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WITTGENSTEIN'S RELIGIOUS ASPECT

R. Shields, *Logic and Sin in the Writings of L. Wittgenstein's*,
Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 146.

No matter how promising the title of R. Shield's book *Logic and
Sin* in the Wittgensteinian themes, the undertaking falls short of its
promised contribution. To be clear, I believe that the writer's attempt
to present Wittgenstein as imparting a quasi or integral religious chara-
cter to any factual analysis, includes many misunderstandings and
hardly fullfills fore-mentioned expectations. The development of con-
cepts which wittgenstein is concerned about in his writings does not,
in any way, include the religious direction and character that Shields
wants to give in his book. The author in question by displaying the
philosophical views that appear in Wittgenstein's early and later work
is giving a total religious dimension to them. His main concern is to
set the logic and language problem, the philosopher develops, in a
moral-religious dimension in order for the sense of religious speech in
linguistic-analytical approach.

To start with, by analysing *Tractatus* while describing correctly
the pictorial relation of language and reality, examining the concept
of logic instead of limiting it in the logical form that would help us
understanding what is going on in the pictorial relation between language
and reality, it unexpectedly gets its ineffable attribution of logical
form as ranged to the ineffable or inexpressible fact of religiousness.
I am of the opinion that the concept of logic - logical form in *Tractatus*
has a different meaning from the one Shields wants to give. Logic in
early Wittgenstein constitutes the bond between thought and language.
Logical propositions "describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather
they represent it"[1]. The essence of logic is that it takes care of itself

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1. *Tractatus*, 6. 124.

and what we are left with is to investigate its activity[2]. The fact of self-supervision of logic makes its concept in *Tractatus* as a priori, necessary and as a "guard" (Schutz) of the correct formulation of the sense of empirical propositions. The constant element which is common between reality and its pictorial form is the logical form[3]. The logical connection of reality elements has a common element the same logical connection of elements constituting the picture of reality. The logical form is the basic concept showing us the logical necessity for all the inexpressible things, as for example the concepts of ethics and religion. In his later work the concept of logical form is transformed into the concept of grammar which constitutes the uses of ideas in the linguistic game or in the context of forms of life.

Widely using the conversations between Wittgenstein and Drury[4], the author considers that Wittgenstein's serious attitude towards world's facts ends up in an affirmation of religiousness. Shields mentions this religiousness firstly as a complementary concept of ethics. He briefly cites the passages of the Tractatus which mention Wittgenstein's some elliptical views on ethics and without making any distinction between the two concepts of religiousness and morality, he stops any reference to morality even in the first pages and continues with religion. This fact constitutes a methodological incosistency. Shields probably is doing this because he bears in mind that ethics has to transfuse in religion a logical or normative perspective, so that religion can take the elements of the concept of ethics and it sproblematic can be examined. I consider that if this happens it is a totaly wrong case. Shield's book is divided into five chapters:

The first chapter is entitled "Logic and Sin" (p. 1) and he tries wrongly in it to correlate the two terms failing to define the concept of logical form sufficiently. For Shields, Wittgenstein is inspired by a tendency of removing a manichaistic chimera which is the eternal conflict of confusion and clarity of concepts aiming at the achievement of understanding based on the assumption that logic as a presupposition of undesrtanding is ranged to religiousness.

In the second chapter with the title "The Limit", (p. 10) Shields attempts to treat logic and ethics with contact point the categorical

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2. *NB*, 11, 4.

3. *Tractatus*, 2. 18.

4. M.O.' C. Drury, «Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein» *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984).

perspective. In Wittgestein thought ethics is the condition of the world and has nothing to do with the facts of the world. Shields does not seem to refute it, although he does not clearly set limits in the lack of basis of the forms of life in which the meaning is formed. The concept of the form of life is the condition of the world as it makes its mark from the affirmation of life. I believe that Wittgenstein approaches the forms of life in a holistic way. Under no circumstances does he consider that individual activities should be taken in particular, on the contrary these activites are interwoven just because this interaction and coexamination is part of their nature. In this way, these complicated forms of life are shown through the possibility of innumerable language to enter in the interwoven activities. It constitutes a clearly unproved syllogism of Shields (p. 29) that the "non pressuposed logic" is parallel to the transcendency of sacred for methodological reason.

In the third chapter entitled: ""The Fearful Judge" (p. 31) Shields approaches the concept of grammar as identical to Wittgenstein's opinion about the fearful judge as originating from the divine will. It is well known that Wittgenstein has many times declared his agony about God using especially zealotic expressions[5]. However, this does not legitimize no one who wants to go along with the philosopher's direction to claim, like Shields in page 51, that "the arbitrariness of grammar is identical to God's fearful judge". The non pressuposed and unfounded concept of rule in wittgensteinian thought appears, according to the writer, as correlated to the unfounded concept of God. I consider that in the whole employment of this subject, the writer is missing the careful analysis of the concept of grammar as developed by Wittgenstein. Grammar according to the viennese philosopher denotes the philosophical research as well or the classification of rules and the grammatical rules constitute the presuppositions for the correct use of linguistic expression. Consequently, what connects the rule with its application is the internal relation constituted by the practice of language users and this becomes obvious through the way we recognize things. Rule, according to Wittgenstein, works within this practice and refers, to the normativity of the forms of life, that is embedded in the agreement between actions and judgements. Consequently, the objectivity

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5. B. McGuinness book (*Wittgenstein, A Life: Young Ludwig (1889-1921)*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988) is an excellent sample for the influence of the religious phenomenon on Wittgenstein's personality.

of rules comes out of the harmony between actions and judgements
in the forms of life of the agents. A harmony which, necessarily restricts
and puts the individual's actions and judgement under the public exa-
mination. That is why the rules do not originate from a reified meaning
which does not depend on the actions and judgements which are invo-
lved in the human practice. In my opinion, what Wittgestein mentions
in paragraph 373 of *Philosophical Investigations*: "Theology as gram-
mar", is not just a replacement but a matter of a different order.
Wittgenstein takes very seriously into consideration religion, leaving
it out from the sphere of philosophical occupation. He has in mind
and specially respects the personal god of christian faith but at the
same time he legalizes the ambiguous approach in understanding the
concepts to a point that if someone does not know its meaning nuances,
he is easily driven to misunderstandings. I consider that the legitimacy
he attributes to ambiguity takes place not only for methodological
reasons but for reasons which can confirm the importance of human
practice for the formulation of matters referring to understanding.

The fourth chapter is the "Specter of Sin" (p. 52) where an unproved
parallelism is attempted among rules that refer to grammar and the
meaning of sin. Of course, Wittgesnstein is aware of what the meaning
of sin and its influence on religious person may mean. But when he
is about to deal with the philosophical approach of the subjects, the
only thing he is concerned about is the matter of the possibility that
has to do with the formulation of philosophical concepts. Parallelism
of judaic or west-christian piety as far as the idea of grammar is
concerned leave Wittgenstein indifferent when he is about to deal with
strictly philosophical matters. For philosopher, religion has always been
a setting which other concepts belonging to different forms of life can
work in a parallel way without though being covered or identified with
each other. Wittgenstein does not, in any way, use the concepts of gram-
mar, rules or language game as methodological concepts in order to
show the religious perpective of his thoughts. These concepts are cru-
cial with the realism that every wittgensteinian approach is characte-
rized. I repeat that the problem of religion for the viennese philosopher
is particularly important and serious but of different category from
the philosophical matters he develops.

In fifth and last chapter with the title "Writing in Glory of God"
(p. 87) Shields compares the breaking of language rules to the moral de-
crease someone who breaks moral rules is subject to, considering that the
acceptance of the meaning of logic for Wittgenstein is identical to the

acceptance of God's will. Furthermore, there is a misundertanding of the concept of solipsism in Shields writings with that Wittgenstein is concerned about. Wittgenstein recognises our position within the world's limits and sees the continuous possibility of slipping into the solipsistic chimera. His reference to solipsism is critical[6]. In *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not accept solipsism as a correct (neither as a wrong one) interpretation of reality. The solipsist who considers himself to be out of the world, in the way he creates his image — as a subject of his own "Anschauung" — he has indispensably connected him with its objects. As a consequence, the subject can draw the knowledge about itself only through these objects. In *Tractatus*, solipsism is connected with issues of logic and the concept of mystical. The crucial point is the language limits as limits of the world. In Wittgenstein's opinion, what a solipsist means is: the world is my (his) world and the inexpressible truth is shown through the fact that: the limits of my language (the only language he conceives) mean the limits of my world. In his later work Wittgenstein refutes solipsism using the concept of the Private Language Argument.

For the reasons above I would like to express my concept reservations towards Shield's written book. The moment he appears to possess the wittgensteinian themes at the same time he attributes to them a religious nuance which is not consistent with the way Wittgenstein approaching the philosophical concepts. Shield's book has a clearly religious character. Nevertheless, I believe in the necessity of these works for broadening the importance of wittgensteinian crucial subject-matters.

ADDENDUM: Norman Malcolm's case.

One of the most serious approaches of the religious phenomenon according to Wittgenstein views on the same subject, is that of Norman Malcolm's has attempted in his book published and criticized by P. Winch after Malcolm's death with the title: *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 140.

In the book Malcolm's thought referring to religious themes which Wittgenstein is concerned about is very careful because he realizes how precarious are his versions which are likely to try interpreting the

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6. *Tractatus* 5. 62.

philosopher's intentions. Even from the book's introduction Malcolm presents Wittgenstein as not moving away from the philosophical problems and discerning only some kind of analogy to religious matters. This analogy does not in any case consitutes either identification or total resemblance between philosophical and theological issues. I believe that the analogy which Malcolm implies is that some religious issues that Wittgenstein approaches are likely to go along with the philosophical issues and while being expressed some correspondence is likely to be shown. However, under no circumstances does Wittgenstein use religious concepts to cover the philosophical ones or follow the reverse course.

Malcolm is fully aware of the seriousness with which Wittgenstein approached the religious phenomenon and presents his attitude with consistency towards this fact, according to which the showing of the phenomenon through actions is attempted and not a theoretical approach. He assigns importance to the religious motives of human feelings and emotions but he does not in any way accept the hermeneutical approaches for these subject-matters.

Malcolm ends his book by noting down four analogies of wittgensteinian approach referring to philosophical grammar and the religious issue, and these are: I) The explanation which can be given for the two big issues have an end, they end up in non-assumptional statements, II) As far as the two issues, there is a tendency of surprise or admiration for the existence of some fact which is part of the familiar language game, III) In both issues, a morbid attitude can be found to those and IV) The action has priority towards intellectual explanations and syllogisms in philosophical and religious field.

Malcolm's attempt is of special severity not only because he himself as Wittgenstein's student tries to be consistent to the mental direction of the philosopher but because he keeps serious reservations towards wrong criticism that has been expressed about Wittgenstein's metaphysical views.