Kevin Cahill: Frege and Bismarck: Revisiting the Private Language Argument in the *Tractatus*

Introduction

In her 2001 paper «Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box?», Cora Diamond argued for the idea that there is kind of private language argument in the *Tractatus* that in certain respects anticipates later Wittgenstein's more extensive treatment of this topic in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The considerations Diamond finds in the *Tractatus* are purportedly directed at views like the ones Russell advances in works such as «Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description». Diamond's paper focuses largely on what she takes to be Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell's views on quantification, specifically on the relation between quantified statements and the particular propositions that form its base. Diamond contends that Wittgenstein's treatment of this relation counts as anti-realist when compared to Russell's more realist views on this relation. In «Does the *Tractatus* Contain a Private Language Argument?», William Child contends that Diamond's argument attributes to the early Wittgenstein an overly epistemoloy-laden conception of use that, while perhaps appropriate for interpreting the later Wittgenstein's treatment of the idea of a private language in the *Philosophical Investigations*, wrongly reads the later conception of use at work there back into the *Tractatus*.

In addition, Child claims that certain passages in *Philosophical Remarks* as well as certain things Wittgenstein is recorded as having said in his discussions with the Vienna Circle in the late 1920s undercut the plausibility of Diamond's account. Finally, Child takes issue with Diamond's framing of the issue of realism and anti-realism as those themes figure in Michael Dummett's interpretation of the early and later Wittgenstein respectively. Here, I discuss only the dispute between Diamond and Child as that relates to the *Tractatus* itself; I do not address how to read Wittgenstein's comments from the late 1920s (Cf. however *PR* 1 and *WVC* 45 on primary language) or the dispute about how to read Dummett on realism.

After reviewing Diamond's and Child's respective accounts, I discuss how Child's critique of Diamond overlooks the centrality of Frege's work for the early Wittgenstein, as Frege has been read by Thomas Ricketts and like-minded interpreters. This leads to pointing to another aspect of the *Tractatus* neglected by Child, viz., its view of the relation between logic and ordinary language. Finally, this allows me to suggest that the *Tractatus* does indeed indicate a view of language use that in relevant respects anticipates the *Investigations*, but it is one that should not be understood in terms of concepts taken from epistemology, but, like the *Investigations* itself, is oriented towards a semantic treatment of scepticism.

Diamond on Russell

Diamond's discussion draws on works by Russell from the period 1905-1913. These include "On Denoting", "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description", *The Problems of Philosophy*, and a manuscript from 1913 published as *Theory of Knowledge.*

Diamond's discussion focuses on a central feature of Russell's thinking during this period: the concept of *acquaintance.*

> [A] fundamental principle of Russell's during that period was that all cognitive relations depend on acquaintance. Acquaintance is direct awareness, direct cognitive contact; and the objects of acquaintance, according to Russell, include not only sensations and other mental items, but also non-mental items, such as universals and abstract logical facts. Russell's idea that all cognitive relations depend on acquaintance is tied closely to another fundamental principle of his, that every proposition which we can understand must be composed entirely of constituents with which we are acquainted (Problems of Philosophy, p.32; cf. "On Denoting," p.56). During the period with which I am concerned those two principles help to shape Russell's epistemology and metaphysics, via the theory of descriptions, used by Russell to explain how propositions about things with which we are not acquainted can have, as their constituents, only things with which we are acquainted. (Diamond, 264)

Two Problems Raised by Russell's reliance on acquaintance:

1) How can I understand a proposition that is about a physical object with which I am not presently acquainted?

2) How can I understand a proposition that is about a mental object with which someone else is acquainted?

Russell tries to solve both problems via his accounts of quantification, propositional functions, and denotation.

In the case of an ordinary object that is outside the reach of my current acquaintance, the proposed solution looks like this:

Example: The world's largest saltwater swimming pool lies on the Pacific Ocean.

$\exists x$ (x is the world's largest saltwater swimming pool $\wedge$ x lies on the Pacific Ocean).

«X» is meant to *directly* denote the object. If the object satifies the two propositional functions, the proposition is true. We can thus understand a proposition that contains an object with which we are not, but could be, acquainted.

There are questions about this account of denotation, but they are not my present concern.

In the case of understanding a proposition referring to someone else's mental object (or their self), things are more complicated. Diamond describes the situation this way:

[L]et us suppose that each of us is acquainted with his or her own self. Russell treats that as a serious possibility, during at least part of the period which I am discussing. Now consider a statement about Bismarck. Since we are supposing that Bismarck himself has direct acquaintance with himself, he will be able to use the name "Bismarck" (or "I") so that it directly designates himself. If he makes the statement "Bismarck is an astute diplomatist" or "I am an astute diplomatist," he himself, an object with which he is acquainted, is a constituent of his judgment. But you or I or anyone else can think about Bismarck only via some description; we are not directly acquainted with the object which he denotes by "I." If we say "Bismarck was an astute diplomatist," an analysis of our proposition would show that we are not directly designating Bismarck. We designate him via some description. In the analyzed proposition, the name "Bismarck" is replaced by a description, and we can see from the analysis that Bismarck himself is not a constituent of the proposition. Because the object Bismarck is known to Bismarck by acquaintance, but known to us only by description, our judgment about Bismarck is not the same as Bismarck's judgment about Bismarck. Bismarck has available to him a proposition which he can understand and which we cannot. We can, however, know by description the proposition which Bismarck understands. P. 265

On analogy with the case of a proposition about an ordinary physical object with which I am currently not acquainted, we get the following analysis:

$\exists x$ (x is the first chancellor of the German empire $\wedge$ x is an astute diplomatist).

Diamond comments:

> It is important that, as Russell sees the situation, there is something which we should like to do but cannot do:
>
> > …when we say anything about Bismarck, we should like, if we could, to make the judgment which Bismarck alone can make, namely the judgment of which he himself is the constituent. In this we are necessarily defeated, since the actual Bismarck is unknown to us. ("Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," p.218)
>
> In that quotation, Russell uses a descriptive phrase to speak about a judgment which we cannot make or understand. We know that there is such a judgment, but there is a barrier cutting it off from us. There is an ideal position for thinking about Bismarck, a position which no one but Bismarck can be in. p. 265

Because we are "necessarily defeated" in making a judgement about Bismarck, the variable in the propositional function can only *indirectly* denote its object. This is another way of saying that we really don't understand the proposition Bismarck makes about himself, which implies a problem in the quantified sentence itself.

Russell's understanding of the relation between a quantified sentence and the set of sentences that constitute its base is a realist, referential one, both in the cases of direct denotation of a physical object outside of my acquaintance and in the case of indirect denotation of someone else's mental object.

In the latter case, however, there is the added complication that the variable in the propositional function must be understood as reaching across what seems like an *uncrossable* boundary.

> The…*Tractatus* conception is that logical relations are relations between sentences in logical space, i.e., between sentences which we understand. This is tied to the "construction" story about the quantifiers, and also to a general "construction" story about all sentences, and, as I have suggested, also to what Wittgenstein regards as his fundamental insight in the *Tractatus* about how logical words contribute to the sentences in which they occur. There is here no appeal to an independent notion of understanding. P. 274

For Wittgenstein, quantifiers have a more direct, intelligible-constructive relation to their base, not an indirect referential one as with Russell's account of other person's mental objects.

Diamond elaborates further problems for Russell's theory that involve descriptive language of sensations:

We need to trace some implications of that Russellian account. When I make a judgment about Bismarck's private objects, I need, in addition to descriptions which indirectly denote the objects, things to say about those private objects; I need words for predicates and relations. In speaking about the objects with which I am not acquainted I use words the meaning of which is secured by my acquaintance with things like the universal *redness*. My acquaintance with redness arises from acquaintance with complexes; since I am not acquainted with the complex *Bismarck's having a red image*, my acquaintance with redness does not come from acquaintance with that complex. So, when I use the word "red" in speaking about Bismarck's image, I must understand the meaning of that word from other complexes involving redness, complexes with which I am acquainted, and I must be able to carry that meaning into the context of application to Bismarck's image, with which I cannot be acquainted. P. 276

These two possible central focuses for a critique of Russell on privacy, available within the *Tractatus*, correspond to two of the central focuses in the *Investigations* discussions of private language. The first focus is on the idea of sensations, wishes and so on as hidden objects accessible only to the person who has them, and the criticism is that such objects play no role in the language game; the second focus is on the idea of using a word in speaking about a private object while keeping it to a fixed meaning, and the criticism is that we have no coherent idea of fixity of meaning in such cases. P. 277

Apart from discussing the *Tractatus'* critique of Russell's approach(es) to sensation language, Diamond also discusses how the book indicates the rudiments of a novel understanding of such sentences, an approach she claims anticipates Wittgenstein's later discussion of this question in *PI*. On the issue of the relation between a mental state/sensation state and the behavioral symptoms ordinarily associated with such a state, she writes,

> If such-and-such behavior is mere inductive evidence, then something else has to be what it is evidence for: there has to be something else that would, if it were established, constitute grounds for inferring that the toothache is getting worse. The argument here starts from the fact that "Bismarck's toothache is getting worse" is not an elementary sentence; it therefore must be entailed by some truth-functional combination or combinations of other sentences. There cannot be merely symptoms of Bismarck's toothache's getting worse; there has to be something which would, if established, count as non-inductive grounds for holding that it is getting worse. p. 280

The alternative analysis available within the *Tractatus*, once Russellian realism is rejected, involves an early version of the later insistence that where there are symptoms (inductively based justifications for a kind of statement) there must also be criteria (something which would count, non-inductively, as justification). In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein says that an "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria. I have been arguing that the rejection of quantification over objects about which we cannot speak without quantifiers leads, in the *Tractatus*, to the view that a process in someone else's mind stands in need of outward criteria. P. 281

However, this idea is not worked out in the same level of detail in Diamond's paper as is the issue of quantification. She suggests that the *Tractatus* "supplies" the material for such a worked-out account. (p. 282). I will address this issue more fully when I respond to what Child says about the issue of descriptions of sensations in his paper.

Diamond summarizes her main argument this way:

> The *Tractatus* rejects the Russellian conception of how semantics and logic hang together; that is, it rejects not just the Russellian idea of how we can quantify over things with which we cannot be acquainted, but also any substantive conception of semantic theory which would allow a theory to explain the legitimacy of inferences independently of whether we ourselves could be in a position to make those inferences. For the *Tractatus*, inferential relations cannot be explained by such a theory, since such relations are internal to what our sentences are: what construction from what other sentences. A sentence has no semantic identity (as we might put it) which could be taken to form part of an explanation of its logical relations to other sentences, since it is only in the sentence's use as standing in these and those logical relations that it is such-and-such meaningful combination of signs at all. The very idea of there being legitimate inferences beyond what we can understand is undercut; logic can only be internal to the language we speak and understand. Pp. 285-286

William Child: "Does the *Tractatus* Contain a Private Language Argument?

Child does not dispute that Diamond has pointed out an important difference between Russell's and Wittgenstein's respective understandings of generality. He counters, however that

in claiming that the *Tractatus* treatment of generality entails that private objects in other people's minds can play no role in our language for talking about others' sensations, Diamond imputes to the *Tractatus* a specific conception of use, with a definite epistemic content, that is not actually there; she reads back into the *Tractatus* a conception of use that only surfaces in Wittgenstein much later on. P. 145

Moreover, regarding Diamond's claim to finding a purported early version of the *Investigations'* treatment of sensation language and mental states in terms of symptoms and criteria, Child asserts that

> Diamond interprets the *Tractatus* in a way that makes it seem far more similar to Wittgenstein's later work than it really is—by reading into the *Tractatus* epistemic concerns that have no place there. P. 145

Considering Child's crticisim of what Diamond says about the *Tractatus* and sensation language will bring out an aspect of her discussion that I think he misses and which opens up a very different way of understanding what is going on in the book.

But first I want to look at Child's depiction of Diamond on quantification and general generality.

In line with my earlier presentation of her argument about generality, Child states that,

> On Diamond's interpretation, the key to the 'Tractatus private language argument' lies in the difference between Russell's and Wittgenstein's treatments of generality. A crucial element in Russell's view is the idea that I can grasp a general proposition that is true or false in virtue of the truth or falsity of singular propositions that I cannot understand. P. 146

He adds a bit later,

> Diamond stresses that on Wittgenstein's account, by contrast, a general proposition cannot have as one of its instances a singular proposition that I cannot understand. To see why, we need to appreciate Wittgenstein's treatment of general sentences. P. 146

Child notes that there are three ways in which a complex proposition can be generated out of its base of elementary propositions according to the symbol N: 'N(ξ)' given at TLP 5.502. He rightly states that the most relevant way for us here is the following: "giving a function fx whose values for all values of x are the propositions to be described."

I won't review Child's description of the Tractarian machinery for how general propositions are constructed out of their base propositions.

The description below gives the gist of his account so far:

> Now Diamond emphasizes that a crucial feature of Wittgenstein's account of the construction of complex propositions from elementary propositions is that, if I am to understand a non-elementary proposition, then the elementary propositions that go into its construction must themselves be propositions that I understand: they must be made up of names that I understand, or could understand. P. 147

According to Child, Diamond thinks this reasoning applies to

the case where a general proposition is constructed by successive applications of the N operator to all values of a given propositional function fx: the instances of a general proposition that I understand must be elementary propositions that I can in principle understand. And that rules out the possibility that I could understand a general proposition about toothaches that had, as one of its instances, a singular proposition about Bismarck's toothache that I could not understand. On Wittgenstein's account, therefore, I cannot use general sentences to identify by description an object that Bismarck can name and I cannot. So, *pace* Russell, private objects in others' minds can play no role in my language— by figuring in the truth-conditions of my claims about others' sensations. P. 147

Child agrees with what he regards as Diamond's interpretation of Wittgenstein's view on names and objects in the *Tractatus*, namely that objects I cannot name can play no role in my language. He adds, however, that

> that will only show that private objects in others' minds can play no role in my language if we assume that I cannot have names for such objects. If we reject that assumption and allow that I can give names to others' private objects, there will be no barrier to allowing that propositions about others' experiences are true or false in virtue of the presence or absence of private objects in their minds. So if there is a private language argument in the *Tractatus*, it depends on the principle that it is impossible for one person to have names for other people's private sensations. What might explain or justify that principle? P. 147-148

Child mentions two possible explanations:

1) Sense data accounts, where the subject alone can name his mental object, because only the subject is acquainted with this private mental object.

Child notes that such interpretations of the *Tractatus* are not as "popular" as they once were. More importantly, this is not the line of attack that Diamond adopts anyway. (pp. 147-148) So I won't explore this approach further. Child finds Diamond's primary reason for thinking that it is impossible for one person to have names for other people's private sensations to be the following:

2) The objects we give names to, our own and other people's, is shown in the language we use. P. 149

Child objects: If Diamond is not relying on a principle connected to the supposed impossibility of my being acquainted with other people's sense data, "What, then, is she depending on?" p. 149

The answer is that Diamond has a particular conception of the use of language, from which it follows that other people's private objects are irrelevant to the use I make of my language: 'Objects known only to Bismarck', she writes, 'play no role in the language which I use in everyday life in talking about Bismarck and things in his mental life' (275). But what reason is there to think that the conceptions of use and of playing a role that are implicit in that claim are conceptions to which Wittgenstein was already committed in the *Tractatus*? P. 150

Child elaborates his objection:

If we are to accept Diamond's interpretation, we need to be convinced that, at the time of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein already had the conception of use that is required to make a private language argument go through: a conception on which a state of affairs can be relevant to my use of a sentence only if I can recognize whether or not that state of affairs obtains, and on which an object can be relevant to my use of a word only if I can recognize the presence or absence of that object. But for that to be true, the *Tractatus* would need to forge a much closer tie between the notion of use and *epistemic* notions such as justification, evidence, and recognition than it actually does. [my italics] Without that, there is nothing in the *Tractatus* to show that we cannot use names that refer to others' private objects. My complaint, then, is that Diamond's reading imputes to the *Tractatus* a notion of use that carries a much greater and more definite epistemic weight than anything that is actually to be found there…. It is agreed on all sides that the *Tractatus* is not concerned with epistemology: it contains no theory of perception, for example, and no account of ostensive definition; and it says explicitly that theory of knowledge has no special or foundational place in philosophy (4.1121). P. 150

Sidepoints:

(See Diamond on the question of what it means for something to be "in the *Tractatus*", p. 263)

Cf. TLP 5.541-5.5421: Wittgenstein is, in a way, very interested in psychology and epistemology; he wants to reject them as logically irrelevant, however prevalent in philosophy.

Child maintains that Diamond would have to provide a much fuller account of use, one related to epistemological issues, than the text of the *Tractatus* warrants.

TLP does address use, but it has a one-dimensional impoverished «account» of use, not no account at all.

Back to Diamond on Sensation Language in the *Tractatus*

Diamond asks,

What does it mean, according to the *Tractatus*, to say that Bismarck's toothache is getting worse? If Russell's account is wrong, what alternative is there? P. 279

And she writes,

Suppose we think that Bismarck's behavior gives us grounds, but merely inductive grounds, for inferring that his toothache is getting worse. Probably, on the basis of his behavior, the toothache is getting worse. Well, what is it that the behavior gives us inductive evidence for? What would show us that THAT is the case? There has to be an answer to that question within logical space; there has to be an informative answer, not just that what the behavior is evidence for is Bismarck's toothache's getting worse. If such-and-such behavior is mere inductive evidence, then something else has to be what it is evidence for: there has to be something else that would, if it were established, constitute grounds for inferring that the toothache is getting worse….There cannot be merely symptoms of Bismarck's toothache's getting worse; there has to be something which would, if established, count as non-inductive grounds for holding that it is getting worse. P. 280

As noted above, Diamond does not develop this point in detail, or at least in enough detail to satisfy Child, who objects again to the weight Diamond gives to epistemological notions connected to use without adequate basis in the text itself. He writes that, "there is no basis in the text or context of the *Tractatus* for this interpretation." p. 153

We'll see that her point is primarily conceptual, not epistemic.

Child criticizes Diamond's use of "non-inductive grounds":

Giving the truth-grounds of an ordinary proposition is a matter of spelling out what has to be the case for it to be true. There is no suggestion that the truth-grounds of a proposition function as evidence for asserting the ordinary proposition. P. 153

FN 16 Having advanced her positive suggestion about the treatment of sensation language in the *Tractatus*, Diamond herself goes on to make the point that the kind of 'grounds' that are revealed by Tractarian analysis of a sentence '**need not . . . have any connection with what, *in our actual practice*, we really do count as grounds for accepting that sentence as true**' (281) [my bold and italics]. As far as I can see, that acknowledgement completely undercuts the suggestion that the *Tractatus* contains something that is in any way at all a precursor of the later treatment of mental language in terms of symptoms and criteria. P. 153

Contrary to Child, I take Diamond to mean that while carrying out an analysis of an ordinary proposition in the individual case may reveal a string of elementary propositions, in our actual practice it is a sense that we typically grasp immediately, this grasping being part of our complicated organism. More on this later.

Child Concludes,

> Contrary to Diamond's account, therefore, there is nothing in the *Tractatus* conception of analysis that suggests any particular way of analysing propositions about others' sensations. In particular, there is nothing to suggest an account that exploits anything like Wittgenstein's later conception of criteria: non-inductive grounds for assertion that are built into the meanings of the relevant terms. The lesson, once more, is that we should not read Wittgenstein's later views back into the doctrines of the *Tractatus*. P. 153

Frege's Conception of Logic

Thomas Ricketts, "Logic and Truth in Frege"

Frege's conception of logic…differs markedly from more contemporary views. His logical laws do not describe valid forms of argument; they are about neither sentences nor the thoughts sentences express; they do not use a truth-predicate. Furthermore, in his controversy with Hilbert, Frege scorns talk of varying interpretations of sentences as a confused way of expressing what is properly said by the use of quantification, including quantification into predicate positions. He has then no semantic conception of logical consequence, in the post-Tarskian sense of 'semantic'. p. 124

It is a consequence of this view that there can be, in a sense, no genuine theorizing about logic. There is only theorizing within logic the proof of derived logical laws from basic logical laws and the application of logic in formal proofs within the framework of the *Begriffsschrift* to the laws and facts uncovered by the special sciences. Here Frege's view of judgment meshes with and motivates his universalist conception of logic. Our grasp of the goal of judgment, our occupancy of the status of cognizers, is exhibited, not in our applications of the predicate 'true', but in our manifestations of judgments in assertions. 136

What Wittgenstein Rejected and Took from Frege

Ricketts:

"Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*"

Wittgenstein rejected Frege's and Russell's universalist conception of logic – what he disparaged as the old logic – while retaining their inchoate but guiding assumptions first that logic frames all thought, and second that it is possible to give a clear, completely explicit and unambiguous expression to the contents judged true or false. 54

"Frege, the *Tractatus*, and the Logocentric Predicament"

Wittgenstein largely shares Frege's underlying view of judgment and the role for logic it dictates. In the *Tractatus* he aims to develop a conception of logic that remains fully true to it. Of particular importance is the radical difference that Frege discerns between logical laws and inference rules. Wittgenstein argues that the status Frege assigns to inference rules characterizes all of logic; as a consequence, there are, in Frege's sense, no logical laws. 3-4

Immediacy and Understanding:

"Frege, the *Tractatus*, and the Logocentric Predicament"

Wittgenstein provides an example of this idea of immediacy from a slightly different direction at 5.132:

> If p follows from q, I can make an inference from q to p, deduce p from q. The nature of the inference can be gathered only from the two propositions. They themselves are the only possible justification of the inference. 'Laws of inference', which are supposed to justify inferences, as in the works of Russell and Frege, have no sense [sinnlos], and would be superfluous. 11

"Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*"

Wittgenstein wants an understanding of the logical connectedness of sentences and the thoughts they express that makes this connectedness intrinsic to them. Sentences, and the thoughts they express, represent a reality outside of them either correctly or incorrectly. Moreover, sentences represent what they do independently of their truth or falsity. That a sentence implies some others, contradicts others, and is independent of still others and so forth, must somehow be rooted in the nature of the sentence as a representation of reality. This approach to logical connectedness leads Wittgenstein to deny that there are logical principles like those Frege and Russell identify, to deny indeed that there is any body of theory that sets forth the logical connectedness of sentences (see 6.13). On his view, the task of the logician is rather to make perspicuous the logical connections intrinsic to statements via a clear rendition of those statements. 59

TLP on Sign/Symbol Distinction

3.32 The sign is the part of the symbol perceptible by the senses.

3.321 Two different symbols can therefore have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common—they then signify in different ways.

3.323 In the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways—and therefore belongs to two different symbols—or that two words, which signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition.

Thus the word "is" appears as the copula, as the sign of equality, and as the expression of existence; "to exist" as an intransitive verb like "to go"; "identical" as an adjective; we speak of something but also of the fact of something happening.

(In the proposition "Green is green"—where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective—these words have not merely different meanings but they are different symbols.)

More TLP on Sign/Symbol Distinction

3.324 Thus there easily arise the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full).

3.325 In order to avoid these errors, we must employ a sign-language (*Zeichensprache*) which excludes them, by not applying the same sign in different symbols and by not applying signs in the same way which signify in different ways. A sign-language (*Zeichensprache*), that is to say, which obeys the rules of logical grammar—of logical syntax.

(The *Begriffsschrift* of Frege and Russell is such a language, which, however, does still not exclude all errors.)

3.326 In order to recognize [*erkennen*] the symbol in the sign we must consider [*achten*] the significant use.

3.327 The sign determines a logical form only together with its logical syntactic application.

The *Tractatus* and the Sign/Symbol Distinction

Sign/symbol distinction is crucial: our fundamental relation to language is not to uninterpreted signs. Signs are derivative.

Logic must look after itself. What this means is the rejection in philosophy of meta-languages in both early and later Wittgenstein.

In the normal case, I must be able grasp the sense of a proposition immediately in my perception of it as a symbol. This is one reason why skepticism is palpably (*offenbar*) nonsensical. (*TLP* 6.51)

TLP on Our Immediate Relation to Meaning (Sense)

4.002 Man [*Der Mensch*] possesses the capacity of constructing languages, in which every sense can be expressed, without having an idea how and what each word means [*bedeutet*]—just as one speaks without knowing how the single sounds are produced.

Colloquial language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it.

From it is humanly impossible to gather immediately the logic of language.

Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.

The silent adjustments to understand colloquial language are enormously complicated.

The Self-Sufficiency of Logic

5.473 Logic must take care of itself. A possible sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted. ("Socrates is identical" means nothing because there is no property which is called "identical". The proposition is senseless because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol is in itself unpermissible.)

In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic.

5.4731 Self-evidence, of which Russell has said so much, can only be discarded in logic by language itself preventing every logical mistake. That logic is *a priori* consists in the fact that we cannot think illogically.

5.4732 We cannot give a sign the wrong sense.

TLP on Colloqial Language and Scepticism

5.5563 All propositions of our colloquial language [*Umgangssprache*] are actually, just as they are, logically completely in order. That most simple thing which we ought to give here is not a simile of truth but the complete truth itself.

(Our problems are not abstract but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)

NB: It's unclear whether Wittgenstein's other commitments about logic can be harmonized with this idea.

6.51 Scepticism is not irrefutable, but palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked. For doubt can only exist where there is a question; a question only where there is an answer, and this only where something can be said.

Preliminary Conclusions

As far as the role of a *Begriffsschrift* in the *Tractatus* goes, it is a clarificatory tool meant to aid us in clearing up misunderstandings, misperceptions, due to various kinds of logical unclarities that tend to disrupt ordinary language. It is not meant to be a kind of universal language as Frege and Russell hoped for, nor a logical syntax in the way that Carnap later understood this.

The *Tractatus* begins from a commonsense realist, fallibilist, outlook on our ordinary linguistic understanding, i.e. our immediate grasp of sense.

I can understand the sense of a sentence such as "The present King of France is bald" before I have the Russellian analysis at hand. This includes understanding its inferential relations, even if I have no idea how each word means what it means. In fact, if I did not posses this prior immediate grasp, I couldn't recognize Russell's analysis as correct.

Realist interpreters prioritize the semantic *ontology* of elementary propositions underlying the "picture theory" *over* the issue of the immediacy of our grasp of sense (and thus neglect the issue of skepticism).

Of course, even though Wittgenstein claimed that ordinary propositions are logically in order as they are, he was wedded to certain tacit metaphysical commitments regarding what underlies that order, and these dictated the kind of tools he believed were needed to avoid or clear up confusion that can arise. But as Diamond suggests, this doesn't imply that he assumed that our normal understanding of the sense of a proposition required us to invoke the very underlying structure that vouchsafes this sense.

Above, we saw Child write in a footnote,

> Having advanced her positive suggestion about the treatment of sensation language in the *Tractatus*, Diamond herself goes on to make the point that the kind of 'grounds' that are revealed by Tractarian analysis of a sentence '**need not . . . have any connection with what, *in our actual practice*, we really do count as grounds for accepting that sentence as true**' (281) [my bold and italics]. As far as I can see, that acknowledgement completely undercuts the suggestion that the *Tractatus* contains something that is in any way at all a precursor of the later treatment of mental language in terms of symptoms and criteria. P. 153

This overlooks some indications Diamond provides in her paper about the significance of ordinary language, such as the following:

> (An important premise in the private language argument is that our ordinary everyday language is not in any way logically inadequate. Without that premise it might be thought that the absence of reference in our language to other people's private objects makes that language incapable of achieving its aims.) pp. 359-360

Propositions about other minds, in particular about sensations, are part and parcel of our ordinary language. The Russellian account of propositions about Bismarck's toothache (or self) implies a radical break in our immediate grasp of these propositions and so leads to skepticism, which is "offenbar unsinnig".

Conclusion

The issue of the immediacy of understanding or perception of ordinary language is also at stake in the *Investigations*, with the important difference that the tools for philosophical clarification we may need are drawn from our various ordinary language resources as well, and do not need to rely on any sort of technical apparatus.

Understanding not Interpretation

§201. This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.

Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.

§431. "There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding."

"Only in the act of understanding is it meant that we are to do THIS. The *order*—why, that is nothing but sounds, ink marks.—"

§432. Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? — In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?— Or is the *use* its life?