabbing, torturing, killing and the like are among the moral evils. Natural evils refer to the pain that sentient beings suffer as a result of natural events such as tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis and diseases.

Theists usually tend to offer different justifications for moral and natural evils. One of the most debated justifications is justifying moral evils by referring to "free will". In a non-compatibilist conception of free will, human beings act freely and therefore they are themselves responsible for the pain and suffering which they inflict on others. Some atheists have either questioned the intelligibility or the coherence of a libertarian conception of free will. David Lewis (1993), for instance, has argued against the possibility of a libertarian conception of free will. The libertarian conception of free will can also be used against the theist position. Schellenberg (2004) not only questions the existence of free will as a necessary prerequisite for a meaningful relationship with God, but also argues that the existence of free will itself is reason to doubt God's existence. This is because, as a result of free will, many atrocities occur which a loving God would want to prevent and the alleged benefits of free will can also be achieved under a different scenario where free will does not exist.

Facing the challenges brought about by the problem of evil, some have argued that the problem of evil impels us to revise the divine features. Some have argued that we should abandon attributing omnipotence to the Almighty, while others have argued that we should limit the kind or extent of the knowledge attributed to God, yet others have argued that we should question the concept of "goodness" when it comes to God. A radical version of the revision arguments proposes the existence of an evil genius or evil God who is omnipotent and omniscient and has created this world. Cahn (1977), Stein (1990), and Law (2019), among others, have argued that the existence of an evil God is as likely as the existence of a good

God. Cahn introduced the "problem of good", a challenge for reconciling the good in the world with the existence of an evil God. There is of course another possibility which has not been taken seriously in the recent debates on the problem of evil among analytic philosophers, namely Manichean-ism. In the past, Manicheans defended the existence of both evil and good deities and as a result they had an answer for the existence of good and evil; two separate sources.

A strong commitment to morality is presupposed in discussing the problem of evil. Therefore, both theists and atheists need to have the pos-sibility to condemn evil and there are instances of evil which need outright condemnation. Nevertheless, some theists insist that there are justifications for the existence of such evils. They do so by insisting that God knows things that we do not and given that we do not have that knowledge, we are not aware of those justifications. However, given the human perspective and understanding that we have, we have no other choice but to condemn those evils as unjustifiable. Wachterhauser (1985) argues along the lines that given that our understanding of morality is dependent on our human perspective, if we accept that certain evils are somehow justified, then we have no choice but to become skeptical about morality. However, skepticism about morality is as big a blow to theism as the problem of evil itself.

In all the debates on the problem of evil, despite the differences, phi-losophers deal with the co-existence of God on the one hand and evils on the other. In contemporary debates on the problem of evil, the God in question is generally taken to be the God of the "Abrahamic religions". One of the implications of this is thought to be that God is a person who has a mind, willpower, intentions, and moral features. Three divine features are singled out in dealing with the problem of evil: Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnibenevolence.

In what follows, I will offer a Wittgensteinian diagnosis of the discus-sions related to the problem of evil. In order to do so, I will draw on themes present in the writings of the later Wittgenstein. Two major arguments will be developed. First, Wittgenstein argued that the use of words in each language game determines their meaning. As a result, when we intend to define divine attributes, we ought to engage with the religious traditions and the actual religious language games. However, philosophers in the analytic tradition propose their own abstract concepts and almost neglect the religious traditions entirely. This means the philosophical discussions

on the problem of evil barely have any relevance for the religious believer. Second, Wittgenstein thought of concepts like "disembodied mind" as confused, and argued against the intelligibility of attributing personhood to non-humans. Drawing on these points, I will argue that the philosophical discussion on the problem of evil needs therapy and not a clever solution.

God and divine attributes in the religious traditions

In the Wittgensteinian view, for a word to have meaning it should be used in a specific language game with its own rules. In our discussion, in order to see how divine attributes are used and what they mean, we ought to consult existing religious language games. However, in the debates on the problem of evil, many of the divine attributes are employed without paying any attention to religious tradition. Figuring out the proper use of the words in the religious language game is not an easy task and a superficial consultation of the religious texts can lead us astray.

In the religious texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God manifests a variety of emotions such as anger and vengeance. One might think that it would have been easier to resolve the problem of evil had the philosophical conception of God more in common with the holy books of the Abrahamic religions in particular and religious traditions in general. Take the following example, a passage from the Old Testament which was a severe punishment for what King David as a person had done: "The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died." (2 Samuel 24:15.)

If we were to accept God as an extremely powerful person who took revenge on an entire nation simply because one of them had committed a sin, then we have a very clear answer to why evil and God coexist. In that case, God is the source of evil and there is no problem in reconciling such a God with the existence of evil. If God is the source of evil, then there is no "problem of evil". The problem would be instead how to deal with such a God.

However, dealing with religious traditions is not as simple as picking out a few instances from the holy books and determining what of conception of God is at play. On reading the holy books, one will find many passages that could imply that God is immoral, while other passages may suggest that he is pure love. In order to see how God and divine attributes are used in each tradition and how they hang together, that tradition ought

to be studied in its entirety. It is only after such a thorough study of God in a tradition that we can begin to engage with the problem of evil. The specific attributes that we may all agree on, need to be specified with the aid of tradition. Let us assume that we all agree that if there were a God, he ought to be all loving. We need to specify what "love" means in "all loving" and in order to do so we need to deal with specific religious traditions to determine what is meant by "love" in each of them. Without such specifications, we are not dealing with the God of certain traditions but with speculations about what God would be. Some philosophers have speculated about God and have argued for or against such speculative conceptions. Arguing for or against such a God is arguing for or against a philosopher's God, not the God of a certain tradition.

God in the Abrahamic Religions?

In addition to the fact that analytic philosophers do not consult the religious traditions to clarify the meaning of divine attributes, they seem to have a craving for a general definition of God in the Abrahamic religions. Another Wittgensteinian criticism can be leveled against this craving for generality.

Wittgenstein (1958) is famous for arguing against reduction and craving for generality in philosophy. He thought that such cravings were the result of the preoccupation of philosophers with the methods of sciences. If we were to apply this criticism to the discussions on the problem of evil, we should resist the general and reductive conception of "God in the Abrahamic traditions". By the Abrahamic religions we mean Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, the Gods present in each of these religions are so different that one wonders how one could argue for or against them at the same time. Barely any philosophical paper in the analytic tradition on the problem of evil or Theism refers to the holy books of these three religions. What is meant by divine "knowledge", "power", and "morality" is dependent on minute details in each of these books. Taking one example, Richard Swinburne begins the first chapter of his book "Is there a God?" as follows, "My topic is the claim that there is a God, understood in the way that Western religion (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) has generally understood that claim" (1996, p. 3.). Contrary to the general use of the term "God in the Abrahamic traditions" or "God in the monotheistic religions", the God presented in The Quran and the Gods presented in The Old and The New

Testament are not the same, despite similarities. Consulting each of these religions would make it clear that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have crucial differences; pivotal differences in discussing the problem of evil. This is not to mention how our conception of God would be different if we were to take the various interpretations of each sect in these three religions into consideration. Unless we carry out such an examination and base our philosophical arguments on such an examination, we are not dealing with God in any religious tradition but an imagined God. Taking Wittgenstein's advice seriously, we should speak of three different versions of the problem of evil, one specific to Islam, one specific to Judaism, and one specific to Christianity.

The philosophical and the religious conception

In his book "Problem of Evil and Problem of God" (2004), D.Z. Phillips has leveled some criticisms against the idealized conception of God used in the philosophical discussions related to the problem of evil. Phillips develops the Wittgensteinian point mentioned above and discusses one of the divine attributes, namely Omnipotence, in order to examine how in the analytic tradition this divine attribute is used and how irrelevant it is to the religious traditions. Richard Swinburne defines God's omnipotence as,

> [a]n omnipotent being is one who can do anything logically possible, anything that is, the description of which does not involve a contradiction: such a being could not make me exist and not exist at the same instant, but he could eliminate the stars or cover the earth with water just like that.

> (Swinburne, 1998, p. 3)

Such a definition is not to be found anywhere in the Abrahamic traditions. Rather it is a definition that Swinburne has come up with. However, defining God regardless of the tradition is not only limited to theists. Atheists such as J.L. Mackie also define divine attributes without consulting religious tradition.

Phillips (2004) questions Swinburne's definition by offering the following examples as things that God cannot do: "riding a bicycle, licking and savouring a Haagen-Dazs ice-cream, bumping one's head, having sexual

intercourse, learning a language and so on and so on" (p. 12). If God rides a bicycle or licks an ice-cream, it does not constitute a logical contradiction. Yet we know that God cannot ride a bicycle nor lick an ice-cream. But where do we know this from? It is widely accepted that the concept of God developed in the monotheistic traditions does not include such anthropomorphic capacities because God is thought to be without a body. Therefore, in order to find out what sort of conceptual limitations there are for defining God and his attributes, we ought to consult each monotheistic tradition. With his ironic examples, Phillips reminds us of the importance of the religious tradition in developing concepts related to God. If we allow our imagination to wander off, we may come up with interesting stories but that will be our story, not the story of the religions. Of course, we cannot prevent philosophers from speculation. All we can do is to remind them that their speculations do not determine the conception of God in the religions. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein (1969) examines the consequences of neglecting the different discourses and their respective rules. In § 467 he discusses how two people discussing philosophy would be labeled as mad if others were not notified that they were engaged in philosophy. Philosophy is a harmless activity insofar as we are aware of engaging in it and not confusing it with another language game.

As far as Swinburne's definition of omnipotence is concerned, it is doubtful that Phillips's critique of this definition is acceptable. As William Hasker (2007, p. 153) has pointed out, Phillips is not successful in showing that the concept of omnipotence is incoherent. This is because attributing the actions Phillips listed to God is, in fact, contradictory given that God is immaterial by definition. Hasker adds that while Phillips quotes Swinburne's statement that "God cannot do what is logically impossible *for him* to do, whatever the reason for that logical impossibility" [italics in the original] he does not give enough attention to this statement in dealing with the incoherence of the concept of omnipotence.

Phillips reminds us that our definitions and conceptions need to be limited by the tradition. However, there are two limitations to his valuable reminder. First, it is not always clear if his own conceptions are also in accord with the tradition he has in mind. Let us take the example of morality. Phillips argues that humans and God do not share a moral community. In other words, he holds that one cannot sensibly say that God acts "according to" some moral rules as is the case with human beings because such a statement

would indicate that God obeys something outside of him. Thus, Phillips concludes that God has no moral action, and even mere action, at all. However, he does not offer any exegetical source for his view nor does he engage religious passages in which God has been described as a loving and caring person or where God exhibits wrath and envy to clarify his point. The problem of God's obeying something outside him is recognized and met in the religious traditions. In Islamic tradition, for instance, there are at least two views of the al-Ash'ari and the Mu'tazilites (Frank, 2007). The proponents of the former hold that God's actions could be described as good but in themselves. In other words, God does not act according to some criteria; rather, His actions are the criteria themselves. This indicates that morality supervenes on the actions of God and, thus, it is conceivable that, in a possible world, God orders to kill the innocents and this could be considered as moral. In contrast, the Mu'tazilites hold that God acts according to some criteria but these criteria are not external to Him. This indicates that there cannot be a possible world in which God orders to kill the innocents; rather, God always acts according to justice while justice is required by His existence. What is common to the two views is that God is not subordinate to some external criteria. As Hasker (2007, p. 157) has mentioned, in Christianity also some orthodox Christians believe in "the doctrine of divine simplicity" according to which God, God's attributes, and God's actions are identical without there being a need to talk about God's obedience to some external rules. The upshot can be stated in this way: as far as a moral community is concerned, God is the pivotal point of such a community and humans are subordinate to it rather than vice versa. That is to say, in the religious traditions the problem of the moral community is solved or dissolved by making the relation between humans and God upside down so that God originates the moral community and humans participate in it.

Second, Phillips also follows the mainstream analytic philosophers of religion in speaking of "the Abrahamic religions", whereas he limits his focus on Christianity and neglects two other religions, namely Islam and Judaism. Imposing the philosopher's conception of God on any religion is the problem that Phillips recognizes and the problem with his own work is that he imposes a Christian conception of God—which does not seem to be a Christian God upon close examination of the religious texts—on monotheistic religions. In order to remain more faithful to Wittgenstein's philosophy,

it would be best not to "think" what religions have to say about divine attributes and rather "look" at each religion and determine it for each case.

Conception of God in the problem of Evil

So far, we have dealt with the Wittgensteinian remark that meaning of words are determined in how each language game is played. This point has been widely neglected by analytic philosophers. Let us now turn to some philosophical considerations with regard to the concept of God in the problem of evil.

If the problem of evil is to make any sense at all, God needs to be a person—or person-like—who has created the world and sustains it and can intervene in it. In this picture, God has a mind, he wills and intends things and he has some moral features. Such a God is said to be beyond the physical realm. Therefore, if the problem of evil is to make any sense, we need a divine supernatural person who has certain attributes to begin with. In addition to such a broad conception of God we need a definition for "evil". Here, I have chosen the now dominant view which equates "evil" in the problem of evil with pain and suffering that sentient beings go through.[2] In other words, in order to have the problem of evil in place, we need to experience pain and suffering and witness other sentient beings experiencing it while a certain conception of God is in place. In the following section, I will examine the problematic conception of God that is now commonplace in the analytic tradition; a conception that Wittgenstein found problematic.

Wittgenstein on God

Wittgenstein had a complicated relation with religion and God. From his youth when he was occupied with his sins and logic during his conversations with Russell[1] to his mystical notes during the First World War, the mystical elements in the Tractatus, (see McGuinness, 1966) and his interest in religion in his later life, it is evident that he was not a cold-blooded atheist. In fact, he could be described as an atheist friend of religion.

Wittgenstein remained an agnostic as far as the evidence indicates, however there were certain concepts in religions which he appreciated

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[2] When Russell asked Wittgenstein whether he was thinking about his sins or logic, Wittgenstein replied that he was thinking about both of them (McGuinness, 1989, p. 48).

and admired. Paul Engelmann has described Wittgenstein's agnosticism as follows:

> If we call him an agnostic, this must not be understood in the sense of the familiar polemical agnosticism that concentrates, and prides itself, on the argument that man could never know about these matters. The idea of a God in the sense of the Bible, the image of God as the creator of the world, hardly ever engaged Wittgenstein's attention…, but the notion of a last judgement was of profound concern to him. "When we meet again at the last judgement" was a recurrent phrase with him, which he used in many a conversation at a particularly momentous point. He would pronounce the words with an indescribably inward-gazing look in his eyes, his head bowed, the picture of a man stirred to his depths.
>
> (cited in Child, 2011, p. 218)

On the other hand, Wittgenstein could not accept one of the attributes of God, namely that God is the creator of the world:

> Wittgenstein [once said] that he thought that he could understand the conception of God, in so far as it is involved in one's awareness of one's own sin and guilt. He added that he could not understand the conception of a Creator. I think that the ideas of Divine judgement, forgiveness, and redemption had some intelligibility for him, as being related in his mind to feelings of disgust with himself, an intense desire for purity, and a sense of the helplessness of human beings to make themselves better. But the notion of a being making the world had no intelligibility for him at all.
>
> (Malcolm, 2018, p. 309)

If we are to conceive of God as a creator, then we have to assume that he is a person with certain attributes who has created the world. The idea of "creator" is in fact at the heart of the problem of evil. Had God not created the world, then given that he is not the source of existence then he would not have been responsible for the existence of evil. However, the question is how to understand "God is the creator of the universe". In his lectures on religious belief, Wittgenstein (1966) makes it clear that when one says, "God's eyes can see everything," it would be a confusion to speak of God's eyebrows. This is because, when we use "eyes" for God we are not describing anything. Rather we are using a metaphor to convey a religious idea.

Therefore, if we do not detect the proper use of the word "eye" in that specific context we would have a confused idea of God. Likewise, when we use the term "creator" we need to clarify how to use it so that it would not lead to confusion. In order to make this point clear, we can draw on the distinction between "analogy" and "metaphor". When we attribute something to God which is in no way describing him we would say that we are using metaphors, whereas when we use a word which is in some sense a description of God we would say we are using an analogy. If one says that God's goodness is an analogy, it means that God has some affinity with the word "good" as we use and understand it. However, if we say that God's goodness is a metaphor, it means that we are using the words to make God meaningful for ourselves without describing him on any level. When we consider the word "creator," we have some images in mind of carpenters, or sculptors or other professions in which someone creates something. In order to determine whether "God is the creator" is an analogy or a metaphor, we need to make some philosophical considerations. In order to use "God is the creator" as an analogy, we need to presuppose that God could be described as a person in some sense of the word. However, Wittgenstein is critical of describing God as a person. This would mean that for Wittgenstein, "God is the creator of the universe" can only be a metaphor. Let us examine God's personhood, a concept used by most analytic philosophers and examine what is problematic about it.

The personhood of God

The concept of "person" as we understand it now implies moral duty and psychological properties such as mind and will. This is a recent development of this concept. Prior to the Enlightenment, the concept of person was not used to refer to human beings, but to deal with the Trinity and how the three persons of the Trinity are related (Wolf, 1964). This original use of the term "person" in the history of Christianity can enable us to determine the proper use of the term "person" when we are dealing with God in a Christian context. How we ought to perceive the relation between God and the concept of "person" in Judaism and Islam requires a separate analysis. However, given that the psychological concept of "person" is a recent development, and did not exist in the original context of Islam and Judaism, it cannot be attributed to God in these religions either. Nevertheless, some analytic

philosophers seem to be at ease in using this specific concept of person for God and neglect the proper use of this term in its religious contexts.

The personhood of God is described by Swinburne as follows:

> I take the proposition "God exists" (and the equivalent proposition "There is a God") to be logically equivalent to "there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e., a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things". I use "God" as the name of the person picked out by this description.
>
> (Swinburne, 2004, p. 7)

J.L. Mackie who was an atheist did not have any problem in conceiving God as a person. In other words, he thought it is meaningful to call a bodiless entity a person:

> Although all the persons we are acquainted with have bodies, there is no great difficulty in conceiving what it would be for there to be a person without a body: for example, one can imagine oneself surviving without a body, and while at present one can act and produce results only by using one's limbs or one's speech organs, one can imagine having one's intentions fulfilled directly, without such physical means.
>
> (Mackie, 1982, pp. 1–2)

On the other hand, some atheists such as Kai Nielsen thought that God cannot be a person because we cannot call a disembodied soul a person. Nielsen argues that God cannot be a person because it would lead to a contradiction. On the one hand, God is said to be infinite but also a person, and said to be a person without a body. Nielsen argues that an "infinite person" and a "bodiless person" are contradictions in terms (Nielsen, 1985, pp. 24–25). Instead of arguing for the logical possibility of such a concept we can also talk about the probability of this concept. For example, we could argue that God's being a person is highly improbable because we have never witnessed a mind without a brain (Drange, 2010).

In the Wittgensteinian view, the use of words is regulated by conceptual constraints. If we are to use the word "person" for certain entities, we need to consider the grammar of the word "person". Mackie is right in saying that, we can imagine a disembodied spirit as a person. However, imagination is not

the best guide for word-use in the Wittgensteinian view. When we imagine a disembodied soul as a person who has intentions and moral traits and so on, we are somehow imagining a person—a human being—but merely subtracting the body. We are somehow treating it like a human who just happens to have lost the human body or merely does not have it but everything else is as if she had a body. Our use of the word in such an instance is pretty much determined by the use of the words "embodied person". When we speak about will power, intentions, and moral traits of the disembodied soul, we are using them just as we would use such words for an embodied person.

This is because we have no place for a disembodied mind in our form of life to know when they intend something or become angry or happy. Given that we have no encounter with disembodied minds and we have not developed the proper use for words related to them in our form of lives, we merely project the use of such words which we use for embodied persons onto a disembodied person. Before such an encounter, if we use such words, we would be using them "as if" we were describing a human person.

Moreover, for Wittgenstein, attributing all the personal traits is restricted to humans and those who behave like humans:

> "But doesn't what you say come to this: that there is no pain, for example, without pain-behaviour?"—It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

> (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 281)

The word "person" is used for human beings and somewhat loosely for some animals. This is because they have some personal traits or we read these traits in them. Wittgenstein famously said "if a lion could talk we could not understand him" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 223). In fact, if a lion could "talk" and we could recognize that behavior as "talking", we should be able to understand it. Lions cannot "talk". This is because their form of life, their structure of brain, tongues, teeth and communal life and… are so different that talking as a recognizable activity for us cannot be carried out by them. If we imagine a lion talking, it is as if we are imagining a human being with a lion costume who is acting; something similar to the lion in *The Wizard of Oz* or Disney cartoon characters. The Lion-ness of a person who talks cannot be real, but only apparent. God does not share our form of life, he does not

have a brain, a tongue, teeth and is not brought up like us. Therefore, one cannot say that God talks. Also, any other activity which is dependent on our form of life cannot be attributed to God. For example, God cannot be said to love or hate us. The words "love" and "hate" are dependent on our form of life. We may say a dog loves his owner but here we are only using "love" anthropomorphically. If there is such a thing as dogs' loving others, it is not the same as human-love. Similarly, attributing knowledge to God would be meaningless because our conception of knowledge is dependent on our form of life. Given that God does not participate in our form of life, it is meaningless to say he has "knowledge". If we were God or a member of the divine community, maybe given our life-form in that community—the fact that we have no brains, no bodies, no tongues and are made of some gaseous substance and have a certain type of relationship with one another—we could have a certain type of knowledge. However, what type of knowledge that would be and whether it is recognizable by human beings as "knowledge" is not as simple as Mackie claims it to be, to say the least.

If none of the features that a person possesses could be attributed to God, then he might still be said to be a person who has no traits in common with us. But why and how do we recognize a person as a person? We recognize someone as a person because they participate in a form of life which is shared among persons. If not, calling an entity a person would be merely based on imagining them to have something in common with our shared life. The traits and characteristics that we attribute to and recognize in other people is also dependent on the form of life. Therefore, describing God as a person would constitute an instance of confusion. We have confused God with a human being.

If God cannot meaningfully be described as a person, then the problem of evil also evaporates. This impossibility would imply that the divine attributes that we envisage are not analogies, but only metaphors. If we cannot describe God as a person on any level, then attributing traits belonging to persons to God would also be wrong. We could not attribute moral traits, such as love and benevolence, to him; neither could we attribute knowledge and power to him, unless we do so metaphorically.

The problem of evil requires God to be at least analogically a person. As we have seen, the original use of the term "person" in the Abrahamic religious is irrelevant to the concept of "person" as we use it now. In addition to this point, Wittgenstein's critical remarks if successful indicate that we

can use the concept of "person" for God only as a metaphor. Similar to what Wittgenstein says about the relation between God's eye and eyebrows, we could say that when we use God's personhood as a metaphor, it would be a mistake to talk about his attributes such as "knowledge", "will" and "mind" as if we are describing them.

If God cannot be a person and God's personhood is at the core of the problem of evil, then we do not need to solve the problem of evil with some clever solution. We do not need to propose theories, defenses, and theodicies to solve the problem. Instead, we need therapy to get rid of this pseudo-problem.

But what if a personal god did exist? Wittgenstein would have defied him:

> It is a dogma of the Roman Church [said Wittgenstein] that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason. Now this dogma would make it impossible for me to be a Roman Catholic. If I thought of God as another being like myself, outside myself, only infinitely more powerful, then I would regard it as my duty to defy him.
>
> (Drury, 1974, p. 107)

Conclusion

The Wittgensteinian criticism of using religious concepts while neglecting the language game of religion is a serious problem which needs to be addressed by analytic philosophers. Each religion has a distinct conception of God and the rules governing each of these language games determines its correct use. As a result, instead of speaking about the problem of evil in Abrahamic religions or monotheistic religions, we need to speak of problem of evil in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam separately. The examination of Phillips's view showed that consulting religious traditions could prevent analytic philosophers from imposing their own terminologies upon religious concepts. While Phillips takes the concept of God's omnipotence as incoherent, the religious traditions avoid the incoherence by taking the immateriality of God more seriously into consideration. Likewise, the problem of moral community that Phillips raises has been dealt with by the religious traditions in a way that prevents the subordination of God to the moral community.

In addition to this point, the Wittgensteinian criticism against the intelligibility of the personhood of God, if successful, undermines the philosophical debates on the problem of evil. In that case, we are engaged with a pseudo-problem and we do not need clever arguments and counter-arguments, rather we need to clarify our misconceptions. These two Wittgensteinian criticisms go hand in hand and cannot be separated. To draw on Wittgenstein's example mentioned in this paper, we do not need to offer arguments to determine whether God's eyebrows are brown or black. We need to recognize that we are dealing with a metaphor. To gain a proper understanding of such metaphors we need to see how they are used in their home. The language game of religion, and not the analytic philosophy of religion, is home to such metaphors.

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Abstract

Theists believe that our world was created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. Given that God is believed to be the creator, we would expect the way our world is to be compatible with God's attributes. We do not expect a God who is omnipotent and omniscient to create a poorly-designed world. If our world was poorly designed, we would either abandon our belief that our world was created by God, or we would revise the divine attributes, or we would find a way to justify the co-existence of God with such a world. In the history of philosophy, evil as a feature of our world has been subject to a great many debates. Evil is considered to be all the pain and suffering that sentient beings go through. God is said to be omnibenevolent; as a result, he would not want us to go through pain and suffering. He is also omniscient and omnipotent and therefore has the knowledge and power to safeguard us against evil. Yet we face pain and suffering in this world. For theists, reconciling the existing evil in this world with God is a challenge, and atheists have tried to argue away from evil and prove the non-existence of God. The debate between theists and atheists surrounding the problem of evil presupposes a certain conception of God. The presupposition is that God is a person who possesses a mind, will power and has a moral character. While most analytic philosophers dealing with the problem of evil have taken sides in this debate, in the Wittgensteinian view the debate is based on a confusion. This confusion has two reasons. First, the definition of God and the divine attributes are not based on the language game of religion. Second, the conception of personhood attributed to God is a confusion. As a result, for Wittgenstein there can be no "problem of evil" as is discussed among the analytic philosophers, and the debates between the theists and atheists are not engaging with a real problem but a pseudo-problem. The problem of evil does not need a solution and smart arguments and counter-arguments, rather it needs therapy.

ARTICLES

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HOW COULD BOLTZMANN HAVE INSPIRED
THE EARLY WITTGENSTEIN?

1

Strange ontological theses open up Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. The world, we read, divides into states of affairs, each of which may or may not occur regardless of the occurrence of any other states of affairs (Wittgenstein, 1961a, 1.21 & 2). Each state of affairs is an impermanent combination of objects that are permanent (2.01 & 2.027 & 2.0271).

This so-called logical atomism is highly counterintuitive, not least because the text lacks examples of objects and states of affairs. More importantly, in the scientific pictures of the world—from the beginning of the 20th

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century or the present one—there are no parts of the world that can be the case or not the case while everything else remains the same. Nor does the image of the world of common sense know such independent facts.

Some (pseudo)arguments in favor of such a formal ontology appear in the sections of the book on what form our ordinary propositions would take after a complete logical analysis of them. We will not find a single example of analysis there, which does not prevent Wittgenstein from saying: "It is obvious that the analysis of propositions must bring us to elementary propositions which consist of names in immediate combination" (4.221). Names denote objects, and in an elementary proposition they are connected just as objects are connected in a pictured state of affairs. The counterpart of the ontological theses of logical atomism is now the thesis that elementary propositions are logically independent: "It is a sign of a proposition's being elementary that there can be no elementary proposition contradicting it" (4.211).

In science, propositions describing a certain situation are used together with the laws of nature to infer propositions that e.g., a different situation will occur in the future. Wittgenstein considers this to be a mistake: "The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena" (6,371). Earlier, he stated: "The exploration of logic means the exploration of *everything that is subject to law.* And outside logic everything is accidental" (6.3). "What is thinkable is possible too" (3.02). We read in the commentary to 6.3: "Mechanics determines one form of description of the world" (6.341), "the possibility of describing the world by means of Newtonian mechanics tells us nothing about the world" (6.342).

The question arises whether *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* is not only a metaphysical but also anti-scientific book? Or maybe it is possible to indicate in physics at the turn of 20th century a research program that could suggest such ontological theses?

2

Who inspired the early Wittgenstein, and how? It is usually claimed that the logical parts of the *Tractatus* are a critical development of Frege and Russell's ideas. And that the remarks about the mystical were influenced by Schopenhauer, Weininger, Kraus and others. But Wittgenstein in 1931

gave the following list of authors who influenced him: "Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 19). Here the question arises: does Ludwig Boltzmann open this list by accident? And even if by accident, why is he in this group?

The aforementioned list has been widely known for forty years, but typical commentators of *Tractatus* are of little interest to the possible influence of Boltzmann on the early Wittgenstein. Boltzmann is not even mentioned—to give some representative examples—neither in the entry on Wittgenstein's logical atomism in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Proops, 2017), nor in the nearly 400-page introduction to *Tractatus* (Morris, 2008), nor in *The New Wittgenstein* (Crary, Read, 2000). There is nothing about Boltzmann in (Sluga, Stern, 2018). In biographical sections, some books mention that the 17-year-old Wittgenstein intended to study physics under Boltzmann, but Boltzmann committed suicide. I have found only a few articles in English on the possible influence of Boltzmann on the ideas of *Tractatus* (Blackmore, 1983, 1999; Harré, 2001; Montibeller, 2016; Nordmann, 2002; Preston, 2016; Stern, 2002; Sterrett, 2006, ch. 6; Visser, 1999; Wilson, 1989). None of them contain a hypothesis similar to the one I formulate below.

John M. Preston considers the possible influences of Hertz and Boltzmann on the early Wittgenstein, especially on his conception of the aims and methods of philosophy, and concludes his article with the statement: "We can have little certainty about the ways in which [Wittgenstein] was influenced by Hertz and Boltzmann, but his relationship to their ideas was probably one of creative appropriation" (Preston, 2016, p. 121).

3

Boltzmann (1866) tried to derive the second law of thermodynamics from the laws of mechanics, using the law of conservation of energy and the kinetic theory of heat. Then he read an article in which James Clerk Maxwell used—for the first time in the history of theoretical physics—the probability calculus in his model of gas (Maxwell, 1860a, 1860b). From then on, probabilistic considerations played an increasingly important role in Boltzmann's theoretical investigations. In his later work (1872), he analyzed collisions between atoms of gas using the laws of classical mechanics. But then he moved on to probabilistic considerations and introduced a function H,

which he considered, not entirely legitimately, to be the statistical counterpart of Clausius's entropy.

The second law of thermodynamics deals with processes that are irreversible in time, while the laws of mechanics are invariant due to the reversal of the direction of time. This was pointed out by Joseph Loschmidt (1876). As Boltzmann himself wrote in a popular text:

> The fundamental equations of mechanics do not in the least change their form if we merely change the algebraic sign of the time variable. All purely mechanical processes can therefore occur equally well in the sense of increasing and decreasing time. But we notice even in ordinary life that future and past […] are clearly distinguishable.
>
> (Boltzmann, 1974, p. 179)

Boltzmann reacted to Loschmidt's remark peculiarly: later, (2015) he stopped using the laws of mechanics at all. If the motions and collisions of particles were governed by the laws of mechanics, the thermal processes would be reversible. But they are not. Boltzmann does not expressly comment on this, but the fact is that he does not apply any of the laws of mechanics. He only assumes the principle of the conservation of kinetic energy (but he does not use the formula $E_k = mv^2/2$). Then he tries to found the physics of gases on a purely statistical grounds. He divides kinetic energy of particles into (arbitrarily small) portions ϵ, then—using purely combinatorial methods—he calculates how many ways these portions could be divided among n particles (each of them could have kinetic energy equal to $0, \epsilon, 2\epsilon, ..., p\epsilon$). He assumes that the probabilities of all such distributions—microstates—are equal.

What is given in the experiment is a macrostate. Boltzmann states:

> […] it is possible to calculate the state of the equilibrium of heat by finding the probability of the different possible states of the system. The initial state in most cases is bound to be highly improbable and from it the system will always rapidly approach a more probable state until it finally reaches the most probable state, i.e., that of the heat equilibrium.
>
> (Boltzmann, 2015, 1975)

The probability of a macrostate is proportional to the number of microstates realizing it. Microstates are independent of each other (subsequent microstates are not bound by the laws of mechanics). The greatest number of microstates

corresponds to the situation where the velocity distribution of the particles that make up the gas is Maxwell's distribution. Hence, it follows, for example, that it is much more likely that heat will flow from bodies with higher temperatures to bodies with lower temperatures than vice versa. These are the regularities we observe in experience:

For if we start from the simplest basic assumption as to equal probability, we find for the behavior of aggregates of large numbers of individuals laws that are quite analogous to those that experience shows to hold for the behavior of the material world (Boltzmann, 1974, p. 172).

Boltzmann then showed that some natural phenomena can be explained using only the theory of probability and the principle of conservation of energy. A new research program was thus started. Like any new program, it had a limited range of successful applications, but it was hoped that this range would be expanded. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was already known that a small grain of salt was made of trillions of atoms, and it was possible to speculate whether, for example, the laws of mechanics to which the grain is subject could not be reduced to the laws of the probability calculus.

4

The young Wittgenstein read Boltzmann's *Populäre Schriften* (1905). When he studied higher mathematics as part of his engineering degree, he could also read at least excerpts from Boltzmann's (usually very long and chaotic) professional articles or hear about his research program at lectures.

Ludwik Fleck (1935) stated, as a result of research on the history of medicine, that an important source of theoretical novelty in science is misunderstandings between scientists. Wittgenstein cannot be expected to fully understand Boltzmann's research program. Especially that, as Uffink (2017) shows, this program was full of ambiguities, and kept changing from one article to the next. But Wittgenstein could—having missed the role of the principle of conservation of energy—take from Boltzmann the view that pure statistics lie behind the regularities revealed at the macroscopic level.

For the result of purely random events at the microscopic level to be almost necessary regularities at the macroscopic level, the microscopic world must be made up of a great number of elements. In the picture of the world of *Tractatus*, it would be necessary to have great

numbers of states of affairs into which reality decomposes and/or a great number of objects that combine into states of affairs. This is equivalent to saying that "ordinary" propositions are truth functions of a great number of elementary propositions and/or that a typical elementary proposition is a combination of a large number of names. When he started working on the book, Wittgenstein remarked:

> A proposition like "this chair is brown" seems to say something enormously complicated, for if we wanted to express this proposition in such a way that nobody could raise objections to it on grounds of ambiguity, it would have to be infinitely long.

> (Wittgenstein, 1961b, 19.9.1914)

It is not clear from this passage whether there should exist (infinitely) many elementary propositions or whether elementary propositions should be (infinitely) long.

5

My hypothesis that at the basis of the logical atomism of *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* there are associations with the program of Boltzmann's statistical physics is confirmed by the presence in the text—in thesis 5.15 and in the comments on it—of the logical theory of probability. The fact that the states of things are independent of each other now takes the form of the statement that "Two elementary propositions give one another the probability 1/2" (5.152). If, on the other hand, we have two propositions r and s which are truth functions of partially the same elementary propositions, they confer some probability on each other. We calculate them by arranging a standard truth table from all elementary propositions occurring in r and s, and then in the last two columns we give truth values of r and s for given combinations of truth values of those elementary propositions. For n lines where r is true, s is true in m cases. The ratio m/n determines the probability that the proposition r gives to the proposition s. If $m = n$, i.e., $m/n = 1$, then s follows logically from r.

Moving on to the ontological theses we say that m/n determines the probability of the fact pictured by s if a situation pictured by r is the case. How one could use such a scheme to calculate the probability that the occurrence of a certain fact gives to another fact is not known, as it is not

known how to perform a complete logical analysis of any non-elementary proposition. There is, however, an analogy with Boltzmann's research program. In Boltzmann's case, all microstates have the same probability. And it follows from Wittgenstein's thesis that only the numbers of rows in the respective truth tables determine the probability that r gives to s, that all combinations of truth values of elementary propositions from which a given sentence is built—what Wittgenstein calls the proposition's truth grounds—are equally probable.

The question arises whether there are any analogies, for example, between Wittgenstein's states of affairs and Boltzmann's microstates, or between (possible) facts and macrostates. This question cannot be answered because we know nothing about the structure of elementary propositions except that they are combinations of names. But whether the names are to refer to particulars or to qualities, relations, etc., Wittgenstein does not inform us. There is also nothing about how names intertwine in elementary propositions.

6

The hypothesis presented in this article about the influence of Boltzmann's research program after 1877 on the early Wittgenstein is speculative. In this respect, it does not differ from the hypotheses formulated by the authors mentioned in § 2, and it is neither more nor less credible. It is not confirmed by any surviving texts. It is supported by the fact that it helps to understand the strange ontological theses of *Tractatus* mentioned in § 1: (1) the world divides into states of affairs that are independent of each other; (2) nature is not governed by laws other than the laws of logic, (3) probability is of a logical character. If two facts contain partly the same states of affairs, then the occurrence of one gives some probability of the occurrence of the other.

Boltzmann (1877) treated microstates as independent, not bound by the laws of mechanics. He only used the calculus of probability and the law of conservation of energy (but understood in an abstract way). He concluded that if a physical system is in a certain macrostate, it will have a certain probability of going to a different macrostate.

When speculating about the influence of the research program from (Boltzmann, 1877) on the ontology of *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, one

should, as I have indicated above, take into account Fleck's creative misunderstandings as a source of theoretical novelties.

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Abstract

In 1931, when writing about those who had inspired him, Wittgenstein singled out Boltzmann; nobody seems to know why, however. Most commentators have ignored this remark, while a few have tried to guess what the inspiration might have

been by searching the popular and philosophical writings of Boltzmann. In this article, I hypothesize that Wittgenstein may have been inspired by Boltzmann's scientific research program from his famous 1877 article. This hypothesis is not confirmed—or rejected—by any surviving documents. But to some extent (considering the role of Fleck's creative misunderstandings) there are two explanations for the origins of the two strange theorems underlying the Tractatus's ontology: (1) each situation can be the case or not the case while everything else remains the same; (2) the facts are not subject to the laws of nature. My hypothesis also makes it understandable why Wittgenstein developed his logical theory of probability. So, let's keep it in mind.