

# 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. Does she have 'charisma'?
11. Is truth simple in an ultimate sense?
12. Are we able to 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...

## **C. Passage about the Linguistic Turn, by P.M.S.Hacker**

The linguistic turn,... is a ‘fundamental gambit as to method’ agreed upon by two different groups of linguistic philosophers: ‘ordinary language philosophers’ (...) and ‘ideal language philosophers’ (...). The methodological gambit is to talk about the world by talking about a suitable language. The disagreement between the two groups of philosophers turns, ..., on what is to count as a language and what makes it suitable as an object of investigation that will shed light for philosophical purposes on the nature of the world, in particular on ontology.

Why should the linguistic turn be taken? In Bergmann’s view, for three reasons.

- First, words are used either ordinarily, i.e. ‘commonsensically’, or philosophically. Philosophical uses of words are prima facie unintelligible, and require commonsensical explication. That is a requirement of the method.
- Second, much of the obscurity of pre-linguistic-philosophy stems from failure to distinguish linguistic statements from meta-linguistic statements. The method is the safest way to avoid the ensuing confusions.
- Third, there are some things which any language can only show. ... Such things... can be spoken about, ... in a meta-linguistic discussion of the syntax and interpretation of a language. Hence, again, the linguistic turn.

Ordinary language philosophers, according to Bergmann, talk about the language we speak. They study communication, explore how we learn language, and how we communicate by using it. This, he declared, is a psychological study.... Since we use ordinary language to communicate about the world, there is some sense in which it ‘must therefore be a picture of the world’, and must, in a minimal sense, be a ‘suitable’ language by the study of which one can engage in ontological investigation. ... But because the primary use of ordinary language is communication, it is actually most unsuitable as a philosophical tool. What is needed is an ‘ideal language’, or, more accurately, a schema of a language, which adequately pictures the world. And that is the instrumental goal of ideal language philosophers.

## **D. What might be language, and what meta-language?**

- i. The 192 bus goes to Stockport.
- ii. Its true that the 192 bus goes to Stockport.
- iii. The statement “the 192 bus goes to Stockport” is true.
- iv. All 192 buses go to Stockport.
- v. The sign “192” on the front of buses tells us that it goes to Stockport.
- vi. Truth is not like a bus timetable.
- vii. Reality is unreliable.
- viii. One can always rely on a 192 bus to get you to Stockport.
- ix. This is a meta-linguistic statement about 192 buses and where they go.
- x. If the driver confirms where the bus is going then it does go there.
- xi. A terrorist got into Stockport bus station and has wickedly changed all the numbers around.