

**LANGUAGE, REALITY, AND  
TRANSCENDENCE**



**LANGUAGE, REALITY, AND  
TRANSCENDENCE**  
**An Essay on the Main Strands of  
Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy**

**R. C. Pradhan**



BrownWalker Press  
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*Language, Reality, and Transcendence:  
An Essay on the Main Strands of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy*

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To

All My Teachers



It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely.

I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*



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## PREFACE

The present essay is a sequel to my book *The Great Mirror: An Essay on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, which was published some years ago. I had planned over a long period to write on Wittgenstein's later philosophy taking into account all his post-*Tractatus* works which deal with a vast area covering philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophical psychology, philosophy of religion and ethics. It is not easy to do justice to all these areas in one monograph. However, in order to present Wittgenstein's later thought in one framework, I have compressed all his thoughts into a single frame taking into account all the salient strands of his thought.

I have no illusion that I have really brought out the deep nuances of Wittgenstein's thought because of the complexity of his thought crisscrossing all areas of philosophical concern. I have made only a modest attempt to understand Wittgenstein as a philosopher with a comprehensive outlook, rather than as philosopher of language or philosopher of mind, restricted to any particular field. I have tried to avoid narrowing down his thoughts into stereotypes of the contemporary specialization in philosophy. Wittgenstein's philosophy touches all problems which all thinking human beings face. Therefore there is no need to put his thoughts into the pigeonholes of any particular kind.

I have benefited from scholars who have taught me and also with whom I have worked in my long academic life. I have learnt much from the students whom I have taught. Besides, I have learnt a great deal from my colleagues in the Department with whom I have discussed the problems from time to time. I am grateful to Professor Suresh Chandra who kept my interest in Wittgenstein alive over the years and with whom I have had long hours of discussion on Wittgenstein.

My thoughts in this monograph have developed during my long years of study and teaching of the philosophy of Wittgenstein. I think if this monograph can help anybody in understanding Wittgenstein in a better light, I will be very happy. But that is unlikely to happen. Nonetheless, I will have the satisfaction that I have made some effort, however small, in this direction.

*Language, Reality, and Transcendence*

I am very much grateful to my wife and children who have always encouraged me to read and write. Without their help I could not have done even this little.

I am thankful to Mr. Jeff Young for undertaking the publication on behalf of Universal Publishers. I am also thankful to Professor V.T. Sebastian, Department of Philosophy, Panjab University for encouraging me to publish the manuscript and for giving me guidance in the matter. I express my thankfulness to Mr. Surinder Lijhara of the Indian Overseas Press for being the co-publisher in India.

HYDERABAD

R.C.PRADHAN

## INTRODUCTION

Wittgenstein's later works need a more comprehensive and integrated study than has been attempted so far. This is so because his later works are not only scattered over a long period of time but also are more complex and varied in themes and methods of treatment. Like the *Philosophical Investigations*, all other works, in Wittgenstein's words, "are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings." These sketches, of course, contain the seeds of a system of thought which is largely spread across the major as well as the minor works of his. Though Wittgenstein never claimed to be a systematic philosopher, his works leave in our minds the impression of a systematic mind working ceaselessly over a number of themes such as language, life, self, reality, mind, mathematics, logic, ethics, religion and culture, to name a few most absorbing subjects of interest to the philosophical mind.

The present essay is a study of the most fundamental ideas underlying Wittgenstein's later works. It only selectively treats those issues which appear to my mind to be the key to a comprehensive understanding of Wittgenstein's thoughts. In the process, of course, many themes get excluded or at best are given a little space in the essay. Thus this essay is not exhaustive in the way many works on Wittgenstein pre-eminently are. My aim rather has been not to present Wittgenstein's later thought in the routine way, but to bring out the main stands of his thought which are of immense timeless value.

Wittgenstein's absorbing interest in language, life and mind is phenomenal in view of the fact that he wrote extensively on these themes in his later works. He believed that a study of language as a phenomenon in human life has the highest philosophical value in view of the fact that it is only through the mirror of language that we can understand the nature of life, mind and the world. Wittgenstein adheres to his earlier stand that philosophy struggles with language in order to get a clear vision of things in the world. Clarity of thought and language is taken to be the pre-requisite of philosophi-

cal understanding. Therefore the idea of grammar becomes the very fulcrum of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

Philosophical grammar, in Wittgenstein's sense, as distinguished from empirical grammar, makes it imperative that we study the rule-structure of language in a non-empirical logical manner so that we get an over-view of the linguistic activities or language-games we engage in. Philosophical grammar belongs to the tradition of philosophical logic which studies language in a non-empirical way so that it can view the rules of language as the necessary features of language. The main aim of philosophical grammar is to prove the necessity of rules of language in order to gain clarity about language. Clarity of language and the necessity of grammar go hand in hand in the philosophical context. In view of the importance of grammar in philosophy of language, I have accorded a transcendental status to grammar. It is because philosophical grammar is genuinely transcendental in the sense that it lays down *a priori* the rules of language so as to map the possibilities of all linguistic phenomena. In no case is Wittgenstein interested in the empirical facts regarding language, as for him philosophy does not undertake any scientific study of language.

Wittgenstein's philosophical interest in the nature of the world has not diminished in his later thought, in spite of the appearances to the contrary, because language and the world stand or fall together. Therefore it is ill-advised to believe that the later Wittgenstein has not given any importance to the world. The language-games themselves which occupy the centre-stage of his later thought demand the world to be their home and the field of their operation. It is, however, to be emphasized that the world does not need to be pictured in the way laid down in the *Tractatus*, because there is no necessity of such a pictorial relationship. The gap between language and the world is grammatically cemented in a more thoroughgoing way than realized before. The world is, so to say, under the "shadow of grammar" precisely because of the grammatical writ running large on the face of the world. Wittgenstein's metaphysics of the world is thus an extension of his metaphysics of grammar.

The very presence of language and the world introduces the presence of the self in Wittgenstein's philosophy. This has been forgotten, more often than not, in discussions on Wittgenstein's later philosophy. It has been held, though wrongly, that the later Wittgenstein has no notion of self because he has abolished the category of self in view of his naturalistic and behaviouristic attack on the Cartesian self and mind. Though it is true that Wittgenstein is anti-Cartesian in his approach to the self, he has not discarded the notion of self and subjectivity because without it he cannot explain how language-games are possible and how the world can be represented in language. This makes him re-introduce the notion of self as a transcendental reality, not belonging to the world as an empirical entity, but as a transcendental presupposition. I have argued in this essay that Wittgenstein has a transcendental approach to the self which defies naturalism and behaviorism. The self has a

large metaphysical presence in Wittgenstein's thought in general and his later philosophy in particular.

Wittgenstein derives his philosophy of morality and religion from the metaphysical notion of self. The metaphysical self is the transcendental source of the moral values in view of the fact that moral values, like the metaphysical self, are outside the boundary of the world of facts. Wittgenstein finds the moral values to be transcendental in character because under no circumstances can they be derived from the world of facts. The later Wittgenstein has not abandoned his earlier moral point of view according to which we can have no ethics worth the name in the absence of a standpoint of transcendence. Hence I have emphasized in this essay the importance of the concept of transcendence in Wittgenstein's philosophy in general.

Transcendental philosophy has its roots in Kant's critical philosophy and it is extended in the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Wittgenstein was influenced by Kant through Schopenhauer who turned philosophy itself into a metaphysical enterprise aiming at salvation of the human soul through denial of the empirical world. Wittgenstein has been a constant champion of human salvation through philosophy and the practice of philosophical meditation. On this he is in agreement with the spirit of Indian thought, mostly of Vedanta and Buddhism, which he has come to know from Schopenhauer's writings. Even without this historical link with the Indian traditions of thought, Wittgenstein can be singled out as the ablest defender of the spiritual approach to the problems of life and the world. This is reflected in his enthusiastic espousal of the mystical tradition in philosophy and religion. I have highlighted this aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy because I feel that this aspect represents the quintessence of his philosophy of life.

Now the basic problem in understanding Wittgenstein is as to how to reconcile the empirical with the transcendental, the mundane with the supra-mundane, and the ordinary with the extra-ordinary in his philosophy. This reconciliation has been achieved by Wittgenstein himself by appealing to both the realms within the same philosophical frame of reference. He has brought the ordinary, the mundane and the empirical under the umbrella of the transcendental, the extra-ordinary and the supra-mundane. This he has done without abandoning either from his total vision of the world and life. My constant effort in this essay is to make the transcendental aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy intelligible to the contemporary audience.

Wittgenstein has been interpreted by some post-modern thinkers as one of the early champions of the post-modernist thought which has been developed in Germany and France in the recent years. Post-modernism as developed by Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard has given a call to do away with the metaphysics of the essences, the idea of philosophy as a grand narrative and the grand idea of transcendental subjectivity. These concepts have been sought to be discarded for the sake of more fractured and open-ended concepts of language, mind and the world, thus paving the way for a relativistic

and anti-metaphysical world-view. The later Wittgenstein no doubt had the apprehension of the vulnerability of the metaphysical concepts which he was very cautious to use in his philosophy. But he did not feel the necessity of going all the way to give up metaphysics altogether. He respected metaphysics for what it is worth, both as a source of wisdom and also as the liberator of the human mind.

In any assessment of Wittgenstein, one cannot press forward the view that Wittgenstein brought an end to philosophy and metaphysics. It is because he is a respecter of the metaphysical traditions, of the eternal values which human kind has pursued for ages, and also of the human will to conquer evil in the world which the world religions have championed through the ages. Such a thinker of the stature of Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer and Hegel cannot be one who is out to destroy the past achievements of mankind. If not anything else, Wittgenstein is a spiritual thinker who believes that mankind can be salvaged from the darkness of world by the bright light of philosophy.

My effort in this essay is to pay tribute to the great genius of Wittgenstein who made philosophy a mission of the human soul in its struggle to reach the transcendent in the rich profundity of the philosophical wisdom.

In the first two chapters I have made effort to discuss the concept of philosophy to show how it begins with the study of language and grammar but ends with the ascent to truth in its unalloyed search for the foundations of everything. Thus philosophy is shown to be inherently metaphysical and logically unsparing in its search for truth. Truth is bound to be searched through language and history, but the home of truth is always the realm of the transcendence.

The chapters three, four, five and six explore the structure and the limits of language and the world thus paving the way for the transcendental realm. Language has been studied in its depth-grammar only to discover that grammar itself exceeds its own “shadows” and overturns the very grammatical circle to accommodate the transcendental. In course of this discussion, I have gone through the maze of grammatical necessity, the linguistic contingency and the contingency of the world in order to emphasize the limits thereof. All this is meant to show that Wittgenstein is not strictly a philosopher of language and grammar because his aim is to go beyond language and grammar.

The chapters seven, eight and nine go into the nature of transcendental self and its relation with the world and more fundamentally the source of ethics and religion in the self. I have highlighted the fact that Wittgenstein’s moral and religious point of view is the underlying theme of his philosophy. Wittgenstein is the philosopher of life, enlightenment and salvation. He is the poet of the infinity and immortality of the human spirit.

The chapters ten, eleven and twelve go into the larger question of Wittgenstein’s place in the tradition of transcendental philosophy *vis-à-vis* his relation to the post-modern thinkers. Here also I look into Wittgenstein’s philo-

## *Introduction*

sophical critique of the Western civilization in his broad perspective of the civilization of mankind. That Wittgenstein is concerned with a better and spiritually enlightened civilization cannot be denied.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AWL: *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932-1935*

BBB: *The Blue and Brown Books*

CV: *Culture and Value*

NB: *Notebooks 1914-1916*

OC: *On Certainty*

PR: *Philosophical Remarks*

PG: *Philosophical Grammar*

PI: *Philosophical Investigations*

RFM: *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*

TLP: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Z: *Zettel*



# CHAPTER I

## PHILOSOPHY REDEFINED: MAKING THE WAY FOR GRAMMAR

To understand the later Wittgenstein's philosophy is to understand the centrality of grammar in human thought and experience. It is to bring back grammar into the center-stage of human thought and thereby to map the structure of thought within the broad framework of grammar. It may appear strange that Wittgenstein in his later works plays down the role of logic in his thought which was assigned a primary place in his early philosophy; but there will be no surprise if one takes into account his middle period renunciation of logic of the *Tractatus*'. Wittgenstein did delimit logic only to make room for grammar. This is the theme of his oft-quoted remark that philosophy is a "grammatical investigation"

In this chapter an attempt will be made to show how Wittgenstein keeps pace with his grammatical investigations vis-à-vis his interest in the nuances of ordinary language. It will also unfold the bench-marks of his grammatical inquiry through his interesting collection of the grammatical "remarks". It is interesting to note that for Wittgenstein philosophy is not a discipline that can have strict boundaries like mathematics or the natural sciences; it is essentially a boundless inquiry with unlimited stopping points.

### I. 'BACK TO THE ROUGH GROUND'

The later Wittgenstein compares his philosophical moves to those of homecoming, that is, of coming to the roots or the rock-bottom of things. This is essentially a Socratic journey to the essence of things, but with a difference. Socrates leaves the world of the concrete in search of the abstract, the pure and the unblemished. But Wittgenstein's Socratic insight lies in embracing the concrete, the impure and the blemished in order to realize the essence of things as consisting in them. The Platonic essences disappear to make room for the concrete. The concrete is the new ideal, the new essence of things.

The slogan: 'Back to the rough ground' is the reminder that philosophy deals with the rough ground of things rather than the essences which have

least relevance to our concrete and ordinary ways of living. It is a reminder that philosophy is not in search of the logical forms or the logical structures that have existence only in a rarefied realm of logical objects. Philosophy in this sense deals with the phenomena that are out there in the very concrete realm of ordinary experience. Wittgenstein writes:

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not *a result of investigation*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty.- We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!. (PI, sect. 107). (italics original)

The contention here is that the purity of logic is an empty requirement considering the fact that we are dealing with the actual language and its grammar. The choice is between what is required as an ideal logic of language—a requirement much emphasized in the *Tractatus*- and the grammar of the actual language, because Wittgenstein realizes that under ideal conditions language cannot simply work and we need the “rough grounds” for it to work. Therefore Wittgenstein’s later philosophy chooses grammar rather than logic as the focal point of its attention.

Philosophy as the study of grammar remains an inquiry into the actual practice of language for the obvious reason that it is in the actual practices that grammar is demonstrated and that the rules and customs set together by grammar are found in operation. There is a demonstrable reason to believe that philosophical reflections are not of the nature of model-making or raising an ideal or “striving for an ideal” (PI, sect. 98) for in this search for an ideal we are misled into believing that the ideal is real and that there is nothing beyond this ideal. Wittgenstein writes:

The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable. You can never get outside it; you must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe.- Where does this idea come from? *It is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.* (PI, sect.103). (italics mine)

The ideals here spoken of relate to what we generally take as models or theories which abound in philosophy including Wittgenstein’s early philosophy. The ideals so called impose a certain structure on our thinking and thereby constrain it in a particular way. That is why there is a tendency to take them as final and complete in themselves and as beyond revision

The ideal of making a model or raising a theory has the negative consequence that it appears to be blind and has the aura of necessity. For example,

the ideal of purity of logic is so engrossing that we take it to be indispensable and absolutely true. It generates the idea of being metaphysically valid, even though there is no reason why it can be taken as the ideally so. Wittgenstein writes:

We want to say there can't be any vagueness in logic. The idea now absorbs us, that the ideal '*must*' be found in reality. Meanwhile we do not as yet see *how* it occurs there, nor do we understand the nature of this "must". We think it must be in reality; for we think we already see it there (*PI*, sect. 101)<sup>5</sup>.

The difficulty with the idea of purity of logic is that it does not allow for any vagueness in logical thinking and provides a blanket assurance that logical thoughts can never go wrong. This is the idea associated with the general doctrine that logic is the purest of all sciences and must set standards for all thoughts.

## II. 'A PICTURE HELD US CAPTIVE'

The later Wittgenstein finds that a certain conception of logic has held us captive in that it misled us into thinking that logic alone matters as the standard bearer of all thoughts. Wittgenstein did hold in his early philosophy that logic is the ideal essence of all thought in that it provides the rules of thought and language. The idea of logic of language came out of this conception of logic. Logic, according to this conception, is the most sublime of all sciences and hence must be kept as the ideal. Wittgenstein puts this in so many words in the following passage:

Thought is surrounded by a halo.—Its essence, logic, presents an order, in fact the *a priori* order of the world: the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is prior to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it—It must rather be of the pure crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* No. 5.5563) (*PI*, sect. 97).

This picture of logic as having the ideal order of *a priori* possibilities of thought, language and the world brings along with it the necessary metaphysical abstractions. Accordingly, a shadowy world of pure logical objects is created beyond the realm of empirical experience. Wittgenstein in his later thought resents this Platonic-Tractarian philosophy of logic as he is sure that there are no good reasons why such a transcendental realm of possibilities needs to be postulated.

What Wittgenstein seems to be wary of is the unwarranted assumptions regarding the so-called essences which are postulated to underlie language, thought and the world. There is no real need for these essences to understand language and thought; they creep in because we do not keep the things in their proper perspective. “We are under the illusion”, he asserts, “that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between- so speak-super-concepts” (*PI*, sect. 97). The idea of order of super-concepts is of no practical use because we are not properly told about the real character of the concepts. We are held captive by a new idea or a new model. We are misled into believing that there is something queer, peculiar and profound about the most ordinary words like “language”, “experience” and “world”, whereas they could be as humble and ordinary like “table”, “lamp”, “door”, etc.

The idea of logic Wittgenstein is now against is the one that is based on the false notion that logic is always about the extraordinary and the sublime. This idea is the result of the metaphysical gloss that we put on the term “proposition”. Wittgenstein explains this in the following way:

‘A proposition is queer!’. Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts. Or even to try to purify, to sublime, the signs themselves.-For our forms expression prevent us in all sorts of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras<sup>8</sup>. (*PI*, sect. 94).

The quite ordinary signs are sublimed to look strange to us whereas they are perfectly fine with us when used in the ordinary context. This tendency to sublime signs gives rise to the peculiar conception of logic as an extraordinary science. As a result, “when we believe that we must find that order, must find the ideal, in actual language, we become dissatisfied with what are ordinarily called “propositions”, “words”, “signs”. The proposition and the word that logic deals with are supposed to be something pure and clear-cut. And we rack our brains over the nature of the real sign.” (*PI*, sect. 105)

### III. THE GRAMMATICAL ILLUSIONS

The fact that we “rack our brains” over the use of signs shows that we are in for a terrible mess precisely because signs are very familiar objects of use in our ordinary life. That we suffer from grammatical illusions cannot be denied. It is because the more we push a sign out of its context the greater the possibility of our being misled. Illusions are created by the misunderstandings language produces in us through our inattention to the correct grammar of lan-

guage. Such is the case when we say that language is sublime and unique. Wittgenstein has the following to say on this:

“Language (or thought) is something unique”- this proves be a superstition (not mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. And now the impressiveness retreats to these illusions, to the problems (*PI*, sect. 110).

These illusions are grammatical when they arise out of the misuse of language, or at least from the misconceptions we have regarding language. Thus they get entrenched in the whole notion of language and its structure. The users of language necessarily get entrapped in the mistaken notion of language and grammar. That is why the problems regarding language look so deep and impressive. Wittgenstein writes:

The problem arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of depth. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language.-Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be deep? (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.) (*PI*, sect. 111)

The philosophical problems arising out of the grammatical illusions are to be treated as the “the deep disquietudes” because they are not genuine problems but are fostered by the illusions. Because of this reason such problems masquerade as problems when in fact they are not. Wittgenstein’s critique of such problems is that they need to be dissolved because such problems are not genuine.

Wittgenstein elsewhere states that philosophical problems-some at least-arise when language goes on a holiday<sup>3</sup> meaning thereby that when language is not kept in its proper perspective, philosophical problems crop up crowding our minds. Such being the origin of the problems, it is natural that we need a critique of language that dissolves them. The later Wittgenstein’s critique of language like his earlier critique is bent upon dissolving the grammatical illusions which have their origin in the misinterpretation of language<sup>4</sup>. This is the common theme of much of his meta-philosophical critique of philosophical theories and doctrines. It is therefore not surprising that, according to Wittgenstein, “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (*PI*, sect. 109). Language is itself the source of this “bewitchment” because it alone provides the models or pictures that mesmerize our intellect.

The meta-philosophical critique historically attributed to Kant did show that human mind or reason has the tendency to go wrong in its speculations when it is misinformed about the categories and concepts it uses. It in fact falls irretrievably into metaphysical traps when it is taken mistakenly along the path of unexamined thinking. Kant’s famous ‘Transcendental Dialectic’ is a