History of Philosophy
75 Ludwig Wittgenstein
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Abstract:

This text provides an overview of **Ludwig Wittgenstein's early philosophical contributions**, specifically focusing on his relationship to **Bertrand Russell** and the development of **logical atomism**. The source explains Wittgenstein's **"picture theory of meaning,"** which posits that language serves as a mental model representing **empirical facts** rather than just naming isolated things. The author highlights Wittgenstein's goal of creating an **ideal language** to eliminate the ambiguity and confusion that typically lead to **philosophical problems**. According to the text, the early Wittgenstein practiced a form of **scientism**, asserting that only **scientifically verifiable** propositions are meaningful, while ethics and metaphysics should be met with silence. Finally, the material notes a significant shift in his later work, where he moved away from strict logical structures toward the concept of **"language games"** and ordinary usage.

Briefing Document:

Study Guide: The Early Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein

This study guide provides a comprehensive overview of the early philosophical work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, specifically focusing on the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as analyzed in the lectures of Dr. Arthur Holmes. It explores Wittgenstein's relationship to Bertrand Russell, his "picture theory of meaning," and his definition of philosophy as an activity of logical clarification.

Short-Answer Quiz

1. According to Wittgenstein's early work, what is the distinction between "facts" and "things"? A fact is the existence of a state of affairs, representing the

totality of how the world is, whereas things (or objects) are merely the constituents that make up those states of affairs. Wittgenstein argues that the world is a totality of facts, not of things, because facts possess a logical structure that simple objects lack.

2. How does the early Wittgenstein define the primary goal of philosophy? Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity aimed at the logical clarification of thoughts. Its goal is to act as a critique of language, identifying where the logic of language is misunderstood and setting limits on what can be meaningfully said.

3. What is the "Picture Theory of Meaning"? The picture theory posits that mental representations or thoughts are "pictures" that serve as models of reality. These mental pictures correspond to states of affairs in the world through a shared logical form, where elements in the picture represent specific objects in the world.

4. Why did Wittgenstein and Russell advocate for an "ideal language"? They believed traditional philosophical problems arose from the misuse and ambiguity of ordinary language. An ideal language would be a strictly logical sign-language where every name refers to exactly one fact, thereby eliminating double references, misleading connotations, and linguistic confusion.

5. How does Wittgenstein characterize "scientism" in the context of the Tractatus? Scientism is the view that the scientific method is the only acceptable method for obtaining reliable knowledge. Wittgenstein follows this by asserting that the totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science, effectively excluding non-empirical subjects from the realm of "knowledge."

6. What makes a proposition "nonsensical" according to Wittgenstein's early framework? A proposition is nonsensical if it has no empirical referent or sense, meaning it does not refer to an observable state of affairs. Most metaphysical and philosophical questions fall into this category because they attempt to speak about things that lie outside the empirical world.

7. What is the difference between a "sign" and a "symbol"? A sign is the physical word or sound itself, while a symbol is the sign used in a way that carries specific meaning. Confusion arises in philosophy because one sign (like the word "green") can be used to symbolize multiple different things (a name, a property, or a place).

8. Why does Wittgenstein argue that there can be no "propositions of ethics"? Ethics deals with values that lie outside the world of facts and empirical observations. Since propositions can only express facts about how things happen to be in the world, they cannot express "higher" ethical laws or values, which are not empirically observable.

9. How does Wittgenstein apply David Hume's view to the law of induction? Wittgenstein asserts that the law of induction has no logical justification, only a psychological one. He believes there is no causal necessity making one thing happen because another did; the only necessity that exists is logical necessity.

10. What is Wittgenstein's conclusion regarding the "meaning of life" and death? He suggests the problem of the meaning of life vanishes with death because death is not an event in life that one lives to experience. Since the solution to the "riddle of life" would lie outside space and time, it cannot be expressed in empirical propositions and must be passed over in silence.

Quiz Answer Key

Question	Core Concept to Include in Answer
1	Facts are states of affairs; things are the building blocks of those states.
2	Philosophy is an activity of logical clarification, not a set of doctrines.
3	Thoughts are mental models (pictures) that share a logical form with reality.
4	To eliminate ambiguity and ensure a one-to-one correspondence between words and facts.
5	The belief that only science provides reliable knowledge; true propositions = science.
6	Lack of an empirical referent; inability to be verified by scientific observation.

7	Signs are words; symbols are signs with specific referents; ambiguity occurs when one sign has many symbols.
8	Values are not empirical facts; therefore, language cannot capture them in propositions.
9	Induction is psychological habit, not logical law; there is no causal necessity in nature.
10	Death is the end of the problem-bearing experience; what cannot be said clearly must be met with silence.

Essay Format Questions

1. **The Limits of Language:** Discuss Wittgenstein's famous dictum, "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." How does this shape his view of metaphysics and religion?

2. **Russell and Wittgenstein:** Compare and contrast Bertrand Russell's "logical atomism" with Wittgenstein's "logical form." How did Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus* influence the interpretation of Wittgenstein's work?

3. **The Critique of Philosophy:** Analyze Wittgenstein's claim that philosophy is an "activity" rather than a "body of doctrine." What are the implications of this view for the history of philosophy?

4. **Empiricism and Meaning:** Trace the influence of 19th-century empiricists like John Stuart Mill and David Hume on Wittgenstein's theory of meaning. How does the "verifiability principle" emerge from this tradition?

5. **From the Tractatus to Investigations:** Based on the source's conclusion, why did Wittgenstein eventually abandon the "picture theory of meaning" and the pursuit of an "ideal language" in his later work?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Atomic Fact:** The simplest form of a fact; a specific, indivisible state of affairs consisting of a combination of objects.

- **Denotational (Extensional) Meaning:** A theory of meaning that focuses on what a word denotes or the specific particulars to which it refers in the empirical world.

- **Emotivist Theory:** In ethics, the view that moral statements do not state facts but instead express or "vent" feelings and emotions.

- **Fact:** The existence of a state of affairs; according to Wittgenstein, the world is the totality of facts, not things.

- **Hypothetico-Deductive Method:** A scientific method where explanations have the structure of a deductive system based on broad general hypotheses as premises.

- **Ideal Language:** A strictly logical language, free from the ambiguities of ordinary speech, where every word corresponds to exactly one factual referent.

- **Language Games:** A concept from Wittgenstein's later work (Philosophical Investigations) suggesting that language has various functions beyond just scientific or descriptive use.

- **Logical Atomism:** The attempt to analyze knowledge into its basic logical constituents and organize them into a deductive system.

- **Nonsensical:** Language that has no empirical referent or fails to adhere to the logical syntax of language; often applied by positivists to metaphysics.

- **Picture Theory of Meaning:** The theory that thoughts and propositions are logical pictures or models of states of affairs in reality.

- **Scientism:** The philosophical stance that counts the scientific method as the only valid way to obtain reliable knowledge.

- **Sign vs. Symbol:** A "sign" is the physical manifestation of a word (sound or ink), whereas a "symbol" is the sign considered alongside its specific logical meaning or referent.

- **State of Affairs:** A combination of objects or things; the arrangement of constituents that forms a fact.

- **Verifiability Principle:** The criterion that the meaning of a proposition lies in its internal logic or its ability to be empirically verified.

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