

relationship should involve the transmission of light). The significant feature of the metaphor might simply be that there exists a correspondence – a matching – between object and image.¹

So is there, perhaps, a distinction to be drawn between epistemological and metaphysical priority? Could Wittgenstein be seen as claiming that although we can only have knowledge of essential features of the world by studying what is essential in language, nevertheless what is essential in language is so because of the essential nature of reality? But then what sort of 'because' could this be? It could hardly be causal. The idea of a causal explanation of something which is necessarily the case (at least on any objectivist construal of necessity) is surely incoherent. Moreover, the idea that the essential features of reality might have causal consequences would be puzzling in its own right. For we certainly cannot express the sort of dependency involved in terms of counterfactuals. We cannot say 'The essence of thought would not have been as it is had the essence of the world been different', since this would require us to make sense of the idea that there is a possible world in which the essence – the necessary features – of reality are different.²

But then the 'because' can hardly be a logical one either. For in admitting the epistemological priority of logic over metaphysics, we should already be granting that what is essential in language can have implications for the essence of reality. So the most that could be claimed is that there are implications in the reverse direction as well, with the essential features of reality implying something about the essence of language. But this would leave us with no more right to say that the essence of language is dependent upon what is essential in the world than to say the contrary.

There is, of course, a sense in which the essence of the world might be said to be temporally, or ontologically, prior to essences in language. For example, we should insist that long before there were ever any human beings or any language, it was true that no physical object could be in two places at once. And we should insist that even if there had never been any human beings, it would still have been true that no surface could be red and green all over. But nothing of any great significance turns on this. For since we have had to use our language in describing such past and counterfactual states of affairs, it may be that these essential truths are merely projections, in some sense, of essential structural features of our language.³ Certainly such examples do not show that language is the way it is because the essence of the world is as it is.

Since we have failed to mark out any sense in which metaphysics is explanatorily prior to logic, given an epistemological priority in the reverse

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Our task in this chapter is to substantiate further the reading of *TLP* presented in Chapter 2: responding to a contrary argument, and deploying Charity in its support. We shall also consider what it is that fundamentally makes metaphysics possible, in Wittgenstein's view.

(A) Epistemological versus metaphysical priority

The one aspect of *TLP* which is apparently in tension with a belief in the priority of logic over metaphysics is the recurring image of 'the great mirror' (5.511, 6.13). For it is logic which is said to mirror the world rather than vice versa. This suggests that the essence of reality is being given some sort of priority over the essence of language, since a mirror merely reflects what is there in the world, its image being wholly dependent upon what is placed in front of it. It suggests that what is possible in language and thought (logic) is supposed to be in some sense dependent upon what is possible in the world (metaphysics).

But in what sense dependent? Given the weight of evidence presented in the last chapter, Wittgenstein surely cannot suppose the dependence to be an epistemological one. He cannot be meaning that we come to know of what is possible in language – which combinations of expressions make sense, which result in a tautology and so on – in virtue of knowing what is possible in reality. He cannot mean that we are supposed to 'read off' the logical grammar of our language from some sort of prior acquaintance with the essential features of the world. So if, as I shall argue, this is the only available form of dependence, then our most reasonable course will be to deny that the metaphor of the mirror need be seen as carrying any such implication. For of course *any* metaphor will have accidental features, going lame at some point. And it may be that the priority of object over mirror-image is an accidental feature of this one (as is the fact that the

direction, I propose to adopt the interpretation of the 'great mirror' metaphor sketched above. Its point is not to draw attention to any form of priority, but simply to insist that there is a correspondence between the essential features of language and the world. This does not mean, however, that the image is wholly bland and uncontroversial. On the contrary, its point is to insist upon a realist attitude to metaphysics, claiming that there really are essential features of an independently existing reality which correspond to the essential features of language.⁴ As such, it can be seen to have decisive advantages over an analogue of the Kantian doctrine of Transcendental Idealism.⁵

Given that we accept, with Wittgenstein and Frege, the epistemological priority of logic over metaphysics, it would be natural to ask whether we should adopt a realist or an idealist attitude to the latter. Should we say that the essences revealed to us through our study of language really belong to the essential nature of an independently existing reality? Or should we say that, since any apprehension of reality is language-mediated, the essential structure of language merely imposes an essential structure upon reality *in so far as it can be apprehended in thought by us*? That is, should we distinguish between the essence of reality 'as it is in itself' and reality 'as it exists as an object of apprehension by us', confining the knowledge which can be made available by our study of language and thought to the latter?

The metaphor of 'the great mirror' should be seen as rejecting any such distinction, hence endorsing a realist attitude. In order to discern the reasoning behind that rejection, it is only necessary to reflect upon the significance of Wittgenstein's remarks about the task of philosophy being to signify what cannot be thought by working outwards through what is thinkable (Preface, 4.113–4.115), and about the impossibility of stationing ourselves outside logic (3.02–3.0321, 4.12). For if it is supposed to be possible to ask whether the world really does have the essential structure which seems to be imposed upon it by the essential structure of language, then *in what language* is this question to be framed? Thus suppose reflection to have shown us the self-contradictoriness of the sentence 'The surface is simultaneously red all over and green all over', but that we are moved to ask 'Nevertheless, is it really the case (in the world as it is in itself) that no surface can be red and green all over?' Either the words 'red' and 'green' mean here what they usually do, or they do not. If they do, then our question answers itself (in the affirmative). If they do not, then we are talking about something else. It is impossible (on an objectivist construal of

semantic relations anyway) even so much as to raise the question whether reality might be other than the logic of our language suggests.

(B) Charity again

As we saw in the last chapter, there is considerable evidence that Wittgenstein believed in the priority of logic over metaphysics. And we have just been arguing that the apparent textual evidence to the contrary – the image of 'the great mirror' – can not only be explained away, but can be seen positively as an endorsement of a realist attitude to metaphysics. We shall return once more to the question of metaphysical realism in Chapter 8. But for the moment let us consider whether our interpretation is also supported by Charity. Is it true that there can be no such thing as non-linguistic access to the essential nature of reality, and that the only way of coming to discern that nature would be by seeing what is essential in language?

Let us suppose, then, that there is such a thing as metaphysics; holding that there are various essential features of an independently existing world. Could we have access to these features which is not linguistically mediated? The idea is barely intelligible. The point here is not that there can be no such thing as access to (cognitive contact with) a reality which is unconceptualised, or which is not describable in language by the one who has that access. For of course a dog can see – 'enter into cognitive contact with' – physical objects.⁶ But can a dog discern that no object can be in two places at once? Or that every physical object must occupy some position in space? It is just not intelligible that a non-linguistically competent creature (by which I mean 'a creature which employs no significant system of signs, whether public or private') might come to discern these essential features of physical objects. Nor is there anything which it could do to manifest its grasp of the corresponding principles. On the contrary, it is, and must be, *via* a grasp of a symbolic system that one is able to discern the essences in reality, if such a thing is possible at all.

It might be objected that it does not follow from the fact that language-users alone can be aware of the essences of things that the only way to discover such essences must be through reflection upon the structure and workings of language. For it is equally true that only a language-user can effect discoveries in sub-atomic physics; but no one thinks that the mode of discovery in such an area is in any sense linguistic. Yet if the mode of discovery of essences is not itself linguistic, then we must be supposed to have

some other form of access to them. There must be something in addition to language-use, which for the metaphysician plays a role analogous to that of experiment and observation in physics. We are thus led to the hypothesis of an essence-sensitive faculty, which for some reason can only be possessed by a linguistically competent creature.

There will be familiar objections to the idea of such a faculty. For one thing, what reason could we possibly have for believing that we possess it, or for believing that it does not systematically deceive us if we do?⁷ More importantly, how are we to make sense of the idea of causal influence being exercised by states which exist necessarily? For is not the idea of A causing B at least connected to the idea that if A had not existed, B would not have? But if A is something which is necessarily the case, then the antecedent of the counterfactual will be impossible.⁸ Yet if the connection with our supposed faculty of metaphysical insight is not a causal one, then of what sort is it? What ensures that the states of the one (our metaphysical beliefs) accurately map the states of the other (the essence of the world)?

What finally gives the lie to the idea of an essence-sensitive faculty, however, is that someone could presumably lack such a faculty, or be guided wrongly by it, while still retaining a complete grasp of their native tongue. For that faculty was only supposed to presuppose linguistic competence, not be guaranteed by it; grasp of a language was not supposed to be sufficient in itself to confer knowledge of essences. But if someone were to say that they believe it to be possible for a number to have a colour, or for a physical object to be in two places at once, would we really be prepared to allow them an understanding of the terms which they use (supposing we took them to be serious)?⁹ On the contrary, do we not take failure to recognise essence (in simple cases like this at least) as implying an imperfect grasp of some part of the language? But then by contraposition, if someone does have an adequate understanding of a language, they must already be in a position to recognise essences. If an understanding of a language is sufficient, by itself, to put us in position to discern the essences of things, then this can only be because it is through reflection upon the character of our understanding that such knowledge is to be attained.

It is worth noting that the approach to philosophy which I have been defending on Wittgenstein's behalf, which would accord logic and semantics pride of place over metaphysics, is consistent with the modern doctrine of Real Essence. For if it is true that water is necessarily H₂O, for example, then such a thing would have to be discovered in the following way. By reflecting upon the manner in which we understand the term 'water', and considering our linguistic intuitions in the face of various imaginary

examples, we are led to conclude that we should not count any description of a substance as a description of water – where that substance is described as existing in circumstances other than those which obtain in the actual world – which ascribed to it an internal constitution different from that which water has in the actual world. We then discover empirically that the actual internal constitution of water is H₂O. So no substance described in another possible world would count as water which did not consist of H₂O. But on this account it still remains the case that the essential nature of the world is only revealed to us *via* reflection upon language (together with an empirical discovery).¹⁰ It would not be as if the essential nature of water were open to direct inspection, so to speak.

(C) What makes metaphysics possible?

As we have seen, there is much to be said in support of Wittgenstein's views. If there are necessary truths about the nature of reality, then the only way for us to know them would be by reflecting on the forms and structures of language. Moreover, such truths would have to relate to the nature of the world itself, and not just to the world in so far as it is an object of apprehension in thought by us. Nevertheless, the doctrine is an extremely strange one. We seem to be required to believe in a sort of pre-established harmony between the essential structures of language and the world, which is little short of miraculous. Now, the one unexamined assumption in our exposition so far is that metaphysics is even so much as possible. We have left unchallenged that there is a class of necessary truths about the world. So let us ask what it is about Wittgenstein's philosophy which makes this assumption seem plausible. Why should he believe that there are essences in reality corresponding to the essential structures in language?

Besides throwing light upon *TLP* itself, an answer to this question will be of importance in understanding the relationship between Wittgenstein's early and late philosophies. For one major shift which takes place in his views concerns the possibility of metaphysics. Of course metaphysics had been stigmatised as nonsense in *TLP*; yet there remained a clear sense in which it was supposed to be possible. For although there were said to be no essential truths about the world (or indeed about language) which could be reported in a significant proposition, we were still supposed to be capable of showing what belongs to the essence of the world by displaying what is essential in language. In *PI*, however, all this is swept away, there being no longer even this way in which genuine metaphysics is held to be

possible. What remains to philosophers is merely to gain a clear view of the workings of their language (*PI* 122–8). So by raising the question of what underlies the *TLP* belief in the possibility of metaphysics we may hope to identify the basis for this change of view.

Before we go any further, however, there are important distinctions to be drawn between three different kinds of supposed metaphysical truth. Firstly, there are truths which might be reached by transcendental argument, based upon the fact that language exists, or has whatever features it has. The major premisses of such arguments take the form 'if language (or such-and-such a feature of language) exists, then the world must be thus and so.' Although such premisses are necessary (if true), the conclusions will be contingent because of the contingency of 'Language exists.'¹¹ (As we shall see in Chapter 12, the *TLP* argument to the existence of Simple is of this transcendental sort.) Now, the existence of this kind of metaphysical truth is relatively unproblematic, since it must remain possible on any conception of philosophy which leaves room for argument and for tracing (or even inventing) conceptual connections. Moreover, far from being rejected by the later Wittgenstein, it seems likely that many of his arguments (for example those against the privacy of sensations) take precisely this sort of form.¹²

Secondly, there are truths which might be reached from the discovery of alternative notations to those which currently exist in our language, such as non-referential ways of handling the numbers. As I showed in Chapter 2, such arguments must make essential use of the Principle of Semantic Relevance, which seems at least closely related to the later Wittgenstein's insistence that we should pay attention to the sort of *use* which our words have. Moreover, instead of being stated in overtly metaphysical mode ('Properties and numbers do not exist'), the conclusions of such arguments are most naturally stated with respect to language ('Predicates and numerals are not used to refer'). So there is no reason to think that the later Wittgenstein need have rejected this sort of metaphysics either.

But then thirdly, there are truths which are supposed to be discernible from specific (but necessary) structures within language, such as the mutual incompatibility of the predicates 'red' and 'green', and the nonsensicality of '7 is blue'. Metaphysical truths in this category are supposedly discoverable from the internal relations between the various expressions in a given natural language. It is this kind of metaphysics which is most naturally described in the image of 'the great mirror', and whose existence seems both inexplicable and puzzling. And it is this which is definitely rejected by the later Wittgenstein. So it is here that we need to

focus our attention: just what is it, on the *TLP* view, which makes this sort of metaphysics seem possible?

I believe the answer lies in the *TLP* commitment to a kind of determinacy and objectivity in concepts and conceptual relations. For if the impossibility of describing an object as both red and green all over, for example, derives from the fact that the senses of the words 'red' and 'green' really do – objectively – conflict with one another, then the use of the material (metaphysical) mode of speech becomes inevitable. For the words 'red' and 'green' are used ('referentially') in the sentences 'The surface is red all over' and 'The surface is green all over', whose conjunction yields an objective contradiction.¹³ In which case the denial and generalisation of that contradiction in 'No object can be red and green all over' must be about the colours as well. And then, of course, the question whether an object might really – 'in itself' – be red and green all over immediately answers itself in the negative.

(D) Logical objectivism

In fact the underlying commitment in question is to what I shall henceforward call 'logical objectivism'.¹⁴ The idea is that all internal relationships between symbols, and between symbols and reality, must depend only upon the nature of those symbols themselves, having been rendered wholly determinate – in an objective, mind-independent way – as soon as the senses of the signs in question were fixed. Internal relations are thus held to exist independently of being ratified by us; indeed, independently even of the possibility of our ratifying them. Their existence requires neither that we be able nor that we be disposed to recognise them: they are objective.

Logical objectivism should be sharply distinguished from the Fregean doctrine of necessarily existing thoughts (*Gedanken*).¹⁵ To say that relationships between senses exist mind-independently is not at all the same as saying, with Frege, that senses themselves have mind-independent existence. On the contrary, those relations may be supposed to have sprung into existence when appropriate senses were first introduced. It should also be distinguished from any form of ontological realism.¹⁶ The claim is certainly not that there exist 'logical objects' independently of the human mind (a claim rejected by Wittgenstein at 4.441 and 5.4). It is rather that logical relations *obtain* objectively.

It is logical objectivism to which Wittgenstein gives expression at 3.342 when he writes:

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Although there is something arbitrary in our notations, this much is not arbitrary – that *when* we have determined one thing arbitrarily, something else is necessarily the case. (This derives from the *essence* of notation.) [Italics in original.]

The idea is that when we have fixed the meanings of our signs – say by giving definitions – then all the internal relationships between signs have already been determined in a way which is independent of anything empirical. Logical objectivism is also expressed at 4.03, where Wittgenstein speaks of propositions being *essentially* connected with situations (italics in original). What he has in mind is that a proposition must reach out to its truth-condition in a wholly objective manner – the fact that a proposition is true on a given condition having been determined *a priori* by its sense, independently of any capacity or inclination of ours to take it as verified on that condition.¹⁷ On the contrary, we take it to be true in that circumstance (if we do) *because* of our knowledge of its sense. Finally, it is logical objectivism which is at issue at 6.113, where it is said to be the mark of a logical proposition that it can be recognised to be true from the symbol alone: such truths are to reflect relations between senses, and *only* relations between senses (see also 5.132).

In the next chapter we shall consider how strong a case can be constructed in support of logical objectivism. And in the chapters which follow we shall explore the extent to which it is involved in Wittgenstein's programme of analysis and resulting metaphysical claims. Our conclusion will be that it is ultimately responsible for many of the distinctive theses (and not a few of the sins) of *TLP*. Then in Chapter 15 we shall argue that it is logical objectivism which is the direct target of attack in the later Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following. So it will turn out to be not only the main pivot on which the early philosophy turns, but also the crucial locus of conflict between Wittgenstein's earlier and later selves.

In order to see clearly the role which logical objectivism is playing in the *TLP* conception of metaphysics, consider what would result from its denial. In that case a necessary truth could no longer be viewed as expressing, so to speak, a *hard* conceptual fact. Certainly it could not be seen as expressing an objective, mind-independent, connection between the senses of the expressions involved. Quite what it would then express is less easy to see – perhaps a linguistic convention or rule, or perhaps our determination not to accept as admissible certain forms of description. But any way there would be something misleading about casting such necessary 'truths' in the material (metaphysical) mode at all. If 'No object can be red and green all over' serves really to express a rule, for example, then it

would be less misleading to say 'You must not describe an object as being red and green all over.' And that does not even appear to be stating something about the essential nature of reality.

From the standpoint of logical objectivism the sentence 'Nothing can be red and green all over' is most naturally regarded as a statement about the colours themselves, as we saw earlier. But if logical objectivism is rejected, then it will have to be viewed very differently. Its acceptability could no longer be thought of as forced upon us by the nature of our understanding of the concepts involved. There would, on the contrary, be nothing intrinsically wrong with the conjunction 'The surface is red all over and green all over', since there would be no objective conflict between the concepts *red* and *green*. So if that conjunction is excluded from the domain of possible truth, this can only be in virtue of something external to it; for example that there is a rule to that effect, which either forms an explicit part of the training in the use of colour-words, or is naturally endorsed by all those who have undergone such training. In any case there would be every reason to deny that it should properly be regarded as expressing something about the nature of the colours themselves.

Would this mean that there would then be room, after all, for a genuine metaphysical question whether an object can be red and green all over? For if the predicates 'red' and 'green' do not objectively exclude one another, then such a question does not immediately answer itself in the negative, at any rate. But what could the question mean? If it means 'Is it allowable to describe an object as being red and green all over?', then the answer is (presumably) 'No'. And if it means 'Could there be a coherent use of colour-words without a colour-exclusion rule?', then the answer is (perhaps) 'Yes'. But none of this establishes anything metaphysical. Of course what one would want is to drop the talk about 'rules' and 'allowable descriptions', and to ask about the essential natures of the colours themselves. But from an anti-logical-objectivist point of view it is unlikely that the sense of such a question can be intelligibly explained.

Summary

We have shown how the claim of Chapter 2, that Wittgenstein takes questions of logic and semantics to be prior to those of metaphysics and ontology, can be made consistent with the image of 'the great mirror'; and we have argued for it on grounds of Charity. We have also seen how his position (thus interpreted) is founded ultimately on his logical objectivism.