INTRODUCTION

The reason for selecting “An Examination of the Distinction between Saying and Showing in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy” as my research topic is that I am not only interested in his philosophy, but also found Wittgenstein as a fertile ground. Søren Kierkegaard once said, fixed ideas are like cramp in one’s foot. You refuse to budge from your position. The remedy is to stamp them down. As Ashok Vohra puts it: “Few thinkers in history has had the courage to do so. Wittgenstein was one of those who could not only break with the dominant academic tradition of his times, but also had the courage to reject the early ideas expounded by him in his in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus....”¹ His philosophical thought is subject to many interpretations. His attempt to solve the problems of philosophy is genuine in the sense that he is deeply involved in this exercise. This does not in any way belittle the contributions made by other philosophers. His writings are simple, but cryptic in nature. One has to dive deep into the philosophical structure of his arguments. Wittgenstein himself once said; “Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.”² As Stroll puts it in his monograph entitled Wittgenstein, “No other twentieth-century philosopher uttered so many words that struck the keyboard of the imagination.”³ This statement of Stroll is not merely a tribute paid to Wittgenstein, but one that is made to recognize his originality in terms of the depth of his thought. Every pithy saying one finds in his works carries with it a lot of philosophical weight that one needs to labor extensively to unload its

content. This is not an exaggeration. My approach in this project is historical, analytical and evaluative. It is historical for it takes into account the brief historical survey of the problem in question. Every aspect of the problem in question is analyzed in order to evaluate its significance in the domain of philosophy. For my part, I believe that the problems of philosophy are nothing but the problems confronted by the individuals in their intellectual and social life.

The famous contemporary American philosopher Richard Rorty held that Ludwig Wittgenstein is regarded as one of the most original and influential thinkers of the twentieth-century besides Dewey and Heidegger. The originality and the ingenuity of Wittgenstein’s philosophical acumen are intelligible to anyone who is familiar with his major writings. His philosophy is often distinguished by two sharply demarcated phases, namely, the one that is advocated in his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and the other in his later works, especially in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Influenced by both Gotlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein advocated ‘logical atomism’ in his *Tractatus*. The predominance of psychologism in philosophy during the early twentieth-century perturbed the philosophers with their background in mathematics and logic. They conveniently replaced psychologism, according to which philosophy can be reduced to psychology, with their own doctrine of logicism, according to which philosophy can be reduced to logic. Also, it is their firm conviction that the principles of mathematics can be reduced to the principles of logic. To put it more succinctly, mathematics is the boyhood of logic, and logic is the adulthood of mathematics. It is also popularly held that it is mainly due to the efforts of both Russell and early
Wittgenstein the philosophy of Frege received any prominence in the Western analytical tradition, for otherwise his philosophy would have met with a premature death. Wittgenstein’s enigmatic approach to any philosophical problem baffled many of his contemporaries. Even G.E. Moore is not an exception to this. The clear headed Moore admitted that Wittgenstein is more cleaver than himself. In appreciation of Wittgenstein, Moore writes: “He has made me think that what is required for the solution of philosophical problems which baffle me, is a method quite different from any which I have ever used---a method which he himself uses quite successfully, but which I have never been able to understand clearly enough to use it myself.”

Like his mentor Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein opined that the elements of reality (physical world) are mirrored through language. Now it is the turn of the twentieth-century analysts to look for certainty in the realm of philosophy through the rigid formal structures of language, which is specially designed to meet this demand. The language that is exclusively designed for this purpose draws its elements of formalism from logic and the elements of foundationalism from mathematics. In a way, its rules of formation and transformation are derived from the truth-functional character of logic and mathematics. But the kind of language that mirrors the reality is not ordinary language but a language with logical perfection. Therefore, it is also called technical or truth-functional language. This language has definite logical essence whereby every proposition is said to have a definite meaning or determined sense. Thus Wittgenstein advocates formalism,

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foundationalism and essentialism in his earlier work. In fact, all these three go together. In the preface of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein made his intentions clear. To quote his remarks:

The book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood. 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.

Thus the aim of this book is set limit to thought, or rather-not to thought, but to the expression of thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).

It will therefore, only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.\(^5\)

It is evident from the above statements of Wittgenstein that he intends to draw a wedge between what can be said and what cannot be said in language. However, one needs to interpret his intentions carefully. As aptly mentioned by Avrum Stroll what is central to *Tractatus* is the difference between saying and showing.\(^6\) In fact, what lies on the other side of the limit is not nonsense but something inexpressible. It

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is a mistake to think that everything inexpressible is nonsensical. Certainly it is not the intention of Wittgenstein to reduce what is inexpressible to non-sense. This is where he differs from logical positivists. The latter by introducing the principle of verification intended to eliminate transcendental metaphysics from the sphere of philosophy. Therefore, they reduced all that is meaningless to the realm of non-sense. On the contrary, Wittgenstein did not really intend to dismiss what is inexpressible to the realm of nonsense. Instead he held that what cannot be expressed can be shown in some form or the other. If it cannot be shown then it is treated mystical. This is clear from his statements made on ethics and religion in the *Tractatus*. Also, it can be vindicated that *Tractatus* is not free from transcendentalism. Perhaps, the language (ideal language) designed to mirror the physical world is not adequate enough to grasp the sense of the values. Similarly, the distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said is akin to the schism made by Kant between what can be known and what is unknowable (thing-in-itself) in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In other words, what is accessible to our sense-experience is something different from what is accessible to our practical reason.

But in early thirties Wittgenstein realized his folly and replaced ideal language with ordinary language. The reason why ideal language is preferred to ordinary language is that the latter often leads us to ambiguities. But the former too has its limitations. It cannot go beyond the physical structure of the world. Picturing mere facts of the reality (world) alone is not the function of language. In fact, language has multiple functions to perform. Later Wittgenstein realized this and felt

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that human beings are equally concerned with the social facts of the reality or the life world. This is a major turning point in Wittgenstein’s philosophical career. Although the distinction between ‘what can be said’ and ‘what can be shown’ is often restricted to *Tractatus*, it is clearly evident from the writings of later Wittgenstein that his later phase is also marked by this distinction. What is mystical can neither be said nor be shown, for otherwise it cannot be called mystical.

Often it is held by some commentators like Daniele Moyal-Sharrock that there is a third phase of Wittgenstein. The works like *On Certainty* neither adhere to *Tractarian* thinking nor to *Philosophical Investigations*. Philosophers like Stroll follow this line of thinking. In his *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein happened to say that his originality belongs to the soil rather than to the seed. The issues or problems of philosophy are of the same nature like seeds but the way in which they are solved or treated depends upon the thinking power of the individual (soil). In other words, these issues are given totally new interpretation and orientation. This is what Wittgenstein meant by the originality of the soil. Ever since the time of the Greeks the problems of philosophy remained the same and they often found new orientation or treatment in the writings of the great philosophers. But one can find something unique in Wittgenstein’s approach to these perennial problems of philosophy. Like Kant, Wittgenstein too felt that the realm of the inaccessible has more significance. The realm of ethics, religion and aesthetics cannot be ignored. But a meaningful discourse about these subjects is not possible with ideal or logically perfect language. Therefore one has to pass over in silence when there are questions
related to these subjects. The ideal or logically perfect language sets limits to the world.

But, later Wittgenstein realized that the “technical or logically perfect” language cannot reveal the logical form of reality in every respect. In his major later work, *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein presented a totally different picture of language. To put it in other words, the views expressed in *Philosophical Investigations* are diametrically opposed to those of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. He held that all the problems of philosophy appear and reappear when language goes on holiday. The socio-linguistic approach of Wittgenstein suggests as that every aspect of human life has its own language-game. Thus language is multipurpose. Wittgenstein attacks the doctrine of essentialism and replaced it with the notion of “family resemblance”. He claims that ordinary language can do everything that is required for the clarification of thought. According to him, language does not essentially contain any fixed rules that govern its function. Language has multiple functions and there are many shades of language. This clearly established the view that there is no essentialist element that governs the language. Wittgenstein tries to establish this point throughout his *Philosophical Investigations*.

Having realized that the realm of inaccessible is more significant and important for social life of the individuals, Wittgenstein radically deviated from his earlier position with a view to accommodate them in his philosophical discourse. It is this new method for doing philosophy helped him to overcome his imagination that ordinary language often results in ambiguities. The clue that ‘do not think, but look’ for what you want is a splendid one for anyone to penetrate into the deeper
aspects of human life. This looking is not mere simple observing something for the sake of observing, but to grasp what is exhibited or shown practically. The pragmatic purport of each of our forms of life is exhibited. A sincere attempt is made to highlight these issues in the present work. The present work is classified into four chapters. A brief account of the contents of the each chapter is presented. As far as the method is concerned, I have adopted historical, analytical and evaluative approach to study the present problem.

Our aim is to examine the fundamental distinction between saying and showing in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. It is true that language means everything to human beings. The progress of human kind is largely attributed to the efficient network of communication of the humans. Thus language is a gift. Wittgenstein is right, in a way, in saying that every aspect of human life is taken care of by a language-game. With this end in view we have classified the present work into the following chapters.

The introduction provides a brief account of the significance of the topic and the methodology adopted to approach the philosophy of Wittgenstein. In the process, a quick survey of Wittgenstein’s place in the contemporary philosophical scenario is presented.

The first chapter deals with the central doctrines of Tractatus. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a bird’s eye view of the Tractarian project and how to approach it. The aim of philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, is the ‘logical clarification of thought’. In the process, this chapter highlights the significance of
Wittgenstein’s approach to the problems of philosophy through ideal or logically precept language. The supposed gap between the knower and the known (the reality) is mediated by language. Thus one can see a linguistic turn in the art of philosophizing. In fact, this chapter serves as a prelude to understand Wittgenstein’s supposed distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said. How can we say anything about what is unsayable? We must in some sense talk about this unsayable to show it is unsayable. This is the paradox. Wittgenstein does not start from physics, but from logic. Therefore, what follows about the reality is from the side of language in the form of assertions about it. Therefore, an examination of the logic of our assertions about the reality would be the chief concern of *Tractatus*.

The **second chapter** deals with what can be said. There is an attempt to highlight the contents of the reality (world) and how logical analysis captures the significance of these simples arrived at from the side of language and the reality in order to show an isomorphic relation between the two. In the process, there is a discussion on the composition of the world, sense of a proposition, significance of picture theory, the nature of objects and names. The analysis of the above mentioned aspects would be of immense importance to understand Wittgenstein’s earlier position.

The **third chapter** deals with what can be shown. This chapter derives its significance from the preceding chapter. Wittgenstein himself admitted that his *Tractatus* became popular not because of what is said in that, but for what is not said in that. The distinction between what can be said and what can be shown is not merely restricted to the *Tractatus* alone, but also extended to his later thought. In this
chapter there is a discussion on essentialism, family resemblance, philosophical skepticism, claims to knowledge, and world-picture, meaning as use and rule-following.

The fourth chapter deals with the mystical elements. This is an important segment of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. In this chapter there is a discussion on religion and mysticism, autonomy of religious form of life, the tacit dimensions of culture, and ethics. Each of these components highlight the significance of mystical elements in Wittgenstein’s thought. Although they are part and parcel of what can be shown, a separate chapter is devoted to them to show their significance and importance in the writings of Wittgenstein.

In the conclusion, some reactions to the distinction between saying and showing are presented along with my own observations. My observations are balanced in the sense that both the positive and negative elements in Wittgenstein’s philosophy are highlighted. In a way this distinction suggests us that saying and showing represent the two sides of the same coin. They have their own significance in our day-to-day life.

At the end a select bibliography is presented. The books and articles shown in the bibliography are of immense help to me in completing the present project. The project remains complete only in terms of available space and time given to me as a researcher. But there are many open-ended questions which need to be addressed. Thus the present work is still wide open for future research.