On Logic, Grammar and Metaphysics

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ON LOGIC, GRAMMAR AND METAPHYSICS
Wilson Villones

There has been a phenomenal growth of interest in the connection of these three vast subjects of study in the work of the philosophers of language. I am inclined to think also that there is a common thread running through them all. I shall have the opportunity to dwell more on this later, but at this early juncture it might be wise to specify a certain point of focus just so that this paper could have some direction. My suggestion is that we take a particular philosopher as our starting point and I further suggest that this philosopher be Wittgenstein.

During his Tractarian period, Wittgenstein thinks logic is distinct from other disciplines, an absolute and independent discipline with its own *a priori* truth-conditions, similar to what Russell and Frege hold. It is also during this period that he thinks that, ultimately, philosophy consists of logic and metaphysics; logic is its basis.[1] There is a long tradition in the Western philosophy according to which logic is the language of metaphysics.[2] We can see the same thinking going back as far as Plato, if we look on logic as the science of the forms of speech. In modern philosophy, Hegel shares the same view using logic as the foundation for his historical claims and to his dialectics. Since the development of history is a development of thought, and the essential process of thought is logic, it follows then the development of history is essentially logical process. Thus for Hegel, his theory of historical development cannot be fully understood without some reference to logic.[3] In contemporary philosophy, Russell asserts that logic is the essence of philosophy.[4] Concentrating solely on logic is for me a great waterloo which shows nothing but 'decadence'.

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[1] LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Notebooks: 1914-1916*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979.
[2] NEWTON GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1994, 145.
[3] HENRY D. AIKEN, *The Age of Ideology*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Chicago, 1956.
[4] BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Our Knowledge of the External World,* George Allen and Unwin, London, 1914.

Such weakness has been detected by the later Wittgenstein. He modified his thinking in the *Philosophical Investigations* wherein the ultimate forms of the *Tractatus* have been transcended and replaced; logical forms, according to the revised picture, do not exist in the abstract; they exist only in use, only in communication.[5] And, "Words have meaning in the streams of life".[6] I would like to take side in this thinking of the later Wittgenstein. Logic has no such independence, its rules being implicit in basic language-games and its discipline contained already in grammar. True enough, it seems clear and distinct to me that we understand logical operations through the ordinary language that we use. As its linguistic implication, we can say that logic is already embedded in grammar; grammar already includes logic! Wittgenstein now changes his statement: philosophy consists of grammar and metaphysics; grammar is its basis – not logic. Remarkable, I said but I admit that it is not that easy to understand such a claim. Wittgenstein, being as always provocative, we are now confronted with a problem: what does it mean to say that "grammar is its basis"?

In order to better understand it, we have to see the connection of logic to grammar and then grammar to metaphysics. And I like to think that there is a common thread running through them all. At this early juncture I shall explicate primordially the relationship of logic to grammar. Garver wrote it best:

> The first thing to note is that logic in the traditional sense, and also grammar in Wittgenstein special sense, are part of what the linguist regard as semantics. Semantics is the general study of meaning, and meaning cannot be studied in any

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[5] Cf. N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 151.
[6] L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology: Preliminary Studies for Part II of Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982, 913.

complete and comprehensive way of both explaining and employing such central logical concepts as incompatibility, entailment and inference.[7]

Such semantic structures can be represented as logical relations. Semantic inclusions are logical entailments; semantic contrasts are logical incompatibilities. With regards to such logical incompatibilities, it is said that logical incompatibility is itself a sufficient notion for generating propositional calculus, that is to say, the complete system of truth-functional logic.[8] Let us use an illustrative example given in the book. Think for instance of the colors red and yellow. One can be certain that something has to exhibit particular color of yellow or red and somehow one conceives as an *a priori* that something cannot be both yellow and red at the same time and space otherwise, Leibniz would remind us that such is a violation of the principle of non-contradiction and on the strength of which we judge to be false anything that involves contradiction, and as true *and good* whatever is opposed or contradictory to what is false[9]; Kant will also echo the same thing naming contradictions as antinomies of reason whereby understanding them, reason literally stops. Consequently, it can be said that logical incompatibilities are learned when we learn language. In the language of Garver:

> When I learn colors, I learn to make use of the incompatibilities in practice. That is to say, I learn that if something is blue, it cannot have any of the other primary colors, although it can have any shape at all; if something is triangular, it cannot be round or square or any other shape, although it can be of any color.[10]

On the other side, when we talk about semantic inclusion, we are talking logical entailments. It is in a sense corollary to the modal feature in logic wherein we can construe

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[7] N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 156.
[8] See HENRY M. SHEFFER, "A Set of Five Independent Postulates for Boolean Algebras, with Application to Logical Constants" in the *Transactions of the American Mathematical Society*, 1913.
[9] GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ, *The Monadology,* trans. by George Montgomery, Open Court, La Salle, IL, 1902, §31.
[10] N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 158 – 159.

that something must happen first and that what will be allowed, as regulative rules in logic legislate, must belong to the same sphere where the first phenomenon belongs. This proceeds to the discussion about discourse continuity in which logical functions are inherent. It is accordingly the criterion in knowing whether or not we are understood 'correctly' by our interlocutors. It is also the constitutive and regulative rules of a language-game. And as rules, they are more enabling than restricting or limiting the language-game to be something that is shared. Think for instance the manner how we understand the color scarlet, crimson and maroon as shades of red. Consequently, we can say that red includes different shades of red such as the scarlet, crimson and maroon. Semantic inclusion, in more grossly simplified terms, can be somehow compared to the part whereupon the color of first utterance and the color of response overlap. The continuous flow of the discourse shows distinctly that logic is embedded in the ordinary language that we used. And when we use a certain language, we also meaningfully make use of its semantic inclusion and semantic contrast, as well as inferences. Therefore, we are now justified to say that if we learn grammar, then we learn also logic since grammar already includes logic.[11] And we can also say here that *part of good grammar is good logic*. As Garver wrote, truth-functional logic is an implicit feature of every known natural language, already built into the simplest sorts of communication.[12] Take a look for instance on these statements: a.) Nobody is perfect and I am nobody; therefore I am perfect. b.) Ang kape ay pampakaba at ang gatas ay pampalakas; ibig sabihin, ang kape at gatas ay pampalakas ng kaba. c.) God is Love and love is blind, ergo God is blind. In logic, the wrong usage of the "is of predication" and the "is of identity" in premises is precisely a manifestation of bad grammar. These prima facie illogical statements together with exclusive

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[11] I think it is worthwhile to mention that it is not only logic that is embedded in grammar but also epistemology. This is why we see the exclusion of the mainstreams of epistemology in Wittgenstein. Epistemology then becomes peripheral for it is already included in grammar. By excluding epistemology, Wittgenstein also sets himself apart form the logical positivists, from Russell as well as with Frege.

[12] N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 160.

disjunctions and fallacies in formal and informal logic are paragons of bad grammar. This is precisely where we can see the connection of logic to grammar: that when we learn grammar, we also learn its logic because logic is embedded in grammar. This, according to scholars, is the secret of the universe.

After establishing the connection of logic to grammar, the next stage for us now is to establish the connection of grammar to metaphysics, the former as the basis of the later. It is precisely in this sense that we can answer quite adequately the problem from where this paper emanates. In Wittgenstein, we see a very peculiar conception of grammar. Just think the instance when he wrote that the essence is expressed by grammar and that grammar tells what kind of object anything is.[13] We might say that the business of philosophy is to explain the essence, or if we want to be Platonic about it, the form of such things as pain (which I think had been explained quite adequately in class), memory, intention, seeing, colors and numbers. This explanation can ipso facto be given only on the basis of grammar; and as Graver wrote it, philosophical grammar will be part of philosophy and will constitute the basis for the discussion of the forms and essences of things.[14] This is precisely the core of the motto of Wittgenstein explicated in the *Philosophical Investigations*, that philosophy consists of grammar and metaphysics, the former is its basis. But the question that disturbs us here is that how can something that is found as a matter of fact be the basis for what is universal and necessary? In order to explicate more on the idea of the later Wittgenstein, I think it would make some use to us if I mention that in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein talks about grammatical investigations whereby we can construe that grammar talks about what is already there (in a Parmenidean - Heideggerian sense). In Wittgenstein, grammar is

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[13] LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1958, §371 - 373.
[14] N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 154.

ipso facto not something which is invented, opposite to what Rousseau might think.[15] It is in this sense that what we can say of grammar is that it is that which is hooked on to metaphysics whose task is to specify the ultimate nature of reality and by which reality is to be made sense of. To make sense of or to explicate this reality, what we need is precisely grammar. Wittgenstein would assert here that what we really do in grammar is that we explicate since philosophy in its entirety is, in the language of Kant, "explicative" than implicative.

I believe that it is worthwhile for our present purpose to mention the notions of 'way of speaking' and the 'way of being' at this juncture. Our way of speaking is apparently indicative of our way of being. Think of the instances whereby we adopt our way of speaking to our interlocutor; say for instance, the way we speak with babies and the way we speak, say, to our professors; they are entirely different. Ultimately, it is in here that we can construe that what we really do in language in general and in grammar in particular is that we explicate our way of being. But we may question why is it that our explication, our way of speaking, with locution and/or the so-called 'illocutionary force', can mean differently to our interlocutors. There seems to be different "categories" or "boundaries" going on in grammar that make a certain sentence multivalent, similar to 'metaphors'. Such discussion of categories is ultimately the hallmarks of metaphysics. For instance, Derrida and Hegel would precisely agree that it always has been the nature of philosophy to recognize limits without recognizing that they are truly limiting.[16] It is now in this sense that we can roughly see the connection of grammar to metaphysics. What strikes to be most important here is the significant differences

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[15] Remember that in Rousseau's *Essai*, language is 'invented' via passion and the invented articulation in grammar via ideas is seen as degeneration of language. For an elaborate discussion, see Jean-Jacques Rosseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, ed. by Charles Porset, Bordeaux, Ducros, 1968.
[16] Cf. N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 144.

that which provide the categories and differences in language since it is in these differences that the meaning of a sentence or a 'text' arises.

Describing the structure of reality is basically the business of grammar, metaphysics utilizing grammar. In more grossly simplified terms, the idea here is that grammar or the principles of linguistic description provide a language for metaphysics. It is in this sense that metaphysical remarks can be expressed, grammar being the conduit in which metaphysics makes sense. It is consistent with the tool-theory of language that Wittgenstein is trying to communicate in his later way of thinking. Language is not only bounded by being something that pictures reality but he now explicitly acknowledge the variety uses of language such as greetings, salutations, exclamations, commands, requests, pleas, questions, answers, explanations, jokes, curses, prayers, reports, descriptions, promises and so on.[17] And, as Wittgenstein himself would assert in *Philosophical Investigations*, the moment when language goes on a holiday is the start of having philosophical disputes.[18] This is precisely for me what it means to say that grammar is the basis of metaphysics.

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[17] N. GARVER, *Derrida and Wittgenstein,* 150.
[18] L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, §38.