

*The Glory and the Misery of Ludwig Wittgenstein**

THE *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* appeared in 1921; the *Philosophical Investigations*, posthumously, in 1953. Wittgenstein will live through these two books. The contrast between them is striking. In the author's view, and not in his alone, the second repudiates the first. As his epigones see it, his glory is the second. The first they consider, however tenderly and reverently, a relative failure. As I see it, Wittgenstein's glory is the *Tractatus*; his misery, the *Investigations*. The disagreement could not be more complete. Yet I agree with the epigones that the connection between the two books is very close indeed. I see in the second the reaction, dictated by the council of despair, to the relative failure of the first.

The *Tractatus*, then, if I am right, is a glorious failure. It is also, I am deeply convinced, an achievement of the first rank. Nor is that paradoxical. None of our predecessors achieved more. No one among us and our successors will do better. The fundamental metaphysical problems are too difficult for this to be otherwise. Fortunately, their number is small. Even the secondary ones, though quite a few, are not too many. Good philosophers therefore do not pursue many questions. Rather, they are pursued by a few which they articulate ever more richly and explore ever more deeply, down toward the fundamental ones. The few great among the good can rethink a fundamental problem on their own. Such a problem always consists of a group of dialectically connected questions. To rethink it is either to discover a new dialectical connection within the group or, at the very highest, to affect these connections even more radically by discovering a new

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question to be added to the group. The new question permits and requires new answers. The glorious failures are those who knew how to ask the new question but did not find the new answer.

Wittgenstein all through his philosophical life was obsessed by two fundamental problems. What is the nature of logical truth? Call this the first. What is the nature of mind? Call this the second. Both have shaped both books. The first dominates the *Tractatus*; the second, the *Investigations*. On the first, he asked the decisive new question, led a part of the way toward the new answer. On the second, he merely misled, lending specious plausibility to a stale old answer.

(1) There are no philosophical propositions. Those passing for such are neither true nor false but, literally, nonsense. (2) The illusion that keeps us from seeing through this sort of nonsense is linguistic. (3) To destroy the illusion, or, in a phrase that has become famous, to show the fly the way out of the bottle, is to direct attention to the ineffable, which language shows but cannot say. That is Wittgenstein's conception of the philosophical enterprise. (1) states his nihilism; (2) is the root of the linguistic turn; (3), that of the therapeutic approach. I reject (1) and (3). There are philosophical propositions. Nor is there anything ineffable. Wittgenstein's insistence on the linguistic turn, more radical and more profound than Russell's, is the other half of his glory. But he executed it wrongly, herostratically. That makes (2) his other glorious failure, which, since our questions as well as our answers depend on our conception of the philosophical enterprise, made the other two, the glorious as well as the miserable one, inevitable. So I shall next execute the right linguistic turn.

(1) Words are used either *commonsensically* or *philosophically*. A proposition in which at least one word is used philosophically is a philosophical proposition. As such, philosophical uses are unintelligible. But they can and must be made intelligible by explicating them, i.e., by talking commonsensically about them. Thus explicated, a philosophical proposition says something about the world, which, as the case may be, is either true or false. (2) Every systematically constructed language *shows* some things which cannot without futility be *expressed* in it. These things, though, far from being ineffable, can and for certain purposes must, be expressed by talking about the language and what it talks about. Jointly, (1) and (2) are the gist of the right linguistic turn. Technically, they are equally fundamental. Nontechnically, (1) is the heart of the matter. So I leave (2) until later, comment next on (1).

"Bodies don't exist, only minds do" is a classical philosophical proposition. "Minds don't exist, only bodies do" is another. "Charac-

ters don't exist, only individuals do" is a third. If the words are all taken commonsensically, such propositions are not at all nonsensical. Rather, they are patently and blatantly false; so patently and blatantly indeed that only a madman could assert any of them. Yet each has been asserted by some philosophers. According to Wittgenstein, these men either futilely tried to express the ineffable, or, confusingly and themselves confused, presented as an assertion about the world what is at best one about the way we use language. I believe that these men often succeeded very well in directing attention to certain pervasive, or, as one says, categorial features of the world. Only, I also insist that these features can and must be talked about commonsensically.

Classical ontology is dominated by the several ontological uses of 'exist' and 'existence'. Since the core of all fundamental problems is ontological, I shall next indicate the explications of two such uses.

(a) *If something is presented to me, so is its existence.* The formula explicates the use. To have "existence" in this sense and to have "ontological status" is one thing and not two. The idea is commonsensical. Yet some comments will be helpful. *One.* Something may exist without being presented. If converted, the formula is no longer commonsensical. *Two.* Perception is one kind of presentation. Direct awareness is another. Do both kinds make the formula the truism it must be if it is to serve its purpose? By this question hangs a huge body of dialectic. For my purpose tonight the answer does not matter. *Third.* In such sentences as 'There is a coffee house around the corner' existence is represented by the phrase 'there is'. Existence(a) or ontological status can always be so expressed. But we also say, commonsensically, that there is a prime number between 4 and 6. Are we then prepared to grant some ontological status to such "entities" as numbers? Wittgenstein, we shall see, is not. I am. The way I just used 'entity' is ontologically neutral. It will be convenient to have this neutral word available.

(b) *What exists is simple.* The formula explicates another philosophical use of 'exist', provided only we understand this very special, though commonsensical use of 'simple'. An entity is thus simple if the only way of directly referring to it, in any language, is by naming it. A name, in this very special sense, is also called a label. That conveys the idea that a name can only be attached to what is or has been presented. There is also the idea that a label as such does not tell us anything about what it labels except, of course, that it exists(a). This, though, we shall see, is not quite correct in the case of linguistic labels or names. In a systematically constructed language a name is, of course,

