

The Linguistic Turn

A. Example Sentences

*Which of the following questions are a problem with **language** and which about the **substance**?*

1. Is the ball red?
2. Is there a bad smell in here?
3. Are people frightened of change?
4. Is it true that managers should be in charge?
5. Do accounts reflect a company's financial position?
6. It is true that everything is relative?
7. Is John Snagge is a nasty person?
8. How can we avoid negative thinking?
9. Does free will exist?
10. Is there such a thing as 'charisma'?
11. Is truth simple in an ultimate sense?
12. Are we able to ever learn from our mistakes?

B. A text

Wittgenstein. David Pears. In *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 1996, pp. 685-701. Part 2. The General Character of Wittgenstein's Philosophy.
<http://cfh.ufsc.br/~maf/fil/pears.htm>

Wittgenstein's philosophy is difficult to place in the history of ideas largely because it is anti-theoretical. It is true that in his early work he did produce a theory of logic and language, but it was a theory which demonstrated its own meaninglessness. That was a paradox which he presented [...] in a metaphor borrowed from [...] Sextus Empiricus (c.150-c.225): 'Anyone who understands me eventually recognises [my propositions] as nonsensical, when he has used them as steps - to climb up beyond them. [...] After 1929 he completely avoided theorising. The task of philosophy [...] was never to explain but only to describe. Since western philosophy had mainly been conceived as a search for explanations at a very high level of generality, his work stood to one side of the tradition.

Wittgenstein was not a sceptic. The reason why he rejected philosophical theorising was not that he thought it too risky and liable to error, but because he believed that it was the wrong way for philosophers to work. Philosophy could not, and should not try, to emulate science. [...] His method was to lead any philosophical theory back to the point where it originated, which might be some very simple routine, observable even in the life of animals but rendered unintelligible by the demand for an intellectual justification. [...] His aim was to cure this kind of illusion by a therapy that would gradually lead the sufferer to recognise, and almost to recreate its origin, and so to escape from its domination.

Philosophers are expected to be able to abstract the general from the particular, but Wittgenstein's gift was the opposite - a rare ability to see the particular in the general. He could demolish a theory with a few appropriate counter-examples. His method was to describe an everyday situation which brings a philosophical speculation down to earth...