

On the Idea of Analysis in the Late Wittgenstein

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Wittgenstein is committed to the idea of analysis in the *Tractatus*. His logical analysis aims to reveal a hidden form of the proposition in terms of ultimate elements and their mutual logical relations. Wittgenstein abandoned this metaphysical commitment in his late philosophy. The aim of this paper is to show that Wittgenstein put forward a restricted idea of analysis throughout his philosophical writings. This idea relies on two theoretical distinctions. The first is that between cause and reason and the second between external and internal relations. I shall argue that the former distinction is a special case of the latter and so, for our purposes, we can take it as one fundamental difference. This difference might be confused in the surface grammar. The aim of Wittgenstein's analysis is to reveal the difference. Finally, I will indicate some philosophical problems that can be surmounted using this difference.

It is often argued – even by the most *resolute* interpreters¹ – that in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein is committed to the idea of analysis. In this respect, he was inspired by Russell's treatment of propositions containing definite descriptions. For Russell an analysis is “the discovery of the constituents and the manner of combination of a given complex” (Russell 1984, 119). This manner of combination of a complex proposition is its logical form, whose revelation is the goal of logical analysis. The logical form is given in terms of ultimate elements and their mutual logical relations. Wittgenstein adopted this idea with one important difference. While Russell was convinced that ordinary language does not need to reflect the proper logical form, for Wittgenstein ordinary language was perfectly in order. Ordinary language has to be, according to Russell, transformed into a logically ideal language in order to reflect the proper logical form. His logical analysis starts from ordinary language and proceeds to ideal language, from which the logical form can be derived. Wittgenstein did not see any need for this intermediate step. His logical analysis derives the logical form from ordinary language. Indeed, Wittgenstein maintained that a “proposition has one and only one complete analysis” (TLP, 3.25).

Wittgenstein repudiated much of this picture in his later philosophy. The ultimate goal of a philosophical investigation is to clear away misunderstandings that can be caused by false analogies between different regions of language. In order to dismantle a false analogy, some expressions can be removed or substituted for other expressions. This method may be called “analysis” only in a derived sense (see PI §90). Such an analysis bears no metaphysical commitment to ultimate logical elements and actually to the whole idea of one and only one correct logical form. Wittgenstein wrote indeed that “nothing is hidden” (PI §435).

¹ See Conant & Diamond 2004, 82.

I would like to argue that false analogies and *ipso facto* philosophical misunderstandings may be caused by ambiguous words and sentences and, further, that it was Wittgenstein's intention to tackle such ambiguities. To do so, first one has to detect an ambiguity and, second, there has to be a rule to resolve the ambiguity. Sometimes it is enough to point out that an expression causing problems is ambiguous. But even this presupposes a generic distinction that makes it possible to detach separate meanings. In what follows I will examine two such distinctions in Wittgenstein's works.

Cause and reason

The distinction between cause and reason can be found in Wittgenstein's remarks from the 1930s onwards.² It has proved to be a very powerful tool to surmount philosophical problems. First, take a look at expressions that could be ambiguous this way. The conjunction "because" may introduce a statement of the cause or of the reason. The conjunction "why" has the same ambiguity. Even the word "cause" itself shows the cause-reason ambiguity. Consider the following examples from Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*:

'Cause' is used in very many different ways, e.g.

- (1) "What is the cause of unemployment?" "What is the cause of this expression?" [Experiment and statistics]
- (2) "What was the cause of your jumping?" "That noise." [Reason]
- (3) "What was the cause of that wheel going round?" You trace a mechanism. [Mechanism] (LA 1966 II.12)

Wittgenstein wants to reserve the expression "cause" for a (relation of) mechanical causality between two events. A cause in this sense can be found statistically or by tracing an underlying mechanism. The relation of "being a reason for" connects two propositions. Apart from the reason, Wittgenstein speaks sometimes of the *motive* or the *ground*.³ Between a proposition and its reason there must be a conceptual (logical or even mathematical, e.g. a calculation) relation. Let me outline the differences between these two sorts of relations. One could say that a proposition *somehow* contains its reason unlike a cause, which is not contained in its effect. The cause-effect-relation is only probabilistic; a cause and its effect are

² The identification or unification of cause and reason is embodied in the Latin expression "causa sive ratio" of modern times which can be found in Spinoza or Leibniz. They used this expression *inter alia* in formulating the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which states that "everything must have reason or cause". Schopenhauer, who might have inspired Wittgenstein here, in his dissertation *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* accuses the philosophical tradition of confusing different kinds of reasons.

³ "The difference between the grammars of 'reason' and 'cause' is quite similar to that between the grammars of 'motive' and 'cause'." (BBB, 15) "Or is the previous experience the cause of my certainty, not its ground?" (PI §325)

only cases of concomitance. This is true when we arrived at this relation statistically, but also when we know the mechanism. A logical relation of having a reason is, on the other hand, rigid and strict. Here is an example:

"I write the number '16' here *because* it says 'x²' there."

It might appear that some causality was operating here, but that would be a confusion between 'reason' and 'cause'. (PG §61)

If I calculate the second power of four, the result will be 16, *because* this is the correct way of performing this operation, i.e. this result is in accordance with the rule of squaring. I might, however, make a mistake, *because* I did not pay much attention to the calculation. There is a certain probability of making a mistake. The first "because" introduces a reason, the second one a cause. That the second power of four is sixteen holds with certainty. And again, the mistake also has a ground: The second power of four is not 17 *because* this violates the rule of squaring (see OC §74).

The next dissimilarity between reason and cause, which can hardly be overstressed, is that not all propositions need to have a reason as opposed to all events having a cause or causes.⁴ Wittgenstein writes: "A *reason* can only be given *within* a game. The links of the chain of reasons come to an end, at the boundary of the game. (Reason and cause.)" (PG, §97) There are propositions that cannot (or do not need to) be justified within a given language-game: "And this again joins on to the confusion between cause and reason. *We need have no reason to follow the rule as we do.* The chain of reasons has an end." (BBB, 143) Rules are precisely propositions we do not need to give reasons for – in a given language-game. This does not exclude the possibility that there could be a reason required in another language-game. The chain of reasons reaches (sooner or later) the boundary of a language-game. If this boundary were exceeded then it would be nonsense or at least another language-game. This implies that there could be unexplainable facts.⁵

Wittgenstein uses this difference to cope with philosophical confusions. Let me mention some of these: (1) The meaning of a word is for him given in the explanation of meaning. The same word might be connected with a characteristic sensation. There is the cause-effect relation between the uttering of a word and its characteristic sensation, but an explanation of meaning might give a reason for the uttering of the word (PG, p. 60). (2) Pleasure is not a sensation, for pleasure is always "in something", which means it has a reason. Between a sensation and pleasure is only the cause-effect relation (Z §507). (3) Wittgenstein sees no way for causal relations to achieve the certainty of logical relations. This would presuppose a sort of super-mechanism – that is, a mechanism that cannot break down. Our mind is, however,

⁴ Wittgenstein hereby denies the Principle of Sufficient Reason for propositions and facts while he preserves the Principle for material objects and events.

⁵ Cf. PI, §1: "Explanations come to an end somewhere."

no such super-mechanism. Therefore, mechanical processes in our brains cannot explain the rigidity of human reasoning (LA 1966 II.23ff).

Internal and external relations

The terminology of internal and external relations was common among Wittgenstein's philosophical colleagues in the early 20th century. Most significantly, Russell and Moore argued against Neo-Hegelians that all relations cannot be internal. The distinction plays a very central role in Wittgenstein's early *Notebooks* and in the *Tractatus* as well. Wittgenstein defines an internal relation (and internal property) so that "it is unthinkable that its object [or objects] should not possess it." (TLP 4.123). There lies an internal relation between language and the world in the heart of the *Tractatus*. Internal relations persist, however, between (typically) two structures as abstract objects, i.e. forms (4.122). Therefore, what an expression (a sign) shares with reality is its logical form.⁶

There is elementary disagreement among scholars concerning this internal relation of depicting. According to the traditional (metaphysical) readings of the *Tractatus*, this internal relation connects the logical structure of language and the logical form of the world, which comprises how elementary objects are combined in states of affairs. According to recent opposite approaches, the relation of depicting persists between a sign and what it signifies (the anti-metaphysical approach, McGinn) or the distinction between internal and external relations as such is inconsistent (the resolute reading, Diamond).⁷ Although I believe the textual evidence supports rather the traditional metaphysical view, the metaphysical and anti-metaphysical views can be reconciled here. Consider once again Wittgenstein's remark quoted in footnote 6. A sign signifies something due to its internal property (i.e. unary relation), which is identical (i.e. related by the internal relation of identity) to the same property of a state of affairs.

Whatever the case may be, Wittgenstein in his late philosophy conceives internal relations within language only. Already in the *Tractatus* (4.123), he gives an example of an internal relation between two color shades. Much later in his last *Remarks on Colours* (§1), he points out that the same proposition may express an internal as well as an external relation. The proposition "X is lighter than Y" could be a temporal proposition expressing an external relation between two objects or an internal relation between two color shades. Wittgenstein varies this example in other places: A similarity between two faces could be an external relation between two men or an internal relation between two shapes (LW I, §155nn). The outward form of the proposition is the same. The proposition is, however, ambiguous with respect to the expression of an internal or external relation. This ambiguity occurs and causes

⁶ "Since language stands in internal relations to the world, it and these relations determine the logical possibility of facts. If we have a significant sign it must stand in a particular internal relation to a structure. Sign and relation determine unambiguously the logical form of the thing signified." (TB 25.4.15, p. 42)

⁷ For an overview see McGinn 2010.

confusion only if one treats such a proposition in isolation. If a sufficient context of a language-game were provided, no such confusion could arise.

Thus, a given proposition can express an internal relation in one language-game and an external relation in another. For a relation to be internal, it must express internal properties of language or of a language-game. Propositions expressing internal relations are, strictly speaking, not genuine propositions at all. They are expressing rules of a language-game. To put it simply, internal relations are directed to language, external relations to what language is about. To reveal this, in conclusion, is the ultimate goal of logical or linguistic analysis, which Wittgenstein always maintained.

An internal relation is a conceptual relation, since it holds between language forms, and there must be operations transforming one form into another and revealing that these forms are, in fact, identical. Then the relation between a proposition and its reason must be an internal relation, for it is conceptual and such a connection cannot be contingent. On the other hand, the cause-effect relation holds between separate objects or events and thus must be external. The cause-effect relation is actually an instance of external relation par excellence.

Like the reason-cause distinction, Wittgenstein used this more general and abstract distinction between internal and external relations to make philosophical problems clear. Here are the most important ones: (1) Russell's causal account of intention is based on external relations. Hence, intention and its object are, for him, distinct objects or events. Wittgenstein maintains, to the contrary, that there must be an internal relation of identity: "For expecting that p will be the case must be the same as expecting that this expectation will be fulfilled" (PB 1975, 25, p. 65).⁸ (2) Mathematical calculations demonstrate internal properties of structures (RFM I, 99) rather than external properties of objects. The relation between a mathematical proposition and its proof is an internal one (RFM VII, 6ff). (3) The importance of the phenomenon of seeing-as lies in the fact that some apparent descriptions of objects (i.e. ascribing external properties) are actually expressions of internal relations. If one sees a picture of a rabbit as a duck, then it is a case of perceiving an internal relation between this rabbit-shape and the concept of a duck – or a duck-shape. (See PI II, p. 212.)

References

References to Wittgenstein's works use the abbreviations introduced by Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen.

Conant, James and Diamond, Cora 2004 "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely", in: Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*. London: Routledge, 46-99.

⁸ Cf. „It is in language that an expectation and its fulfillment make contact.“ (PI, §445)

McGinn, Marie 2010 "Wittgenstein and Internal Relations", *European Journal of Philosophy* 18(4), 495-509.

Russell, Bertrand 1984 *Theory of Knowledge: The 1913 Manuscript*, London: George Allen and Unwin.