

Analysis—Phenomenology—Morphology: Some Remarks on Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Method

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The article discusses the problem of the unity of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. It is demonstrated that Wittgenstein applied two methods of study. Changes in his philosophy are correlated with modifications in his method of thinking and investigation. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the only correct method is logical proposition analysis. In the early 1930s, he transformed his philosophy into a phenomenological description of experience, defining its aim as the development of phenomenological language. After 1933, Wittgenstein recognised the grammatical dimension of language and created tools of grammatical analysis. He introduced the notions of language-games and life forms. His philosophy turned into morphology and a description of human language practice.

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1. Introduction

It is common to believe that Wittgenstein applied two philosophical methods. One is associated with his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and linked to the method of logical analysis as espoused by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, whereas the other stems from *Philosophical Investigations* and the theory of language-games. Explained like this, the two methods contradict each other. Analysis is something complete, which concerns meaningful (i.e., true or false) language and produces elementary or simple clauses. The method of language-games, on the other hand, refers to language as a set of linguistic practices, tackles every kind of expression, and is related not so much to the semantics or syntax of language as to its pragmatics. In spite of being common and popular, this opinion does not give justice what is the most characteristic for Wittgenstein's method.

2. The Analytical Period

On the occasion of the critical discussion of Russell's theory of logical types in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes the fundamental distinction between speaking and showing. What is said by a proposition is its content, whereas what the proposition shows are its formal properties which Wittgenstein calls internal. On the one hand,

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what can be seen is related to formal properties of language—on the other, it shows the sense of a specific proposition (TLP 4.022).¹ Wittgenstein says that we need to differentiate between semantic notions such as “Socrates” or “mortality” and notions of a formal or, we could say, categorial nature such as “object” or “thing.” The latter reveal themselves as conditions for the former. In order to say something about Socrates, for example “Socrates is mortal,” we must already have the category of object and the category of property, or, in the semantic version—the category of subject and predicate. The fact that something is an object reveals itself in that the name may be introduced as a value of a certain variable. The statement “Socrates is mortal” says that Socrates is mortal, nothing more, nothing less. According to Wittgenstein one cannot say it and “make sense” but it can be seen.

Logical analysis is necessary because it makes it easier to see how signs are connected to one another. A proposition like $(\exists x)x$ does not say anything about an object, but only shows the allocation of certain symbols. The rejection of Frege's and Russell's theory of logical constants is based precisely on differentiating the visible notation of a proposition from its expressible content. Wittgenstein believes that Frege's and Russell's notations² do not show the logical properties of symbols and blurred differences between symbols as they allow for many signs with the same sense. Both multiplied signs in excess do not provide sufficient explanations of the contexts in which a given sign operates and the way it is related to other signs.³ By creating a new, proper notation, it is possible to correctly identify the nature of the logical sign and, at the same time, apply truth-functional procedures to disclose relationships between expressions. Wittgenstein's comment is brief: “It now becomes clear why we often feel as though “logical truths” must be “postulated” by us. We can in fact postulate them insofar as we can postulate an adequate notation” (TLP 6.1223).

Evidence is replaced by truth-functional procedures.⁴ The introduction of such procedures is only possible after developing adequate symbolic notation.

This brings us to the core of the *Tractarian* theory of logic—the theory of tautology. At the climax of his argument, Wittgenstein states that tautologies and contradictions do not say anything. If there were able to express something, this would mean that they could be brought down to something through analysis and so cease to be tautologies or contradictions. They do not say anything because they are not propositions. A proposition which is always true or always false does not make sense. According to Wittgenstein, tautologies are rules for combining signs. The tautological “law,” such as the rule of non-contradiction shows what is allowed and what combinations of signs are authorised whereas notations such as “*p and not-p*” is the rule forbidding such combination of symbols.

So what does tautology show? Why is seeing the essence of Wittgenstein's method? In the notes made by More, Wittgenstein states that propositions of logic show (reveal) the formal—logical—properties of language and the world (NM, 175, TLP 6.12). They show so they do not speak. This means that one can, as it were, infer the thing that they express from their appearance.⁵ Tautology is a specific combination of signs brought about by means of certain relationships represented by logical operators.⁶ This combination constitutes a structure whose constituent parts have “definite properties of structure” (TLP 6.12). And the fact “that its (tautology's—MP) constituent parts connected together in this way give a tautology characterizes the logic of its constituent parts” (TLP 6.124). Hence, tautologies are conditional on developing configurations of constituents having their own logic. What kind of logic of constituents is at stake here? The answer is to be found in proposition 6.124: tautologies presuppose that,

names have meaning, and that elementary propositions have sense. And this is their connection with the world. It is clear that it must show something about the world that certain combinations of symbols—which essentially have a definite character—are tautologies... this means that in logic it is not we who express, by means of signs, what we want, but in logic the nature of the essentially necessary signs itself asserts.⁷ (TLP 6.124)

What are important in tautology are not signs which already have their internal logic, but their combinations which express a truth about the world. Because elementary propositions may be combined into a tautology, tautology as a possible and also necessary combination of the propositions, reveals logical properties of the world (TLP 6.12).

We need to be aware that Wittgenstein replaces proof, which is a specific discursive action, with truth tables, i.e., a graphical element—script⁸—to reinstate the distinction between saying and showing. This specific method, as Wittgenstein calls it, is a typical operation to be performed with the use of graphical notations: graphs, rebuses, or cross-words.⁹

Logical truths are revealed neither in evidence nor in verbal or written procedures, but in records or notation which is their location or, more precisely, their matrix. Logic provides its own foundation in that all that can be required of it is included in graphical signs. Seeing is a specific process of deciphering what is shown by the sign or whatever is graphical, whatever constitutes script. It is not by its content that we recognise the form and sense of a proposition, but by its notation or its outline. The script is what draws the eye, as it were, when we ask about the structure of the proposition. No matter what can be seen, what reveals itself, it shown by the very graphical nature of the sign—writing itself.

Hence, logical analysis is only a tool making seeing possible. However, if we want to understand fully the nature of seeing, we must consider the problem of the agent who “sees.” On the basis of some remarks from the *Tractatus*, we may assume that it is some kind of transcendental subject, albeit Wittgenstein does not say so directly. In any case, the fact that the *Tractatus* does not raise the topic of the subject of seeing will have an influence on Wittgenstein's later investigations.

3. The Phenomenological Period

In 1929, in his article *Some Remarks on Logical Form*, Wittgenstein revised his position from the *Tractatus* writing: “If, now, we try to get at an actual analysis, we find logical forms which have very little similarity with the norms of ordinary language” (RLF 165). In experience: “We meet with the forms of space and time with the whole manifold of spatial and temporal objects, as colours, sounds, etc., with their gradations, continuous transitions, and combinations in various proportions, all of which we cannot seize by our ordinary means of expression” (1929).

The object of philosophy is to construct a “phenomenological language” that is a language which is supposed to offer a direct description of experience (*unmittelbare Erfahrung*) (PB 1), what is directly given.¹⁰ What is given directly? Wittgenstein does not answer the question unequivocally. At times, he would be talking of the world of sensual data (*die Welt der Data*) (MS 105, 96; MS 107, 222; PB 48) or the world of representations (*die Welt der Vorstellung*) (PB 49); at times he would mention the visual space (*Gesichtsraum*) (MS 107, 1). The area of study is quite vast. Like Husserl, one might say that the objects of the phenomenological description are phenomena, i.e., what is given in any possible intuition, but it seems that this would diverge from Wittgenstein's views.

Wittgenstein is more inclined to subscribe to ideas put forward by positivists, especially Mach.¹¹

According to Mach, reality is a river of impressions, sensual data, and experiences which are not given as something constant and relatively stable, but as a chaotic and unordered structure.¹² The aim of science would be to provide a conceptual framework for this structure. Wittgenstein repeats after Mach that reality is a “stream of life” with “what is direct finding itself in constant flow” (MS 107, 159).¹³ In a sense, reality is reduced to fleeting impressions which only become determined and shaped in language (MS 107, 158-9). It is reduced to space which Wittgenstein understands very broadly as a combination of the visual, taste, and kinaesthetic space (MS 107, 3).¹⁴

This brings us back to the problem of seeing. The incongruity between logical forms of language and the forms of phenomena (*Phänomenon*) leads Wittgenstein to some conclusions on the phenomenological structure of space. As it is understood in the *Tractatus*, language presupposes that objects and their properties are relatively constant. Just as any meaningful proposition, it is a function of expressions contained in it (TLP 5), so is every possible state of affairs a configuration of objects linked by certain relationships and constituting a space. Wittgenstein was to reject this understanding of space in 1929.

Visual space, says Wittgenstein, exists in time and changes with time. It is full of depth, colours, different clearances, and shadows. Hues are intermixed: a flash can be seen somewhere, and something is looming in the distance or shining nearby. In order to take account of the sense of such space, Wittgenstein uses the notion of the “enchanted swamp” where “everything tangible disappears” (MS 105, 116).¹⁵ This flowing “enchanted swamp” has its own independent reality and can neither be arrested nor grasped (MS 107, 1).¹⁶ Wittgenstein believes that the very intention of expressing this changeability or flow already infringes on language limits and goes beyond sense (MS 107, 159).¹⁷ Each conceptual expression is also a simplification, schematisation, and deviation from sense (MS 107, 3).¹⁸ After all, how does one describe what is timeless by means of language which is made possible in time (PB 48)?¹⁹ How does one capture flowing in the rigid framework of expressions? According to Wittgenstein “the stream of life, or the stream of the world, flows on (everything flows) and our propositions are only verified by what is constant. Our propositions are only verified by the present. And so, they must be constructed in a way making them verifiable by the present” (MS 107, 222; PB 48).²⁰

Again, this raises the problem of “seeing.” In a sense, space is unreal—it is nothing to me; “by its nature, it does not have an owner” (PB 71, MS 107, 1).²¹ To quote Husserl from his *Ding und Raum*, experience “turns into a bustle (*Gewühl*) of meaningless impressions.”²² Faced with space understood in this way “nothing can save the I,” as was rightly pointed out by Mach.²³ What seems the closest in experience turns out to be the most distant and opaque in analysis.²⁴ How then does one account for the phenomenon of space? Is it only through tentative descriptions? What does one relate space to if the “I” which observes the flow of things does not exist? Wittgenstein believes that it should be referred to the language itself, which would be able to capture the flowing reality in words. This, however, is proved to be impossible.

Contrasted with the method of logical analysis, seeing exposed the insufficiency and inadequacy of the method for the understanding of the way language operates. The act of seeing is to be supported with phenomenological analysis expressed in phenomenological language. However, such language will not suffice when the underlying act of seeing is devoid of the subject affecting it. As already noticed by Husserl, this is how “we arrive at a possibility of a phenomenological mass as the only and final being, but the mass is so meaningless that there is no I, no you, and no physical world” (1907).²⁵

4. The Morphological Period

Since the beginning of the 1930s, Wittgenstein worked on a new method for his philosophy which was to focus around the central notion of “grammar” and the catchphrase of “Do not think, but look!” (PI 31). In Wittgenstein's writings from the so-called later philosophical period, there are constantly recurring phrases such as incorrect perception of things, failure to notice the details, blindness to meaning etc. According to the philosopher, in order to understand how language operates it needs to be seen and seeing consists in noticing interdependencies and similarities between individual language-games or usage patterns as well as recognising analogies and details. Language is revealed in its entirety only when one notices the multitude of relations and forms which are created by its individual parts. By noticing common forms, one notices analogies. The ideas put forward by Oswald Spengler and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe make Wittgenstein realise that it is necessary for the work of a philosopher to “see analogies” which means to have a kind of insight into the objects under investigation. Philosophy must therefore be based on seeing and correlated description. During his lectures, Wittgenstein kept saying “philosophy really is ‘purely descriptive’” (BB 18) and made the following comment in his writings: “it could be called a descriptive science of language as opposed to the science of thinking” (BT 408).²⁶

The method followed by Wittgenstein in his later period might be called morphology. “What I give is the morphology of the use of an expression” (1972),²⁷ he said in one of his lectures. Morphology is not so much a discipline or a set of propositions as a way to put a problem, a method to explain it. In the notes for *Logik, Sprache, Philosophie*,²⁸ a book Wittgenstein was preparing with Waismann, the former admitted his debt to Goethe:

Our thought here marches with certain views of Goethe's which he expressed in the *Metamorphosis of Plants*. We are in the habit, whenever we perceive similarities of seeking some common origin for them... But Goethe's view shows that this is not the only possible form of conception. His conception of the original plant implies no hypothesis about the temporal development of the vegetable kingdom such as Darwin's. What then is the problem solved by this idea? It is the problem of synoptic presentation. Goethe's aphorism “All the organs of plants are leaves transformed” offers us a plan in which we may group the organs of plants according to their similarities as if around some natural centre. We see the original form of the leaf changing into similar and cognate forms, into the leaves of the calyx, the leaves of the petal, into organs that are half petals, half stamens, and so on. We follow this sensuous transformation of the type by linking up the leaf through intermediate forms with the other organs of the plant (highlights—MP).²⁹ (R. Monk 1990, 305)

Morphology is typical for its lack of assumptions. It discloses patterns ordering experience (for instance, the perception of plants) and recognises figures, shapes, and forms by similarities and relations between phenomena. It is about seeing interdependencies in the correct aspect or attitude. Its object is not to explain phenomena, my means of other phenomena (VOW, 310), but to see relationships which are not based on the laws of cause and effect, but on similarity and analogy. Thanks to analogy, we treat language as a certain unity rather than just a sum of unrelated actions and statements. One needs to see how language actually operates. Wittgenstein said: “We put some form of language in the context of its environment or we transform it in our imagination to gain an insight into the whole of space in which the structure of our language operates” (VOW, 310).³⁰ Environment is a sort of space—morphological one, we might add—in which one phenomenon is related to another. The relation may be structural, semantic, or analogical, the last being the option of preference for Wittgenstein.

5. Conclusions

Here, the problem of the subject comes back again. Who or what is this “we” with which Wittgenstein manifestly identifies himself? Is the subject something worldly or transcendental? In the *Investigations* and later writings, there are a number of arguments for the transcendental as well as naturalistic or social understanding. Wittgenstein himself does not provide any clear answers leaving the problem as perhaps one of the most important, if not the most important issue related to the interpretation of his philosophy and the method he followed. He keeps balancing between the natural and transcendental attitude and it might be the case that he lacks some radical methodological tools, for example, transcendental phenomenological reduction.

I think that the Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language may be complemented by the phenomenological perspective, which, in turn, will enable the development of the phenomenology of language. It is also important that Husserl himself never treats the issue of language used by phenomenology as a problem in its own right, an omission which is later held against him by many of his students (L. Landgrebe, E. Fink). Wittgenstein's perspective will make it possible to approach the problem anew, ask whether the postulate of autonomous phenomenological language is justified, and defend Husserl's perspective from criticism leveled by deconstruction

Notes

1. “The proposition shows its sense. The proposition shows how things stand, if it is true. And it says that they do so stand” (TLF 4.022). References to Wittgenstein's works are made with the use of designations introduced at the end of the text.

2. Contained in *Begriffsschrift and Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (Frege) as well as *Principles of Mathematics* and *Principia Mathematica* (Russell).

3. K. Rotter, *Idea nauk formalnych we wczesnej filozofii Ludwiga Wittgensteina 1913-1922* (*The Idea of Formal Sciences in Ludwig Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy 1913-1922*), Wrocław 1996, 29-31.

4. The procedures consist in applying the zero-one method.

5. It is for a reason that we make a reference here to Leibniz's notion of “expression.”

6. This is discussed in detail by M. Soin (see M. Soin, *Logika Traktatu. Polemika z Wojciechem Sadnym—The Logic of the Tractatus. Polemics with Wojciech Sadym*) in “Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej” (History of Philosophy and Social Sciences Archive), T. 46, 2001, 40-46. I refer the reader to his reflections.

7. “Das heißt aber, in der Logik drücken nicht wir mit Hilfe der Zeichen aus, was wir wollen, sondern in der Logik sagt die Natur der naturnotwendigen Zeichen selbst aus.”

8. J. Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge Classics, 2005, 249

9. According to Derrida, graphical notations—script—represent certain structures. Referring to the question about the model of the psyche in Freud's psychoanalysis, he said “psychical content will be represented by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic. The structure of the psychical apparatus will be represented by a writing machine.” J. Derrida, *Freud and...*, op. cit. 250. The aim is to “proceed toward a configuration of traces which can no longer be represented except by the structure and functioning of writing” (Ibid., 251). This “operation of writing”—tautology—shows, reveals, expresses or, to quote Wittgenstein from *Tractarian* proposition 6.124 present “the scaffolding of the world.”

10. D. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, New York 1995, 99; and J. Hintikka, “The Idea of Phenomenology in Wittgenstein and Husserl,” *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Half-Truths and One-and-a-Half-Truths*, Dordrecht 1996, 55.

11. In a way, this interpretation is suggested by a later discussion in the Vienna Circle inspired by Wittgenstein's thought, discussion of the possibility for the so-called protocol propositions, i.e., purely observational propositions about phenomena *per se*, that is phenomena as they are without conceptual and intellectual “treatment.” The object, therefore, is to find Mach's language of sensual data.

12. This is in a way confirmed by Wittgenstein's later lectures from 1930 in which he put forward the concept of reality as a sum of impressions.

13. “Das Unmittelbare ist in ständigem Fluss begriffen (Es hat tatsächlich die Form eines Stroms).”

14. He does not include aural space, but the context of Wittgenstein's words suggests that it should in fact be included in the list. “Ihre Raum ist der kombinierte Gesichts-, Tast- und Muskelgefühlsraum darum kann ich mich in diesen Raum ‘umdrehen’ und schauen, was hinter mir vor geht” etc.”

15. "Es ist als käme ich mit der Phänomenologischen Sprache in einen verauzuberten Sumpft wo alles erfassbare verschwindet."

In this context, Mach wrote: "All is ephemeral; a world without substance which is only made up of colours, contours, and sounds. Reality is in perpetual movement, reflecting changes like a chameleon. Cited by: M. Sommer, *Fenomenologia jako poważna praca i pogodna pasywność*, trans. S. Czerniak, "Studia z filozofii niemieckiej, t. 3. Współczesna fenomenologia niemiecka", red. S. Czerniak, J. Rolewski, Toruń 1999, 145.

16. "Der Geschichtsraum so wie er ist hat seine selbständige Realität."

17. "Es ist ganz klar, daß wenn man hier dass Letzte sagen will man eben auf die Grenze der Sprache kommen muss, die es ausdrückt."

18. "Denn ist das was gewöhnlich in ihm vorgeht zu kompliziert so sagt das schon dass die Beschreibung prinzipiell möglich ist."

19. "Wenn die Welt der Daten zeitlos ist, wie kann man dann überhaupt über sie reden?"

Edmund Husserl ran against similar aporia when he wanted to describe primary consciousness of time and the constitutions of temporary objects. This is when he famously said: "For all this, names are lacking." E. Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1964. 100.

20. "Der Strom der Lebens, oder der Strom der Welt, fließt dahin ('alles fließt') und unsere Sätze werden sozusagen nur in Augenblicken verifiziert."

21. PB 71: "Der Gesichtsraum hat wesentlich keinen Besitzer... Das Wesentliche ist, dass die Darstellung des Gesichtsraums ein Objekt darstellt und keine Andeutung eines Subjekts enthält."

MS 107, 1: "Der Gesichtsraum so wie er ist hat seine selbstständige Realität. Er selbst enthält kein Subjekt. Er ist autonom."

On the role of the subject and kinesthesia in space perception, see: PB 72-74.

22. E. Husserl, *Hue XVI: Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907*, Ulrich Claesges (ed.), Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands 1973, 288.

23. M. Sommer, *Fenomenologia jako...*, op. cit., 145.

24. In his lectures on space, Husserl said that "in transcendental reduction, human perception of space ceases to be human." E. Husserl, *Hue XVI: Ding...*, op. cit., 122.

25. Ibid., 288.

26. "Das konnte man die deskriptive Wissenschaft vom Sprechen nennen, im Gegensatz zu der von Denken."

It remains to be seen how this perception and description tally with the doctrinal side of Wittgenstein's philosophy, namely the postulate of the duality between grammar and experience, necessity, and adventitiousness.

The problem is discussed by Maciej Soj in *Gramatyka i metafizyka (Grammar and Metaphysics)*.

27. N. Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, 50.

28. The book was only published in 1965, after Wittgenstein and Waismann were already dead, over 30 years after it was written. It started as Wittgenstein's and Waismann's collaborative effort, its aim being to offer a reader-friendly and clear presentation of Wittgenstein's views from early 1930s. At the outset, Wittgenstein was enthusiastic about the project, but once he realised that Waismann did not quite grasp his ideas and was apt to change his views quicker than the book progressed, he gave up cooperating with the latter.

The issue of relations between Wittgenstein and Waismann is discussed by Gordon Baker in his preface to *The Voices of Wittgensteins. The Vienna Circle. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Waismann*, G. Baker (ed.), London-New York 2003, XVI-XLVIII.

29. R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, Vintage Books, London, 1990, 305.

30. In our opinion, this "transformation in imagination" is strictly related to Husserl's imaginative variation. See E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, Springer, 218-22.

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