

# How could he try to try to whistle it?

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## 1) What is philosophy?<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy is not a natural science. The purpose of philosophy is not to build general theories or to construct philosophical propositions, such as synthetic *a priori* judgments, but it is to logically clarify thoughts. "Philosophy is not a body of doctrines but an activity". In philosophy, you cannot do any hypothesis. Philosophy is not an empirical enquiry but an *a priori* one. His aim is, he says in 4.113, to "set limits to the much disputed sphere of natural sciences."

The main thesis of the book, which is expressed in the preface, is that problems of philosophy are based on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language. The only thing one can do with philosophical propositions is to eliminate them because they do not have a clear sense. As he says in the preface<sup>2</sup> "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." When one meets some philosophical problem, as for example "Does the external world exist?", one is tempted to give them some solutions which consists in philosophical propositions. Generally, when, one is confronted with such questions, one does not find a unique apparently suitable answer but several contradictory answers, even though, all the sources of argumentation are dried up. In these cases, there are three different possibilities. Firstly, one can cut short the discussion in favour one of the possible answers. Secondly one can conclude that things are contradictory. Thirdly, one can investigate the foundations of our theses in order to find the point(s) of tension or disagreement. The last possibility is the one chosen by Wittgenstein. To investigate the foundations of our theses, the foundations of what we say, one needs to clarify the sense of what one says. The way to do this is the analysis of ordinary language. That's why, in 4.0031, he defines philosophy as critic of language. The correct method in philosophy, he says in 6.53, is: "To say nothing except what can be said, propositions of natural sciences [...]. Whenever, someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions." With the logical clarification of thoughts, one should be able to eliminate metaphysical propositions; so that the propositions of natural sciences would enter into considerations. The solution of a philosophical problem is not a philosophical proposition but the disappearance of the problem (4.003) and of its apparent solutions.

## 2) The project of analysis of ordinary language

The project of analysis of ordinary language aims at distinguishing sensical propositions and nonsensical propositions. The project is based on at least three premises. 1) Sometimes, ordinary language deceives us because its apparent logical structure is not necessarily its real logical structure. 2) One has the idea of perfect logical language in which nonsense are intrinsically excluded. Such a language is the *ideography*. 3) The translation of ordinary

language in logical language is the mean to draw the frontier between sensical and nonsensical propositions.

In 3.323, he writes that in "every day language (3.323), it frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different symbols – or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way." If one is tempted, he says in 3.324, to assert some philosophical propositions, it is due to the fact that the apparent logical structure of ordinary language is not necessarily the real logical one, as the signs we use to express thoughts do not necessarily and immediately reflect what they mean.

The logical imperfection of ordinary language is not something inevitable. In order to avoid it, one must use a perfect logical language. A perfect logical language, he says in 3.325, consists in "a sign-language that excludes them by using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by logical grammar – by logical syntax." *Such a language is symbolic logic*. Symbolic logic is the universal grammar of every possible language. For Frege and Russell, in quite different ways, logic was conceived as a science. It was presented as an axiomatic, with its primitive's symbols and propositions. For Wittgenstein, there is no *real* primitive's a symbol or propositions in logic. The only logical constant is a form, and not the name of a logical entity. Logical propositions are tautologies or contradictions that depict no fact, but the frontier of the world. In that manner, they are empty of sense. We can notice the fact the criticism of ordinary language depends on the idea of a perfect logical language.

The translation of ordinary language into perfect logical language is the way to draw the frontier between sensical and nonsensical propositions. What is the difference between a sensical and a nonsensical proposition? The fundamental point of the theory of proposition is that a proposition is not a name. As D. Peirce showed in 1977<sup>3</sup>, this point is a criticism of Russell's theories of judgment<sup>4</sup>. In 3.144 he writes "*Situation can be described but not given names*." The reason why a proposition cannot be a name is that a proposition can be false, not a name. One can assert or deny a proposition. But one cannot assert or deny a name, because in the first case the proposition would be redundant, and in the second case, it would be nonsensical. A proposition has a sense when it has truth-conditions or if one *knows*<sup>5</sup> what the case is when it is true

<sup>3</sup> The relation between Russell's theory of judgment and Wittgenstein picture theory of proposition. *Philosophical review*.

<sup>4</sup> Russell's theories of judgment are criticism of Bradley, Moore, Meinong, Frege, Mach and James and Kant.

<sup>5</sup> The use of such a term is source of tension. 1) If one can know only what is describable, what can be expressed in a proposition, 2) and if logical form is absolutely ineffable, how is it possible to *know* logical form or truth-conditions? Is there some ineffable knowledge? Knowledge one cannot say when it is true or when it is false. If one accept this, we enter into contradiction with the fundamental principle of the theory of proposition: a proposition has a sense iff it has truth-conditions. We believe that the picture theory of proposition is contradictory in itself. That's why, to escape the contradiction we must not deny it or say an opposite thing, as many commentators affirm and as Wittgenstein did, but we investigate the foundation of the contradiction in order to correct it. I suppose that it is, as we will see, the only way to solve the problem of the relation between conception and practice of philosophy in Wittgenstein's

<sup>1</sup> See the preface, 4.002 to 4.0031, 4.111 to 4.116, 6.5 to 7.

<sup>2</sup> See also 4.116 and in 7

and what the case is when it is false. One can understand a proposition without knowing if it is now true or false. The sense of a proposition is independent of the world in that manner. But in another sense, it is not independent because, for him, it is necessary that a proposition can be true or false. To know if a proposition is true, one must compare it with reality. There is no necessary proposition. To represent something, a proposition must be a picture of a fact. And it is a picture of a fact if and only if the proposition has the same number of elements than the fact it represents. It is also possible to say that it must have the same logical form. The logical form is not a further element. Logical form does not exist apart from the elements of the proposition. Understanding a proposition is knowing the totality of its use. In other words, when one understands a proposition one cannot fail while using it even if what he says is true or false. In order to understand it, one must get its constituents and their meaning, the objects they *mean*, and to know an object is to know the totality of its possibilities of occurrence in states of affairs (2.012 to 2.0123). Logical form is neither an object nor a fact, so one cannot *name* or *describe* it. *The logical form is indescribable*, it can only be *shown*. Whoever knows the constituents of the proposition understand its sense, sees its logical form. The ineffability of the logical form is absolute. It says that, the proposition *p* does not *describe* what its sense is, and none can do this. It does not say that the proposition *p* cannot describe what its sense is, but another proposition can do this.

A meaningless proposition is a proposition in which at least one element lacks meaning. When such a case appears, the whole proposition lacks logical form and has as much sense as “tcheuntchewa tobicha” which is gibberish. It has absolutely no sense, or denotes no reality.

### 3) The failure of the project of logical analysis of ordinary language.

The success of the project is based on our ability to clarify the propositions of ordinary language. What is such a thing? What is an elucidation? Its function is to clarify the meaning of a constituent part of a proposition. Wittgenstein wrote in 3.263:

“The meaning of primitive signs can be explained by means of elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain the primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are already known.”

Wittgenstein's explanation is circular. It says that to clarify the meaning of a constituent of a proposition, one must use a proposition containing the sign we want to explain. But to understand the elucidation, one must understand the sign we indeed search to explain.

Moreover, the absolute ineffability of logical form implies that any proposition could explicit the sense of a proposition. If it was possible, a proposition would have a sense if and only if another proposition was true otherwise, which contradicts the ontological commitments (2.0211, 2.0212).

But, on the other hand, concretize the project of analysis necessitates our actual capacity to recognize that such or such part of such propositional sign is essential to its sense.

So it is difficult to see how we could actually do the clarification of our language. It, therefore, seems impossible to draw the frontier between sensical and nonsensical propositions. For the distinction between saying and showing entails the impossibility to describe the logical form, the impossibility to concretize the project can be seen as a consequence of it.

### 4) Applying the theory of proposition:

Others consequences of the distinction can be seen. In the last pages of the book, Wittgenstein applies his theory of symbolism to different subjects such as mathematics, ethic, moral, aesthetic, natural sciences, religion and philosophy. In each case, it is said that propositions are nonsensical. Especially, in 6.54 Wittgenstein writes a very famous and baffling remark:

“My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as step – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.”

So, if one understands Wittgenstein, believes that he is right, one must see that his propositions are nonsensical, that they are neither true nor false, and cannot be true or false, which is not comfortable.

### 5) The problem

We have seen three facts: 1) The *Tractatus* has a project: to draw the frontier between sensical and nonsensical propositions and to eliminate nonsensical propositions. To succeed, the author needs to analyse ordinary language. 2) The project does not work, so it is not possible to draw the frontier. 3) But, Wittgenstein nevertheless declares that some propositions are nonsensical. As a result, we lack determination for the use of the concept of nonsense, but meanwhile the concept is being used. *It seems that analysis is impossible and in the same time that it is effective. The question is « how is it possible? »*

This paradoxical situation is generated by the distinction between showing and saying, by the idea that logical form is absolutely ineffable. So another question could be: How is it possible that the distinction between showing and saying has two conflicting consequences?

### 6) Possible answers:

To finish we can see three ways of answering the problem we arose. We can distinguish three ways of treating the problem.

1) One can say that it is *really* a contradiction, which is the interpretation of Peter Hacker or David Pears. The ladder metaphor means, as the second Wittgenstein suggested, that we must abandon our need for metaphysical explanations because every attempt to assert such propositions falls into nonsense.

2) One can say that there is absolutely no contradiction, even an apparent one, because the analysis of language is not the method of the *Tractatus*. That the way chosen by the defenders of the *New Wittgenstein*, Cora Diamond, James Conant. For them, the ladder metaphor

works. This problem can be simply formulated as follows: Is it possible, and how, to do philosophy when one think that philosophy is nonsense?

means the same thing than for M.Hacker. In each case, we must throw away the *Tractatus*.

3) One can say that there is a contradiction and that we must not be aware of the ladder metaphor because, analysis does not work, so Tractarian propositions cannot be nonsensical. This point of view was defended in 1982 in the *Australasian journal of philosophy* by Brenda Judge and Leonard Goddard. For them, we must correct the ontology and the theory of proposition in order to avoid their dramatic consequences for common sense.

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