Language as a Twofaced Phenomenon: Wittgenstein's *Doctrine of Showing* in the light of Heraclitus' concept of *Logos*

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The aim of this essay is to illuminate Wittgenstein's 'showing doctrine', which is manifested in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, via the notion of 'logical space'. This doctrine presents a sharp dichotomy between what we can say or express (*sagen*) and what we can only show or manifest (*zeigen*). The tension between showing and saying is salient already in the motto of the *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein quotes Kürnberger's dictum: "...and whatever a man knows, whatever is not a mere rumbling and roaring that he has heard, can be said in three words". Here the tension is between the multiple content of knowledge and the severely limited amount of meaningful words that can express it, so that these three words must manifest much more than they can express; it comes out that singularity encloses generality. Such a tension between the particular and generality underlies Wittgenstein's 'showing doctrine', as will be demonstrated hereby via the concept of 'logical space' which is one of the key notions of the *Tractatus*. The investigation of the *Tractatus* will be preceded by an outline of Heraclitus' philosophy of language in which names manifest both a particular object and the cosmic principle, or the *Logos*.

1. Heraclitus' Philosophy of Language: the concept of *Logos*

Heraclitus, the presocratic philosopher, was active during the second part of the sixth century B.C. He was known as 'the obscure' (*skoteinos*) due to his frequent use of paradoxes in order to convey his metaphysical doctrine of the unity of polarities. In his outlook,

everything is in a state of constant flux like the river (Fragment B91[1]), and in the same time all things are one and one is all things (B10[2]). That oneness is the common principle that underlies the mask of multiple appearances, and Heraclitus names it *Logos*: the general or cosmic order of all things (B2[3]). The use of the term *Logos* is most flexible within the heraclitean system so that it means speech, thought expressed by words, justification or rational argument, the particular speech of Heraclitus, and the general cosmic principle (SCOLNICOV 21-26). It seems that the last definition is the most essential and that Logos is indeed the crux of Heraclitus' metaphysics as the general principle underlying all things (KAHN 238).

Within this doctrine, language has an exclusive role. In the first line of his book Heraclitus says: "Of this Logos men always prove uncomprehending, both before they hear it and once they have heard it" (B1[4]). Some commentators have argued that 'this Logos' means no more than Heraclitus' own doctrine (ROBINSON 65-72) but it seems more likely that 'the general' is a key notion in his system so that 'this Logos' is an independent cosmic principle which is the main issue of Heraclitus' book (MORTLEY 15). Anyway Heraclitus tends to utilize the ambiguity of words in order to convey his paradoxical arguments (SCOLNICOV 24) and here he might use the ambiguity of the phrase 'this Logos' in order to indicate a tension within language between the subjective speech and the objective general principle: the Logos is both human speech (which is being manifested by his thought) and in the same time the governing principle of the universe (GUTHRIE I, 428).

This tension within language is clear in Fragment B50, where Heraclitus says: "Listening not to me, but the Logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one". Here he presents a distinction between his own speech and the Logos that speaks through his words. The

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[1] PLUTARCHUS: *De E apud Delphos* 18. 392 B.

[2] ARISTÓTELES: *De mundo* 5.396b 7.

[3] SEXTUS EMPIRICUS: *Adversus mathematicos* VII 133.

[4] SEXTUS EMPIRICUS: *Adversus mathematicos* VII 132 (G.S. Kirk's translation).

Logos is thus the general principle which is reflected or expressed via language. In this manner, language (*Logos*) is a twofold activity: 1) a particular speech of a particular man; 2) a self-manifestation of the general cosmic principle: the unity of polarities. Language is then both a particular act of human expression and an act of self-expression of the general principle. Accordingly Mortley remarks as follows:

> The *Logos*, like a myth, was considered as a body of necessary and incontrovertible notions which were an objective part of the cosmos, to be sought by a philosopher, rather than created by him... the advice [of Heraclitus] "don't listen to me but to what I'm saying" is puzzling, but it is quite understandable if a deliberate attempt is being made to objectify one's discourse as being apart from one's own state of mind (MORTLEY 18).

Heraclitus demonstrates this twofold activity of language in Fragment B48. Here the word *bios* indicates in ancient Greek both 'life' and its opposite: the weapon of death 'bow'. So the word *bios* might be used in order to indicate one of these antithetic references, but in the same time it digresses its particular use and manifests the *Logos*, the cosmic principle of the unity of polarities. Concluding Heraclitus' outlook, language as *Logos* is both a particular discourse and an expression of the general cosmic principle. As will be seen hereby, this heraclitean tension within language between the particular and generality accords the distinction between 'saying' and 'showing' in Wittgenstein's early thinking.

2. Wittgenstein's Doctrine of Showing

2.1 Showing and Saying

In a famous letter to Russell, dated 19.8.18, that deals with the meaning of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declares that "The main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions —i.e. by language— (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown;

which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy" (*Letters to Russell* 71). These words coincide Wittgenstein's statement in his introduction to the *Tractatus*: "The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence" (*Tractatus* introduction 3).

Wittgenstein's delimitation of what can be said, which makes the *Tractatus* a sort of a "criticism of pure language" (STENIUS 220), is carried out by the doctrine of showing. An elucidation of this doctrine should be preceded by a short outline of the *Tractatus'* ontology. In brief, the 'world' in the *Tractatus* is the sum of atomic facts: "The facts in logical space are the world" (*Tractatus* 1.13). A meaningful proposition is a logical picture, true or false, of a possible fact (*Tractatus* 4.01). Language, then, is based on logical form, or logic, 'the great mirror' of the world (*Tractatus* 5.511). Wittgenstein insists that every proposition must necessarily be bipolar: it divides the whole range of logical space into what is inside the realm of a possible fact [P], and what is outside of it [~P] (*Tractatus* 4.0641), in the same way that any island divides the whole globe (ANSCOMBE 75). Yet, there are things, essential things, that necessarily cannot be expressed by any proposition; they can only be shown in language:

> Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it —logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.
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> Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it (*Tractatus* 4.12 - 4.121).

What is the meaning of this distinction between what can be said (or expressed, or represented) and what can be shown (or mirrored or express itself)? Actually, there is an ongoing dispute among Wittgenstein's commentators regarding this issue. Black, in his thorough companion to the *Tractatus*, observes the notion of 'showing' as a crucial concept which unfortunately "is most elusive" (BLACK 190). What is clear, according to Black, is that Wittgenstein presents a sharp antithesis between 'showing' and 'saying' or 'asserting' although "It is more troublesome to decide whether Wittgenstein was justified in drawing so sharp a line..." (BLACK 194). Russell, in his famous introduction to the *Tractatus*, takes what shows itself to be the mystical (*Tractatus* xxi). Moreover, Pears adds a kantian interpretation to the *Tractatus*. In his view the showing doctrine contains the implicit metaphysical dimension of the book (PEARS: *Wittgenstein*, 48); whereas Kant claims that there are substantial necessary truths, Wittgenstein suggests that there are things that can only be shown but not said (PEARS: *Wittgenstein*, 88). In a more analytical approach, Stenius explains the saying-showing dichotomy as a logical distinction between internal and external features, following *Tractatus* 4.122 (STENIUS 179). Brockhaus, on the other hand, perceives this dichotomy as the split between the active and the passive elements of language (BROCKHAUS 184).

It seems that the difficulty to understand the doctrine of showing stems from the fact that, although highly significant, it is only dimly defined in the *Tractatus*. In the words of Pears "It is a baffling doctrine bafflingly presented" (PEARS: *Prison*, 143). Another problem is that there are actually two types of 'showing' in the *Tractatus*: the logical-linguistic showing (*Tractatus* 4.12 - 4.1212) and the ethical-aesthetical showing (*Tractatus* 6.421). Some commentators suggest that these two kinds of showing are intimately interrelated (NIELI 116, ENGELMANN 111). Others claim that there are two essentially different types of showing, the one is immanent and the other transcendent (PEARS: *Prison*, 146; HUDSON 111-112).

Furthermore, it is eventually not clear why what can be shown cannot be said, somehow. After all, Wittgenstein himself says something about showing in prohibiting its pronouncement. This is

perhaps Russell's most acute criticism of the *Tractatus*. "Mr. Wittgenstein", says Russell rather sarcastically, "manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the skeptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit" (*Tractatus* xxi). Consequently Russell suggests an alternative doctrine that coincides his 'theory of logical types'. He offers a hierarchical system of languages in which each language says the logical structure that is shown by the former language (*Tractatus* xxii). Wittgenstein sharply opposes this viewpoint and provides three justifications for his doctrine of ineffable showing: 1) saying what shows itself in language is redundant, or tautologous, since it only duplicates the same declaration (*Notebooks* 109); 2) the attempt to say what can only be shown is not a bipolar proposition and therefore it is nonsense (*Tractatus*, 6.53); 3) No language can express logical form since every possible language is necessarily based upon it. In order to say logical form without containing it, language must step outside logic —i.e. outside the world (*Tractatus* 4.12).

According to early Wittgenstein, then, language is based on a paradox: it comprises ineffable features that it cannot possibly express. During his conversation with (or rather, notes dictated to) Moore, Wittgenstein puts it as follows:

> In order that you should have a language which can express or *say* everything that *can* be said, this language must have certain properties; and when this is the case, *that* it has them can no longer be said in that language or *any* language (*Notebooks* 107).

In accordance with this paradox the famous concluding sentence of the *Tractatus*, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence", can be conceived as an expression of the decisive saying-showing dichotomy. There are things we should not say; they show themselves (*Tractatus* 6.522). Moreover the *Tractatus*, according to its own criteria of meaning, is a nonsensical text which tries to express the ineffable nature of language, as Wittgenstein admits in *Tractatus* 6.54. Wittgenstein was, then, perfectly aware of this

tension-within-language displayed in his system. He expresses this tension in an often-quoted letter to Engelmann: "And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be —unutterably— *contained* in what has been uttered!" (ENGELMANN 7) Indeed, it seems that showing and saying are not a mere antithesis. They maintain an inner interdependence although they constitute a dichotomy. On the one hand, the act of saying, if done correctly according to the criteria of what can be said, leaves space for showing to manifest itself; on the other, showing is the background against which saying becomes meaningful. Thus in *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein remarks: "Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I can express has its meaning" (WITTGENSTEIN *Culture* 16e). What is clear is that in the *Tractatus* language is a twofaced system. During a conversation with the Vienna Circle, recorded by Waismann in 22.12.1929, Wittgenstein affirms this twofold nature of language of his early thought: "I used to believe that there was the everyday language that we all usually spoke *and* a primary language that expressed what we really knew, namely phenomena. I also spoke of a first system and a second system" (WAISMANN 45).

In conclusion, the 'baffling' showing doctrine entails the following characteristics:

a) Language comprises a sharp dichotomy between what can be said and what can only be shown. Language thus contains a dialectical tension between the expressible and the ineffable.

b) Saying and showing are not a mere antithesis; they are interdependent.

2.2 Showing and the notion of 'Logical Space'

And yet, what is 'showing'? The main question seems to be left without a satisfactory answer. In order to probe the issue, I will try at this point to clarify the showing doctrine using the notion of 'logical space'. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein does not unequivocally define

'logical space' in the *Tractatus* (GLOCK 220) but rather declares that "The facts in logical space are the world" (*Tractatus* 1.13). Seemingly he means that 'logical space' indicates the ensemble of all possible combinations of facts, which is the world, and thus the term 'logical space' becomes tantamount to the term 'world'. In the same manner Stenius perceives 'logical space' as the summation of all possible worlds, each of them represents one possible combination of facts (STENIUS 52-54). Accordingly Black explains the notion as the totality of all logical places, the ordered system of all atomic situations (BLACK 155). In addition, Glock remarks that this term originates in Boltzmann's thermodynamics "which treats the independent properties of a physical system as defining separate coordinates in a multidimensional system the points of which constitute the 'ensemble of possible states'" (GLOCK 220) —an important, yet unestablished, remark.

Thus it is obvious that the notion of 'logical space' is dominant in the system of the *Tractatus*. As Wittgenstein remarks in his essay "Notes on Logic", every genuine proposition is essentially bipolar: it is a logical point that divides the whole realm of logical space (*Notebooks* 94). Thus logical space is the background against which every proposition is being defined; in the same manner that geometrical space is the necessary background of any geometrical figure (*Tractatus* 3.411). Thereafter he adds a rather enigmatic remark on the connection between a particular proposition and logical space:

> A proposition can determine only one place in logical space: nevertheless the whole of logical space must already be given by it. (Otherwise negation, logical sum, logical product, etc., would introduce more and more new elements —in coordination.) (The logical scaffolding surrounding a picture determines logical space. The force of a proposition reaches through the whole of logical space) (*Tractatus* 3.42).

A proposition, thus, is a paradoxical phenomenon. Although it determines one and only one logical point within logical space, it somehow manages to convey the whole field of logical space. One

confined logical place entails the whole *infinite* logical space (*Tractatus* 4.463). It is, so to speak, one point that entraps the total range of all other possible points. Enigmatically, the particular entails generality. Anscombe tries to clarify this paradox using a metaphor of an island:

> If you consider an island marked on the surface of a sphere, it is clear that it defines not merely its own shape but the shape of the rest of the surface. A proposition is to be compared to such an island, its negation to the rest of the surface (Anscombe 75).

Each and every proposition, then, shapes the whole range of logical space, and thus the whole range of language, whose borders are the borders of logic (*Tractatus* 5.6, 5.61). Wittgenstein declares this feature in a letter to Russell dated 30.10.1913: "One of the consequences of my new ideas will —I think— be that the whole of Logic follows from one proposition only!!" (*Letters to Russell* 32). And yet, logic, according to *Tractatus* 6.13, is the mirror-image of the world. Hence, every proposition of language expresses one possible fact in the world while in the same time it mirrors the whole range of the world.

Now, what is the actual linguistic expression of this disposition? The answer can be provided via the doctrine of showing: a proposition *says* one fact in the world while it simultaneously *shows* the whole range of the world. To put it in other words, a proposition explicitly expresses one confined logical place whereas it implicitly shows the whole of logical space —the whole range of reality (*Tractatus* 2.06) or the world as a limited-whole. Hence a proposition is a logical point representing all other logical points; the total world is mingled within every proposition of language.

A support to this rather mystical viewpoint can be found in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* whereat he elaborates his forthcoming system of the *Tractatus*. Dealing with the work of art as an object seen from the viewpoint of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*), Wittgenstein remarks as follows:

> Is this it perhaps —in this view the object is seen *together with* space and time instead *in* space and time? ...each thing modifies the whole logical world, the whole of logical space, so to speak... The thing seen *sub specie aeterni* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space" (*Notebooks* 83e).

In this statement we can clearly see an interface between the particular and generality on the one hand, and a synonymy of the phrases 'logical world' and 'logical space' on the other. A proposition, entrapping the whole of logical space, as mentioned in *Tractatus* 3.42, coincides the object seen "together with space and time instead in space and time". In this manner they both represent the whole world: "As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one equally significant" (*Notebooks* 83e).

To sum up Wittgenstein's showing doctrine, it seems that language entails a decisive dichotomy between 1) what can be said, a manifestation of one possible fact in a bipolar proposition, and 2) what shows itself but cannot be expressed, i.e. logical form or logical space or the mingled total world. Every proposition contains a tension between particular expression and ineffable totality in the same manner that Heraclitus' Logos is both a subjective human expression and a self-manifestation of the cosmic principle of the unity of polarities. In other words, every proposition entails a *digression* from what it states: it *says* a fact in the world and in the same time it *shows* logical space, the total range of the world.

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