

Three ways of understanding the world

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Abstract

I have explained briefly three ways of understanding the world, the ways as appeared in naïve realism, categorical framework and relative framework respectively. After giving a brief exposition of these three alternative approaches I have tried to show how later Wittgenstein could be placed. For later Wittgenstein form of life is a guiding principle, with the change of a framework our interpretation of the world is changed.. In the Tractatus Wittgenstein accepted a unique logic and came to the conclusion that what is meaningful in the actual world must be meaningful in all possible worlds. But in the Investigations he has reached to a different conclusion that we have to see the actual use, from the rigid explanation of meaning to the non-rigid explanation of meaning

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That the external world is real and is directly revealed to us by means of our senses is one of the most fundamental and deep-rooted convictions of man. This is naïve realism according to which objects are there in the world and are revealed to us by our senses exactly as they are.

But naïve realism is rejected on the ground that it can hardly explain illusions or doubtful perceptions. That is perception depends not only on the nature of objects but on the perceiving mind as well.

Secondly, the understanding of the world may be possible by the help of a rigid categorial framework¹. Both Kant and Strawson maintain that everything is grasped within a framework. The framework is neither given in experience nor is it the result of inductive generalization, it is an a priori framework shared by common men the justification of which is self-evident.

Kant shows that the sense impressions produced by the thing-in-themselves are interpreted and systematically interpreted by mind through forms and categories. Here, though the world of experience is mind made yet it is not illusory. It is objective and common to all because the forms and categories by which experience is constructed are universal. As ways of thinking are the same each one of us refers to the world of objects in the same way. This shows here that Kant is a realist and he accepts that there is something permanent.

Thirdly, the world may be understood by the help of a relativistic or non-rigid categorial framework. Here we have to first define a categorial frame. According to Korner, a philosopher does not follow natural systems but the categorial frame when he uses a method to uphold, change or exhibit a certain conceptual structure. Korner defines a categorial-framework in the following way:

To indicate a thinker's categorial framework is to make explicit

- i) his categorization of objects
- ii) the constitutive and individuating principles associated with the maximal kinds of his categorization
- iii) the logic underlying his thinking²

Korner uses the term maximal kinds for natural classes. So, the first phrase of categorial framework is to determine maximal kinds which are groups of individuals and which are natural. Secondly, we have to specify a method for individuating and identifying members of the maximal kinds. The categorial framework, however, is not arbitrary, it is guided by logic. So the third requirement of a categorial framework is to state the logic which guides the categorial framework.

Now, by non-rigid categorial frame we mean with the change of paradigm the interpretation of the world itself is changed.

In Kuhn's words:

Examining the record of the past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places³

According to Korner, Tractatus is merely a metaphysical model of Principia Mathematica of Russell and Whitehead⁴. In the Tractatus Wittgenstein is concerned with explaining the descriptive model. Since, description is an absolutistic term or "classificatory term" in Carnap's language degrees of description cannot be possible either one is able to describe or not. Again, the use of the term description clearly implies that there cannot be alternative models and the logic exhausts all moves – possible and actual.

Description, according to Wittgenstein in the Tractatus, has only one purpose which is to mirror or picture reality. In his own words:

The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world.

To all of them the logical structure is common (TLP. 4.914)

In the fact that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the symphony out of the score, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct the symphony from the line on a gramophone record and from this again – by means of the first rule – construct the score, herein lies the internal similarity between these things which at first sight seem to be entirely different. And the rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the

language of the musical score. It is the rule of translation of this language into the language of the gramophone record. (TLP.4.0141)

Thus in the Tractatus, according to Wittgenstein, language does not give any scope for alternative sets of ontological commitments there being a unique manner of representing reality in language.⁵ Strawson agrees with early Wittgenstein in upholding a unique conceptual framework in his book *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*.

For early Wittgenstein what is meaningful in the actual world is meaningful in the possible world and vice-versa. But in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein comes to hold that with the change of paradigm the understanding of the world changes. Wittgenstein was heavily influenced by the Mathematics paradigm.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein seems to have shifted from his earlier position in his later works Wittgenstein no longer spoke of the uniqueness criterion for meaning and understanding. He introduced 'use' as an important aspect of language understanding. The meaning of a sentence can no longer be known merely by the tools of logical analysis. The meaning is to be known by its use. '...the meaning of a word is its use in the language' (PI.43). The introduction of use brings about a major shift in Wittgenstein's position. From his former rigid approach to meaning he shifted to a non-rigid explanation of meaning. This can be made explicit with the help of an example. The expression 'conjugal-love' is defined to be something heterosexual. This is reflected in literature, in art, in philosophy, in every sphere of life by which we are influenced. And on the basis of this expression terms like 'family', 'marriage', 'responsibility', duty, etc. are defined. Now, if science fiction turns into reality and cloning becomes a regular feature and if the dividing criteria of the human race is no longer the male female dichotomy, and if all future human beings are hermaphrodites then this would bring about a radical change in reality. Consequently for the new generation terms like 'love', 'marriage', etc. would have different nuances. The new generations will use the same terms, they will convey different meanings. Here, the difference of meaning can be traced back to different forms of life.

In the example given above maximal kinds do not differ either in the actual or in the possible world. In both worlds maximal kinds are human beings. But the identification principle will change. In the present world human beings are identified either as male or female. In the above mentioned possible world of science fiction an individual can no longer be identified in such a way because in that world all human beings are hermaphrodite – a person combining the qualities of both sexes. But in the possible world of hermaphrodite the male female dichotomy no longer exists. A novel criterion of identification needs to be introduced.

It might violate the conventional example given for excluded middle instantiated by the examples like either male or female and not both.

Here, it may be said that this is a mere thought experiment construed to clarify the position arising out of the acceptance of relative framework.

Thus, among the three interpretations of the world the first is that the world is perceived as it is, the second is that the world may be understood by the help of a rigid categorical framework and the third is that the interpretation of the world is possible by non-rigid categorical framework.

The above exposition of these three alternative positions suggests that the Tractatus cannot be interpreted to be an instantiation of a non-rigid or relativistic categorical framework. The Tractarian position is too rigid to permit any sort of relativism as is clear from the statement 'There is one and only one complete analysis of the proposition'. (TLP 3.25) but whether the Tractatus is to be understood either as a model of naïve realism or as an instance of a rigid categorical framework is a matter of debate. This debate is, however, not relevant to our present purpose which is focused on placing later Wittgenstein according to our tripartite classification and not the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus. The placing of the Investigations according to the above classification is by no means an easy task. That the Investigations cannot be understood in terms of naïve realism is abundantly clear. What is not clear nor easily decided upon is whether the Investigations accommodates a rigid interpretation of the type found in Kant or Strawson's Individuals or whether the Investigations fit in better to a Khunian frame, a non-rigid relativistic frame. Formidable arguments have been given by very capable thinkers in favour of both positions. We find Stephan Korner arguing in favour of interpreting later Wittgenstein in the light of Kant when he says:

'It could similarly be argued that Wittgenstein's later philosophy manifests many characteristic features of Kant's constructivism⁶. Then there is also the other way of understanding the Investigations as a thesis upholding relativism. In recent time this interpretation has been made popular by the works of Kripke⁷ and Write⁸. Instead of seeing the Investigations as propounding a Kantian type rigid construction they understand the text as a thesis in favour of pluralistic constructivism⁹ of what we have labeled non-rigid categorical framework. We are following Robert Kirk's¹⁰ interpretation of Kripke's Wittgensteinian sceptic here. Kirk writes:

Kripke's Wittgensteinian sceptic maintains that

" i) There are no facts in a particular person's life history which determine what they mean by any given word or justify the claim that they mean this rather than that.

And the same sceptic goes on to conclude that:

ii) There is nothing which determines what anyone means by anything or justifies the claim that anyone means this rather than that.¹¹

Write holds a view similar to Kripke by maintaining that Wittgenstein's idea is that my meaning x rather than y is not a matter of fact at all.¹² Write maintains this view in his later article also.¹³

The change of a framework may take place in two different ways, viz., the framework may change radically or a mere extension of the framework may occur. But when faced with a paradigm shift or a change in a categorial framework how does one interpret the shift? There are no non-controversial criteria by the help of which one can distinguish a paradigm shift from a paradigm extension. Intuitively it seems to me, if change occurs in three characteristics i.e. if there is a change in maximal kinds, in identification principles and in logic, the framework would be referred to as a case of radical change. On the other hand, the framework is considered to be a different framework if maximal kinds remain the same but the identification principles or logic or both change. In this case, the change in the framework may be called an extension.

A decision on this point is crucial for a complete discussion of the role and function of form of life as it occurs in Wittgenstein's work. The problem relates to the question of whether form of life plays the role of a rigid framework or a non-rigid framework and if it has the role of a non-rigid framework then do changes in the framework take place abruptly or gradually. In this context a decision will also have to be taken regarding the criterion that differentiates gradualness from abruptness¹⁴ while acknowledging the importance of this problem we regret our inability to do justice to it in the present thesis. We are inclined, however, to interpret the Investigations as denying radical shifts in the form of life.

The reason is that the form of life constitutes our system of reference, our way of understanding a language without the aid of which we are unable to understand a language. A radical shift in a paradigm would require us to give up our existing form of life so that we may enter a new game. But we cannot enter a game from a void. Wittgenstein explains what we do when we are confronted with an unknown language: 'The common behavior of mankind is the systems of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language' (PI 206)

There is a streak of conventionalism in Wittgenstein's later philosophy which is reflected in his discussions of the form of life. According to Wittgenstein necessary statements function regulatively that is, they do not have any descriptive content. This, however, does not seem to commit Wittgenstein to a form of radical conventionalism. Crispin Wright rightly comments,

Wittgenstein's conventionalism . . . does not commit him to the idea that we could use totally different, rationally incommensurable techniques of inference.¹⁵

Wittgenstein does nevertheless accept the possibility of change in necessary statements. These changes take place in the form of amendments necessitated as a practical convenience may require

. . . it is nevertheless open to a Wittgensteinian to take a sympathetic view of the suggestion that not only the hypothesis of a theory, but its underlying logic may be amended as practical convenience may dictate.¹⁶

These changes do not legitimize a global change, an entire rejection of an existing form of life. Since, it is in respect of the form of life that our assertions and uses gain sanctions. Their ultimate justification is dependent on the form of life. Crispin Wright's observation regarding Wittgenstein's views on the foundation of Mathematics state an analogous interpretation which we believe could be transported to an understanding of the form of life in the Philosophical Investigations. Wright rightly writes,

Naturally, a change in inferential procedures will involve a change in the use – the circumstances under which we are prepared to assert – the statements in question. What it must not involve, if it is to be intelligible as such, is a change in our conception of the conditions of ultimate justification for their assertions. ¹⁷

The above quotations from Crispin Wright have been cited with an aim to establish our understanding of later Wittgenstein. That the ideas of the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics are to be understood in the context of the Philosophical Investigations is a position held by Wright himself. What we merely attempt to do here is to show that we were not far from correct when we held that Wittgenstein in the Investigations is a pro changer but not a radical relativist. There is something which he takes to be necessary for language and meaning-understanding. We think that the form of life is one such necessary concept. These necessities provide the conditions for ultimate justification. These necessary conditions cannot be questioned in turn. Thus what we get is an expression of a framework and not a radical shift.

Notes and references:

1. In the present paper I have used expressions like 'categorical framework' and terms like 'paradigm' which are to be understood under the broad classification of constructivism.
2. Categorical-Framework, Stephan Korner, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1970, p.10
3. Structure of Scientific Revolution, T.S.Khun, Chicago, 1962, p.110

4. Sachindranath Ganguly, *Tractatus: A Preliminary*, Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, Viswa Bharati, 1968, p. 1 'I remember Prof. Korner repeatedly asserting that the *Tractatus* is merely a metaphysical model of *Principia Mathematica* of Russell and Whitehead'
5. *Op. cit.* p.10
6. *Metaphysics its Structure and Function*, Stephen Korner, University of Cambridge, 1984, p. 132.
7. Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982.
8. Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundation of Mathematics*, Duckworth, London, 1980.
9. Pluralistic constructivism is an expression used by Stephan Korner, *op. cit.* p. 132
10. Robert Kirk, *Translation Determined*, Oxford, 1986, p. 25
11. *Op. cit.* p.25
12. Crispin Wright, *op. cit.* p.30
13. Crispin Wright, 'Rule-following Objectivity and the Theory of Meaning', in *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*, (eds.) Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981
14. This will introduce all the dreaded difficulties of the Sorites problem arising out of the absence of precise limits to terms.
15. *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Crispin Wright, Duckworth, London, 1980, p. 378
16. *Op. cit.* p. 378
17. *Op. cit.* pp 378-9