MCDSARE: 2019
International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WITTGENSTEINIAN CRITICISM OF CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS FOR THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Kadir Kılıç
*Corresponding author

(a) Boğaziçi University, 1653th Street, 27/1, Bağcılar, İstanbul, Turkey,
E-mail: kadirkilic1045@gmail.com

Abstract

I argue that Wittgenstein's criticism of conceptual analysis sheds light upon methodological issues concerning the ontological argument. Though Sidiropoulou provides a Wittgensteinian analysis of the ontological argument, nobody has yet pointed out how methodological insight from Wittgenstein's rejection of conceptual analysis provides the ground for Wittgensteinian analysis of the ontological argument. In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein defends that the idea of language games provides tools for the rejection of a unified conception of meaning in language, and thus of the thesis of conceptual analysis that meaning analysis is formed by necessarily true statements. His arguments for family resemblances attack to the idea of conceptual analysis that meaning analysis is in the logical form of a biconditional which is universally quantified. Wittgensteinian points on first-/third person asymmetry is to reject the idea in conceptual analysis that meaning is analyzed a priori by the apparatuses of logic. All this discussion is applicable to questions concerning the evaluation criteria of the ontological argument. Firstly, when the Christian-Medieval language game is characterized on the basis of its function and grammar, how conceptual analysis of God and analysis of statements like 'God exists' in an ontological argument, in isolation, goes wrong is clarified. Secondly, since this religious lamguage game is dissimilar to descriptive/factual language game in the sense that the function of the former is not to describe any fact, rather it is the awowal of faith; the application criteria for sentences in the form 'x exists' are not the same with that. Thirdly, similar to pain-language game, it requires a community to make sense the meaning of God, thus forms of life are prioritized. The implication is that, in a Wittgensteinian framework, an interdisciplinary methodology should be followed to evaluate the ontological argument that does not make any sense in abstracto.

Keywords: Anselm; conceptual analysis; language game, meaning; ontological argument; Wittgenstein;

Corresponding Author: Kadir Kılıç

1. INTRODUCTION

The relation between Wittgenstein's rejection of conceptual analysis and evaluation of the ontological argument has not yet been figured out in a clear way, even though these issues are separately discussed in the literature. The main argument of this paper will concern this gap: When three theses of conceptual analysis (in the working model of this method that I will briefly present) are rejected in a Wittgensteinian way, analysis of the ontological argument in abstracto, by conceptual analysis of the concept God and statements like 'God exists', is also rejected and an interdisciplinary method is implied. This gives priority to forms of life to grasp function and meaning of such utterances. In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein points out problems of conceptual analysis or provides theoretical apparatuses for such criticism. The former is not explicit in general, and thus I will discuss secondary literature on that topic when it is needed. This discussion will be in three points: (1) arguments about language games will reveal that Wittgenstein's direct criticism of a unified picture of language implies a rejection of the first thesis of conceptual analysis that suggests universally quantified biconditional form in meaning analysis; (2) the idea of family resemblances (as briefly discussed) that is against the conception of meaning analysis by necessarily true statements amounts to a rejection of the second thesis of conceptual analysis; (3) first-/third person asymmetry that points out how criteria of evaluation change according to language games even if the logical form of a sentence is fixed implies that analysis is not knowable a priori, and this is contrary to the fourth thesis of conceptual analysis. These are results of Wittgensteinian framework, and concerning the aim and limits of this paper, language games, family resemblances and first-/third person asymmetry could not be exhaustively justified in this paper. However, motivations and some arguments for them are mentioned. This constitutes the first part of the paper. The second part will concern the application of these methodological discussions (the second point is not applicable to the ontological argument, but this is mentioned briefly in the paper to see as far as Wittgensteinian criticism of conceptual analysis can be extended to and clarified) to see how the ontological argument can be evaluated within a certain religious language game, when conceptual analysis is rejected in a Wittgensteinian way. After briefly mentioning different formulations and controversies of the ontological argument, I will attempt to characterize Medieval-Christian discourse as a religious language game. This will be followed by analyzing the sentence 'God exists' as part of this language game by comparing and contrasting it with pain language game and factual language game. The conclusion will be that intelligibility of this statement totally depends on religious language game that is strictly bounded with a certain community of believers and the priority should be given to form of life in any analysis of the ontological argument within Wittgensteinian paradigm. This is against to a priori analysis that determines the criteria of applicability of a term by definitions which are not dependent upon any believer- if it depends on believers, it could not be done with forming necessary statements. The conclusions from this case exemplify the main argument of this paper concerning relations between Wittgenstein's rejection of conceptual analysis and evaluation of the ontological argument.

2. WITTGENSTEIN'S CRITICISM OF CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Conceptual analysis can be generally characterized as the conjunction of the following four theses: Conceptual analysis is meaning analysis that is (1) in the logical form of a biconditional which is universally quantified, (2) formed by necessarily true statements, (3) informative, and (4) knowable a priori (Daly, 2010). This is roughly stating Moorean analysis, and I will discuss this kind of analysis-though all variations of philosophical analyses do not have to accept these four qualities (Daly, 2010). Concepts' being analyzable by paraphrase within biconditional statements presupposes that meaning occurs in a language as unchangeable formulas of concepts over and above the use of language, and so any word gets its meaning independently of utterance (Hacker ,1996). Wittgenstein argues against this assumption in Philosophical Investigations by the idea of language-game.

Wittgenstein (2009) regards language-game as "the whole, consisting of language, and the actions into which it is woven" (Wittgenstein, 2009, 7- page reference is not much preferred for Philosophical Investigations, I will follow the numbering of the book in place of page numbers where the abbreviation of this book occurs as PI). Here, an action is directly related to meaning, for example, utterance of a sentence determines its meaning and utterance is always requires an agent who mentions and a context which is mentioned. "The technique of" using a sentence in question form might mean a command rather

than a question, as he exemplifies (PI, 2009, 21). Take, for example, (A): "Are you listening to me?" and the context that a teacher implicitly reminds the student his/her task. Then this sentence has "the function of" command (PI, 2009, 21). This is a case of command-language-game that takes (A) as a cautionary command, whereas another context might make the teacher play question-language-game that takes the function of (A) as a question requiring a Yes/No answer. Examples of many different language games are given by Wittgenstein: giving orders, description of how an object appears, reporting of an event etc. (PI, 2009) This investigation makes clear that a language game is not a fragment of a given language, but a way of using a certain fragment of language (Wolterstorff, 2005) with each having a distinct "grammar" (PI, 2009, 373). The grammar of a language game sets the conceptual structure of a language game (Sidiropoulou, 2009), it "tells what kind of object anything is" (PI, 2009, 373). For example, in a sensation-language game, talking about the duration of sensation is 'grammatical', but the taste of sensation is 'ungrammatical'- in other words correct/incorrect application of a rule of this language game. Therefore, according to Wittgenstein, a word/sentence gets its sense only by the utterance of a particular language game that has its own internal standards of use (Pears, 1971).

If language is taken as a whole having words as common factors for words/sentences over all language games, any division of meaning that I mentioned can still be taken as variations of common factors according to contexts (i.e. various uses of the word 'true') for a particular language. This weakens Wittgenstein's argument, because it is in favour of the idea that there is meaning as abstracted from its usage despite language games. I will try to formulate a Wittgensteinan argument against this supposition by making use of Saussure (1959)'s analogy of chess (Saussure, 1959). In Course on General Linguistics, Saussure makes an analogy between chess and language. Imagine you have a pawn made of wood and you try to get what it means to be a pawn. Outside of playing chess, it is merely a strange thing made of wood that has a certain shape. All the possibility of its moves, the function of it, is defined by its interrelations to other pieces in a game, for example a pawn cannot capture the opponent's pawn by a forward move. According to Saussure, similarly, any word gets its meaning in language by how it relates to other words (Saussure, 1959). I think Wittgenstein takes Saussure's picture of language into pieces in a way that language loses its unifying feature for different language games, despite his use of a similar metaphor at three places (PI, 2009; 65, 108, 136) in Philosophical Investigations (that I will explain). He says the following:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,- but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language"

(PI, 2009, 65)

Different language games, like games (i.e. soccer, chess etc.), have some similarities to certain ones, for example ball is used in soccer and in basketball, and they also have some differences. Some groups of games having significant similarities create "family resemblances" (PI, 2009, 67) according to Wittgenstein. However, it is wrong to say that all games have one common factor in virtue of which they are called as game for Wittgenstein. Similarly, language games are under the category of language only by some network between those games (PI, 2009). Therefore constructing 'language' as determining the sense of words over language games is not a plausible move for Wittgenstein. The usage of a term in contexts of different language games have some differences and similarities to each other, but no unifying meaning for them is in question in this framework. Determination of the meaning of terms like language is via specifying the interrelations between the instances of a general term that do not have certain qualities applicable to instances, contrary to the first thesis of conceptual analysis that suggests necessary qualities on the meaning-side of a biconditional that are applicable to all instances of that term. For instance, the definition of proposition cannot be understood as something above and independent of all language games according to Wittgenstein. An investigation of the role of propositions in language would exemplify this. Firstly, similarly to Saussure's analogy, Wittgenstein says that: "The question 'What is a word really?' is analogous to 'What is a piece in chess?'" (PI, 2009, 108). This means that a word is a word only according to its role in a particular language game. It gets a sense or it is senseless, only in a particular language game. Take the definition of proposition as a statement that can be either true or false. Is it a general definition that we can use independently of language games and so make use of in conceptual analysis? According to Wittgenstein, the first problem is that, it presupposes that we know

what 'true' and 'false' is to determine whether a statement is a proposition or not (PI, 2009), and thus the criteria of truth in a language game. This definition of proposition is similar to the definition of the king in chess as the piece that one can check (attacking directly to the opponent's king by your piece). The function of king as such is one "constituent part of this game" (PI, 2009, 136). Truth and falsity are also constituent parts of factual language game, apart from this game, the term proposition does not make sense (PI, 2009)- this issue will be elaborated later much more than here. This conception of language games goes against to the second thesis of conceptual analysis because language games have dynamic and rich structures, grammars. Thus the meanings of a word in different language games do not always overlap with each other, and so they cannot be made sense by necessarily true statements.

A sentence gets a different meaning by its place in different language games without changing its form in Wittgenteinian analysis. Hacker (1996) gives examples for this concerning "first-/third-person asymmetry" (Hacker, 1996, p. 26). Consider sentences in the form of 'A has B' and rewrite it as follows (F: x has b): P='F(AB)'. If I take tokens of this sentence as P1: 'I have a pain' and P2: 'He has a pain', these sentences refer to different meanings. P1 is the expression of what is inside me, but P2 is a description (Hacker, 1996, p. 26). Moreover, if I take P3 as 'I have a pin', this also relates to quite a different sense. Indeed, the rules of application of the grammar are different for P1 and P3 (Hacker, 1996). Qualitative identity and numerical identity do not apply to P1, but applies to P3; since P3 is a sentence of thing-language game, whereas P1 occurs in a sensation-language game. This is why whereas the pin is identical over belonging to him or me, this is not the case for pain. Therefore, in a Wittgensteinian analysis, translating from sensation-language game into thing-language game (and vice versa) is not justified, since their grammar are different and a common treatment to all sentences in the form 'F(AB)' is not possible. This means that the fourth thesis of conceptual analysis that meaning is analyzed a priori by the apparatuses of logic is rejected, since the same logical form gets radically different meanings in different language games and more than that those so-called 'tokens' get these meaning only by language games.

3. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE GAME

Ontological argument was firstly presented by Anselm in Proslogion. He takes God as the being than which nothing greater can be conceived (take it as a G). His one and many modern or recent defence of the argument focuses on the formal validity of the argument. My rough reformulation of Anselm's ontological argument in Proslogion is the following- for the purpose of illustration, indeed a clear formulation is not needed for this paper:

1. God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived (G)
2. G exists either in the understanding alone or in reality
3. If God exists in the understanding alone, God is not G.
4. It is greater to exist in reality than to exist in the understanding alone.
5. God exists (St. Anselm, 2000)

Descartes presents the argument within a different methodology and with different terms, but a similar idea is observable in Meditations. Again, my rough reformulation of it is in the following:

1. I find in my thought the idea of God (=a supremely perfect being)
2. I clearly and distinctly perceive that God's nature includes his always existing.
2.1. (the idea of) God is (the idea of) a being who posseses all perfections.
2.2. Existence is a perfection.
2.3. The essence of God necessarily involves existence.
3. God exists (Descartes, 2008)

Kant criticizes these arguments on the basis of his idea that all existential propositions are synthetic (Kant, 1998). Russell points that existence is not a property of proper names (Russell, 2010). Alston discusses it in terms of whether existence is a predicate (Alston, 1960) and Plantinga tries to reformulate it without making use of existence's being a predicate (Plantinga, 1966). Plantinga's attempts are motivated by the methodological basis of conceptual analysis (of the concept God) that would amount to find a definition of God in a biconditional form, as a necessary statement, universally quantified in a way that it is applied to only one being etc. The problem of such attempts is firstly methodological from a Wittgensteinian viewpoint. They accept that there is a definition of God over and above all language

games and the main problem is the formal validity and truth of premises of a certain ontological argument. But, how does the concept God as a G get its sense without any language game it is uttered? An investigation of Christian-Medieval religious language game (call it as religious LG shortly) will provide insights for what the direction of discussion for the ontological argument should be within a Wittgenstenian framework.

Religious LG, like other ones, has its own internal standards and grammar. Its standards regard its use and function in ordinary human life. As Wolterstorff (2005) interprets the Wittgensteinian point that the most remarkable function of religious LG is expressive function. Those expressions become senseless in the mouth of a non-religious person or in a different context that one is uttered. Wolterstorff (2005) points that, in Wittgenstein's understanding, there are two defining features of religious LG: (1) The utterance of words when playing religious LG originates from one's arriving at "valuational interpretation" (Wolterstorff, 2005, p. 258) and (2) This valuational interpretation of one's experiences religiously is by the means of totality of religious practices and also playing this religious LG is one part of those practices. This interpretation and expression in turn is made possible by learning language in a particular religious community (Wolterstorff, 2005). Like all other language games, by this function mentioned above, religious LG has its own grammar for evidence, truth, fact, justification etc. For example, in factual language game, a relevant historical proof gives evidence for or against to certain belief you hold. However, this is not the case for religious LG, because from a Wittgensteinian point of view, the function of religious LG is not to describe the world (Wolterstorff, 2005). As Pears (1971) says that: "Religious propositions do not even purport to express factual possibilities, their meaning . . . is to be gathered from their place in human life" (Pears, 1971, p. 119). Moreover, there is no support from reality for the ground of religious LG like other language games other than human life.

The point that the phrase G is preceded by the form of religious life is argued by Sidiropoulou (2009) on the similarity of religious LG to pain language game, and its dissimilarity to thing language game. I will reformulate her argument to support my claim. She argues that 'God exists' gets its sense through its being "avowal of faith" (Sidiropoulou, 2009, p. 145) within religious LG rather than being a descriptive statement. She compares different language games through these sentences:

(1) God exists
(2) A chair exists in my study
(3) Pain (sensation/inner experience) exists

As I mentioned in the first part of the paper, though the logical form of these sentences is the same, their criteria of evaluation, and indeed, their meaning, changes depending on the language game in which they are uttered. The difference between (1) and (2) is that (i) there is clear criteria to evaluate the truth of (2), but not of (1); (ii) the meaning of (2) does not depend a subject who accepts that it is true, but the sense of (1) cannot be separated from religious practices and attitudes toward the divine within a Wittgensteinian framework (Sidiropoulou, 2009). So, just like saying that 'there is a pain in my arm', saying (1) cannot have any meaning independently of a subject saying this (Sidiropoulou, 2009). Another similarity between (1) and (3) is about how these sentences relate to reality. Chair is understandable in language by the resemblance between the pictorial symbol of chair [Bild] and the object chair. This is not the case for pain, it is signified in our ordinary language not based on any resemblance (not Bild but Vorstellung) (Sidiropoulou, 2009). As Sidiropoulou (2009) says that:

". . . if it [pain] is Bild, there must be a lineer projection between pain as inner experience and a meaningful word in language; it cannot be so, because the meaning of the term 'pain' is given through the logical connections of the inner sensation with the outward expression mediated by the body"

(Sidiropoulou, 2009, p. 142)

This passage means that pain cannot get its sense without our mentally associating other's painful expression with some inner sensation during learning our mother tongue. The similarities between (1) and (3) in this sense is that, (i) they are Vorstelluıng rather than Bild, because the term God does not get its meaning by a projection of reality on the word before language (Sidiropoulou, 2009) and (ii) just like the requirement of body for our cognitive access to pain, human beings' religious life is necessary for our cognitive access to the existence of God (Sidiropoulou, 2009). Sidiropoulou (2009) further argues that, if I sincerely say that 'There is pain in my arm', I cannot understand this pain as not to exist, in Anselmian terminology. The condition for the possibility of this proposition is common experiences of pain in human life (Sidiropoulou, 2009). Similarly, the condition for the possibility of saying 'God exists' as "an

avowal of faith" (Sidiropoulou, 2009, p. 145) is religious practice. Therefore, the phrase 'God exists' and religious LG is more an inner shared experience than a description of a thing. This is against to a priori analysis that determines the criteria of applicability of a term by definitions which are not dependent upon any believer- if it depends on believers, it could not be done with forming necessary statements These suggest a Wittgensteinian point that form of life is prior to the conception of God (in the definition of a being than which no greater can be conceived), rather than the other way around.

Discussing the ontological argument only by conceptual analysis is insufficient, if the sentence 'God exists' is grammatical in religious LG, that is more like an expression of faith rather than a descriptive proposition, embedded in religious practice; and it is senseless outside of this language game. Saying that 'God does not exist' is not possible, and ungrammatical, within the religious LG (Sidiropoulou, 2009) because of the function of God in this language game as G. Just like taking a piece from chess makes it merely i.e. a piece of wood, talking about God outside of religious LG is analogically senseless. This means that, the sentence 'God exists' is not derived by an argument within religious LG, but one constituent of the ground of this language game; and cannot be derived by argumentation outside of this language game, and in turn outside of religious practice. Moreover, this framework implies that investigation of religious epistemology questions requires anthropological and cultural studies, because the priority is not given to abstract concepts, i.e. God, that are analyzable and definable by conceptual analysis, but to utterances within human life that occurs within a cultural context. If presented Wittgensteinian analysis is right, this exemplifies the insufficiency of conceptual analysis and further implies serious defects of widesprerad methodology and strict specialization in academic philosophy.

4. CONCLUSION

Wittgenstein's full-fledged rejection of the kind of conceptual analysis that I presented is mentioned in three points: language games, family resemblance and first-/third person asymmetry. The two of these points are applied to discussion of the ontological argument by the characterization of religious language game in a way that the statement 'God exists' cannot be analyzed similarly to the statement 'Chair exists' due to (1) its function is "valuational interpretation" rather than description and (2) its criteria of truth functions diverge from the latter; but analyzed similarly to "Pain exists" due to (1) the necessity of commom experiences of a community and (2) its type of representation in language as Vorstellung. The conclusion is that Sidiropoulou's Wittgensteinian analysis for the ontological argument can be based on a certain rejection of conceptual analysis in a way that religious epistemology via definition attempts is devalued. This opens a way for an interdisciplinary methodology for the evaluation of this argument and may be extended to other discussions in this field, if Wittgenstenian framework is assumed.

Corresponding Author: Kadir Kılıç

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

[1] Alston, W. P. The ontological argument revisited. The philosophical review. 1960; 69(4): 452-474.

[2] Daly, C. An introduction to philosophical methods. Canada: Broadview Press; 2010. pp. 45- 50.

[3] Descartes, R. Meditations on first philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2008. pp. 46-48.

[4] Hacker, P. M. S. Wittgenstein's place in twentieth-century analytic philosophy. Oxford: Blackwell; 1996. pp. 101-126.

[5] Kant, I. Critique of Pure Reason. UK: Cambridge University Press; 1998. pp. 567- 570.

[6] Pears, D. Wittgenstein. London: Fontana/Collins; 1971. pp. 119-140.

[7] Plantinga, A. Kant's objection to the ontological argument. The Journal of Philosophy. 1966; 63(19): pp. 537-546.

[8] Russell, B. The philosophy of logical atomism. 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge Classics; 2010. pp. 67-68.

[9] Saussure, F. Course in general linguistics. New York: Philosophical Library; 1959. pp. 88-110.

[10] Sidiropoulou, C. St. Anselm's ontological argument: riddle or game?. Philosophical Inquiry. 2009; 31   (3-4): 131-152.

[11] St. Anselm, Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press; 2000. 92-93.

[12] Wittgenstein, L. Philosophical Investigations. 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell; 2009. pp. 5-116.

[13] Wolterstorff, N. Religious epistemology. In: Wainwright, W. J., editor. The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion. New York: Oxford University Press; 2005, pp. 245-271m.