

Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein was a fascinating man. Not only was he exceedingly eccentric, but he was also one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century. Below I have tried to give a brief summary of some of the most important points in his philosophy. I hope you find it useful.

Language lies at the centre of all Wittgenstein's philosophy, but his ideas about language did change over time.

EARLY WORK

- In his early work, Wittgenstein thought that language formed a picture of reality.
- This idea led him to believe that only language that stated verifiable facts actually made sense.
- He felt that it wasn't possible to hold a meaningful conversation about subjects like religion or ethics. However, this didn't mean he felt such subjects to be unimportant. He simply felt that they lay beyond the limits of language.
- I want to discuss this position and get your opinions on it.

LATER WORK

- In his later work, he abandons this 'picture theory' of language.
- Instead of language forming a picture of the world, he now thinks that the language we use determines the way we think about the world.
- We are only able to see the world through the medium of language, and the language we use pre-dates us with many of our ideas and concepts being built into it.
- This means that our ideas are cultural. and I want to discuss the implications of this.
- In traditional philosophy it was assumed that there was an underlying truth that gave meaning to words and ideas (picture theory of language).
- However, Wittgenstein thought that the meaning of a word was actually found in its use.

• The result of this idea was to change the nature of philosophy. As an example, take a debate about the existence of God; the traditional approach would assume the word 'God' represents something that exists (the picture theory), and uses arguments to prove or disprove the case.

• Wittgenstein's approach was to say that the word 'God' derives its meaning from the way we use it. It will have different meanings for different people, and so under Wittgenstein's rules there can be no argument.

• I want to discuss this idea, and its implications for philosophy.