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WITTGENSTEIN'S ONTOLOGICAL VISION


by

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Except where acknowledged within the
text, all parts of this thesis
represent my own original work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenda M. Kuhl". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Glenda M. Kuhl

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The greatness of what a man writes depends on everything else he writes and does.

The light work sheds is a beautiful light, which, however, only shines with real beauty if it is illuminated by yet another light.

Just let nature speak and acknowledge only one thing as higher than nature, but not what others may think.

Wittgenstein

Oh, Thou Supreme! most secret and most present, most beautiful and most strong! What shall I say...! What shall any man say when he speaks of Thee?

...And a sort of battle with words ensues, since if what is ineffable is what cannot be said, yet what can be called even ineffable is not ineffable. This battle with words is to be prevented by silence rather than stilled by speech....

St. Augustine

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this thesis attributes to Wittgenstein -- a vision. Yet, everyone who thinks of Wittgenstein thinks of -- language. Furthermore, everyone who is familiar with the Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus and the Philosophical Investigations has found much of Wittgenstein's language to be perplexing and aphoristic. His words may indeed be ordinary and everyday, but they are as well, so enigmatic. Perhaps the difficulty lies in our sight. As Augustine said in a different context so very long ago, "The word would not sound enigmatic if we had the power of vision."¹ It will be one contention of this thesis that Wittgenstein was concerned with enabling us to see.

This thesis is concerned with what he saw; it is concerned with that which he enables us to see. It is an underlying theme of this thesis that in order to understand Wittgenstein, not only do we need to be able to see, but also to accept the invitation he offers to participate in the vision itself, to see what he saw. In other words, there are two aspects of the matter of vision with which to contend: one is our ability to see; the other is what is seen. To see means to restructure our sight such that we attain to the lesser recognized, perhaps less common, ways of knowing. Such ways of knowing enable us to see even the surface levels of our words and the world more correctly. They do so precisely because they enable us to see the depth and the height, the total picture, a little more clearly. That whole, and the understanding of it, is the vision itself. Though it is a surprising word to use, it will not be misleading to say it is an entire ontology.

One of the most fundamental distinctions found in both the early and late writings of Wittgenstein is that of saying and showing. While philosophers standardly use the word "show," Wittgenstein had a very special meaning for it. For him it was a word which performed many functions on many levels. Accordingly, this thesis cannot be merely concerned with what Wittgenstein said; it must also be concerned to show what he showed. Insofar as it is possible to show that which is shown, this thesis attempts to display the kind or quality of this power of vision and the nature or content of the vision that is seen. With that in view, perhaps the entire

¹"Nomen quippe non sonaret aenigmatis, si esset facilitas visionis."
(St. Augustine, De Trinitate, XV, ix, n. 16. [J. P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Latina, xlii, 1069] .)

Wittgensteinian corpus can be understood a little more aright.

As this thesis is itself a showing, the method will be essentially that of exposition, not an argument in the current, common understanding of philosophical argument. What is presented here is not what might be called an 'orthodox' reading of Wittgenstein, and its cogency as a reading must stand or fall on its faithfulness to what is the case and to the multiple levels of the texts themselves. It is an attempt to expose what lies within the texts as the purpose of the texts. The method of exposition is that of spiralling the texts themselves again and again, gradually removing, as it were, the clothes of their language which make them look so much like propositions of philosophical argument, or condemnations of metaphysics, or even an exercise in developmental psychology. This means that the approach is somewhat (though only somewhat) like that of the Tractatus itself in that it is an attempt to show that Wittgenstein shows what is the case.

The nature of Wittgenstein's writing naturally seems to elicit such a showing of what is shown. The Tractatus, for instance, is remarkably like poetry. Few discussions of the Tractatus advert seriously to the fact that it is actually seven sentences woven together by detailed and ordered exposition. The very numbering system itself suggests a certain art form. The text as a whole has about it the character of an experience resounding in the personality of the writer, which is one definition of poetry, and it communicates to the reader a sense of that same, very full experience. In its well chosen language and even in its arrangement of line and entries, it creates a response in us. Each of its seven sections are, as it were, verses. Individually and collectively these sections have many levels of meaning and display in both the deeper levels of their content and in their interrelation, an underlying ontology. At the very end of the Tractatus Wittgenstein openly states that what he has done cannot be done. This forces us to compare the text with poetry, rather than identify it as such. As an art form, poetry cannot make such an admission without negating itself as poetry; to do so is to become instead, a piece of philosophy.

The Investigations, on the other hand, never makes such an admission. While its form is less like that of poetry, it can equally be likened to a work of art. In the introduction, Wittgenstein likens it to a series of sketches and he called himself a "bad painter." This suggests that he saw his writing as an art form as well as a piece of philosophy. In both cases, the endeavour of this thesis lies in the showing of what is contained in

these texts, the pointing out of what can be seen, to whomever might be looking.

This approach perforce dictates both the style and the method of this thesis. Most noticeably it precludes much direct use and discussion of secondary source material. Reference to secondary sources have been included, primarily in footnotes, only when some point seemed to be particularly supportive or contentious vis-a-vis the exposition itself. In some footnotes brief discussions ensue with other authors, but it has been kept to a minimum as such discussion and debate is essentially beyond the scope of this thesis. It is a different sort of enterprise than that of the exposition presented here which is fundamentally descriptive. As the task set is to display and ponder Wittgenstein's vision, description seems more appropriate than extended discussion or debate.

In regard to Wittgenstein, as with most great writers, there can be many fruitful types of scholarship. One can, for example, examine Wittgenstein's philosophical problems through a consideration of the historical and cultural background in which they have their roots, as do Janik and Toulmin,² or one can undertake a detailed exegesis of each passage, as do Baker and Hacker.³ Russell took one approach to the Tractatus; the logical positivists used the text from their perspective. Someone like Bartley⁴ relies heavily on biography, while countless essays examine specific topics. Etc., etc. Of all such attempts, that of Janik and Toulmin is the most extensive study to emphasize the ethical nature of Wittgenstein's work. They do not, however, examine the texts in any detail and to some extent establish an opposition between the ethical interests and the ontological or metaphysical importance. Their approach is enlightening and is, perhaps, a much needed balance to some of the strictly analytic efforts, but can there be such an opposition, or are these two poles a presupposition of one another? This thesis is an attempt to stay close to the texts and to show how these two poles are interrelated and complementary.

Such a great volume of Wittgenstein's writing has been posthumously published that some selectivity is required. The Tractatus and the Phi-

²Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973)

³G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, Wittgenstein, Understanding and Meaning (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980)

⁴William Warren Bartley III, Wittgenstein (New York: Quartet Books, 1977)

Philosophical Investigations are the primary considerations as these two carry the author's final approval for distribution. Other texts are considered insofar as they elucidate particular themes and passages.

Given that Wittgenstein claimed that philosophy should effect a moral change in our lives, that moral change can be said to be the test of genuine philosophy. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to see something, to experience, and to participate, at least in some small way, in that 'moral change.' (Within this thesis the 'moral change' will often be referred to as "the mystical" or "transformation" or "enlightenment" and it will be related to noetic knowledge.) Wittgenstein's dictum necessarily places some constraints on how the texts are to be interpreted. To a great degree, the compatibility of an interpretation with moral change is a mark of the propriety of the interpretation. Not every interpretation makes room for the indicated change in our very persons. These constraints are perhaps not so wide as to allow substantial variations of interpretation. There is room for growth, for deepening, for dialogue, but not for a radically different vision. This thesis will point out an ontological commensurability between what we are as persons and how we see the world, as well as a commensurability between the moral change and the appropriate reading of these texts.

One might say we are already in a circle. The dictum calls for an interpretation of the text which calls for a change which interprets the text as prescribed by the dictum. Instead, there can be found here a pattern of confirmation of the interpretation. Change and interpretation mutually indicate, limit, complete, and confirm each other. The route is not linear, but why should a straight line be more correct or beautiful than an ever-returning arc? Furthermore, philosophy being so intimately connected, as Wittgenstein saw it, with the ethical/mystical dimension means that a reading of this sort remains firmly entrenched in the area of philosophy. It is no more a sort of 'moral literature' than is the writing of Wittgenstein himself. It is, instead, an ontological consideration appreciative of genuine philosophical insight.

The questions with which I initially approached the Wittgensteinian texts were of a very different genre from what is presented in this thesis. The more I read the texts, the more they began to appear as an instantiation of a line from Heidegger: "What is being talked about and what is being said are not identical."⁵ I was also reminded of Plato saying, "I

⁵Martin Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 85.

have never written anything on the real purpose of my endeavour."⁶ What was Wittgenstein doing? The say/show distinction loomed large. At this point I launched upon a long period of study of the Tractatus and the Investigations in an effort to think for myself what Wittgenstein might have thought, instantiating, as it were, another line from Heidegger: "To know what a thinker is thinking takes the devotion of almost a lifetime."⁷ Hegel's counsel to "tarry with" also seemed appropriate, and Wittgenstein's admonition to suspend the question 'why' seemed to apply. To see some things we must not look at others. To see other things, we must not look at all -- but only listen, as in the story of the aspirant who asked his master, "Master, how is it that you see things so clearly?" to which the master replied, "I close my eyes." The articulation of this thesis is the product of that long period of suspension, tarrying, listening.

The first three chapters on the Tractatus attempt to treat the material in such a way as to permit the ontological and mystical dimensions to emerge from that material -- on their own, so to speak. These sections on the world, language, and meaning, are a collection of some basic Wittgensteinian 'elements.' They are the trees of which the forest is made, but they, as all trees, change and grow. The fourth chapter displays the forest itself as found in the Tractatus. It treats of philosophy and the mystical, and portrays the meaning of the text and the philosophical task in these terms. It is a further showing of what is seen.

Part II proceeds from this position and exposes these dimensions in their more subtle and developed forms as they are found in the Investigations. Thus the exposition progresses, as do the texts themselves, from a collecting of concepts, through the attainment of the ontological vision in terms of the mystical experience, which reflexively, deepens and confirms the understanding of those concepts and the reality they represent. 'The mystical' as presented at the end of the Tractatus is seen, in prospect, to be the key to the deeper levels and a more appropriate interpretation of the Investigations.

In more ways than one it is indeed the Vision whereby we understand the Word.

oOo

⁶Plato, Letter vii. (See also Glenn R. Morrow, trans., Plato's Epistles, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. 1962 p. 237.

⁷Heidegger, op. cit., p. 75

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the ontological dimensions of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and the Philosophical Investigations of Ludwig Wittgenstein in light of the concepts of 'noetic knowledge' and 'the mystical'.

Part I is an exposition of the themes of world, language, and meaning within the Tractatus. It is the presentation of an ontology in which the understanding of meaning is that of being expressing itself. Philosophy is seen to be a method for the attainment of 'the mystical' which is understood to be the raison d'etre of the Tractatus as a whole.

Part II is an examination of weltanschauung as the fundamental direction of the Investigations and a study of the concepts of the world, language, and meaning as the 'global solution' of philosophical problems. The predominant ontological theme is that of a 'functioning totality' and this theme emerges from the notions of 'grammar' and 'use' as they are found within the Investigations. The understanding of meaning here presented is that of being being itself and 'the mystical' is portrayed more fully as the fruit of philosophy.

Both the Tractatus and the Investigations are treated as philosophical 'literature' rather than philosophical 'argument' and both are understood as speech-acts in themselves. This thesis emphasizes the compatibility and continuity between the two texts and attempts to correlate the life of Wittgenstein with the philosophy he performed and wrote.

The final chapter of the thesis considers the questions of the future of philosophy and the speaking of the unspeakable in accordance with this ontological interpretation of the Wittgensteinian enterprise.

ABBREVIATIONS AND CITATIONS

All citations in Part I refer to the Tractatus, except where otherwise stated, and are given by entry number in parentheses following the references themselves. All those in Part II refer to the Investigations, and are given in the same manner. Other citations from Wittgenstein's writings are cited according to abbreviated title and page or paragraph as appropriate. The abbreviations used are as follows:

- C&V -- Culture and Value
- L&C -- Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief
- NB -- Notebooks, 1914-1916
- OC -- On Certainty
- PG -- Philosophical Grammar
- PR -- Philosophical Remarks
- PT -- Prototractatus
- RFM -- Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics
- Z -- Zettel