

Jakub Mácha: *Wittgenstein on Internal and External Relations:  
Tracing all the Connections*  
Bloomsbury, 2015, 262 pages<sup>1</sup>

In philosophical texts addressing the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, we are usually confronted with a division of his philosophy to the early, (middle) and the latter phase. However, as an alternative, the authors of *The New Wittgenstein* have suggested that as far as the main (i.e. therapeutic) purpose of Wittgenstein's philosophy is concerned, his work is consistent (cf. Crary & Read 2000). The Czech philosopher Jakub Mácha presents a similar view in his monograph *Wittgenstein on Internal and External Relations: Tracing all Connections*. The author's strategy is to look at Wittgenstein's philosophy from a perspective of a distinction between internal and external relations. Wittgenstein's philosophy has been discussed to a significant extent also among Slovak and Czech analytic philosophers. Anyway, Mácha's monograph comes undoubtedly with some new insights. The book is presented as an 'album' of themes, notes, problems and issues that Macha chose from Wittgenstein's work. Nevertheless, it is not quite of an exegetical nature. In considering these issues, Mácha keeps his own stance toward Wittgenstein's ideas. In order to show the fundamental nature of the distinction between internal and external relations, author puts emphasis on the problems that may be conceived of as secondary to Wittgenstein's main focus: "I admit that I have tried to extract a workable philosophical view or, rather, a coherent set of views from Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*" (p. ix).

Against the so-called new Wittgensteinians who took seriously Wittgenstein's argument that his intention was not in any way to create a philosophical theory, Macha claims that, in Wittgenstein's philosophy, there has always remained something that can be attributed to theory: "I must insist that there still remains something in Wittgenstein's philosophy (the early as well as the later) that can be called a theory. This attempt at setting out a theory is neither about world nor about knowledge nor about language. It is a theory of how to analyse a philosophical text in order to get rid of any philosophical problems that emerge due to the unsurveyable character of natural languages" (p. ix.). According to Mácha, this theory is embedded in Wittgenstein's method of analysis, which binds his early and late philosophy together.

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More substantially, Mácha suggests that “Wittgenstein’s method of analysis rests on the distinction between internal and external relations” (p. x). As a preliminary definition of internal and external relations he appeals to Wittgenstein’s quote from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with a slight terminological modification: “A relation is internal if it is unthinkable that its terms should not possess it, and it is external otherwise“ (p. ix).<sup>2</sup> The justification of this claim is questionable, because Wittgenstein himself did not write much about internal and external relations and never ascribed them such a fundamental character as Mácha claims in his book. However, it is true that Wittgenstein often wrote the least about the most important themes in his thinking – e.g. ethics in *Tractatus* or forms of life in *Investigations*. Nevertheless, Mácha argues for the fundamental character of the distinction between internal and external relations in Wittgenstein’s thought.

The book consists of twenty chapters grouped into five thematic units. These depict all sorts of topics: an introduction to logical analysis, the distinction between internal and external relations reflected in Wittgenstein’s early and late work, as well as Mácha’s own conclusions.

In the first part of the book, *Introduction*, Mácha acquaints reader with the objectives and procedures of logical analysis, explaining how it relates to the distinction between internal and external relations, why they are important and what problems such a differentiation is associated with. Although Wittgenstein’s idea about the form of logical analysis had changed during the thirties, the general idea remained the same: “Two forms of expression are identified that look the same in ordinary language. The aim of analysis is to show, however, that they are different” (p. 5). In order to be able to identify ambivalent uses of words and sentences in a language, there is a need for a generic logical distinction between internal and external relations. According to Mácha, Wittgenstein introduced this as a heuristic tool: “The general lesson I would like to draw is how a metaphysical distinction – far from being nonsensical – can be transformed into and employed as an analytical tool” (p. 5). This distinction is somehow present in whole Wittgenstein’s philosophy; only its wording has changed. The concept of internal relations was replaced by the concept of grammatical or conceptual relations and the term ‘external relation’ was replaced by the term ‘factual relation’.

The second part, *Prelude*, is devoted to the emergence of the internal/external relations in the context of philosophical thought in the early twentieth century. Mácha pursues the question whether all relations could be classified as internal or external. This issue had been already studied by analytic philosophers such as Moore or Russell on the one hand, and by the British idealists such as Francis

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<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein originally did not mention relations but properties (TLP 4.123).

Bradley on the other hand. Mácha's intention is not only to interpret the various approaches that have become a background of Wittgenstein's reflections; he wants to show that Wittgenstein's conclusions are ultimately closer to Bradley's than to Russell's concept. Russell and Moore argued against internal relations between objects and elementary propositions. The view that all relations are internal was attributed to Bradley. Yet Mácha points out that the analysts interpreted Bradley incorrectly. From his ontological monism follows un-reality of all relations because Reality is only one. Relations belong only to Appearance and are partly internal and partly external.

The third part of the book is entitled *Wittgenstein's early writings*. Here Mácha is dealing with definitions of internal and external relations in Wittgenstein's early writings, especially in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Concerning the distinction between internal and external relations, Mácha focuses on the problems of the doctrine of external relations, the nature of simple objects and Wittgenstein's picture theory. In Wittgenstein's early philosophy, the distinction between internal and external relation is associated with the difference between showing and saying. According to Mácha's elaboration, it can be said that while the internal relations are *shown* in a logically adequate language, external relations can be expressed by propositions and therefore can be *talked* about. However, the author points out that these two differences are not identical – all the internal relations are shown, but not all that it is shown should be regarded as an internal relation. By this Mácha justifies why he did not include an important area of Wittgenstein's thought – his ethics into this work: "it is not straightforwardly clear how to apply the internal/external distinction in ethics or to Wittgenstein's reflections about the sense of the world" (p. 42). By gradual examination of Wittgenstein's early texts, Mácha came to the following characteristics of internal relations:

1. Internal relations are such that it is unthinkable (or impossible) that their relata do not possess them.
2. Internal relations hold between concepts or universals.
3. Internal relations can be exhibited in tautologies.
4. The identification of a term of an internal relation is, *eo ipso*, the identification of all other terms. This characteristic, of course, does not apply to internal properties.
5. The external/internal distinction is an instance of the more general saying/showing distinction.
6. Internal relations can also be labelled as structural or formal relations. (cf. p. 48)

Wittgenstein agreed with Russell that all relations among elementary propositions are external, but he admitted relations between propositions and objects: “despite the doctrine of external relations, Wittgenstein conceives of logical entailment as being based on internal relations and, hence, as necessary” (p. 49). Wittgenstein is here close to Bradley since Wittgenstein had held that the relations do not constitute facts (and therefore the characters for them in a logically perfect language are superfluous), and hence they are unreal. If logic were about objects and the elementary propositions, it would be accidental. Logic is therefore, according to Wittgenstein, about complexes, which implies that the relation of logical entailment is a part/whole relation within a given complex (p. 54). Internal relations can be according to him built into logical notation, where they would *show* themselves: “all the relations that can be expressed in a proposition are indeed external, and internal relations can be shown in a logically adequate notation” (p. 55).

The eighth chapter, *The nature of simple objects*, deals with the question what exactly Wittgenstein’s simple objects are and what is the nature of internal relations between them. In the ninth chapter, *The picture theory*, the focus is on the issue whether Wittgenstein intended his picture theory as a picture theory of sense, or whether he introduced it only as an analogy between a picture and language. Mácha provides us with this explanation: “The point of introducing the picture theory of representation and hence the internal relation of depicting is, on my understanding, to improve the analyzed language in the direction of a logically adequate language” (p. 68). The expressions of internal relations should serve as a practical order, as an imperative for correct use of language (expressions).

The fourth part of Mácha’s book pursues the definitions of internal and external relations in Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, i.e. from thirties onward. At the beginning of the tenth chapter, *Definitions of the internal/external distinction; the later writings*, Mácha again notes that Wittgenstein’s understanding of internal relations did not change substantially during his philosophical production. There was a change in emphasis rather than content. The important distinction of the “early Wittgenstein” between *saying* and *showing* is replaced by the distinction between what is expressed by language and what is shown by the grammar of language. Thus, internal relations amount to grammatical relations. The distinction between internal and external relations should help us identify words and sentences that are used incorrectly. The sentence can describe the state of affairs in two ways: (i) it can deal with specific objects, their properties and relations between them, or (ii) it can deal with properties and relations between concepts. The first case is an expression of external relations, while the second case is an expression of internal

relations. Having examined Wittgenstein's late philosophy, Mácha comes with the following definitions of internal relations:

1. Internal relations hold only between concepts while external relations hold between objects and concepts.
2. Internal relations can be exhibited in grammatical propositions, which express either rules of a language game or general facts about our human form of life.
3. Propositions that express internal relations are timeless, whereas propositions that express external relations are temporal.
4. Internal relations relate their terms only in virtue of these very terms, not in virtue of other things or rules.
5. Internal relations allow no exception. (p. 102)

In the fourth part of the book, the author then examines various issues that could be resolved by applying the distinction between external and internal relations. These comprise problems of intentionality, the distinction between reason/motive and cause of an intentional act (with an emphasis on expectation and its fulfilment), the rules and their application, Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of colours, the problem with the "standard meter", the problem of seeing aspects, philosophy of psychology and, finally, Wittgenstein's reflections on aesthetics and arts. In each case, Mácha proceeds as follows: first, he introduces Wittgenstein's presentation of the problem, then he clarifies how this problem is specifically related to internal/external relations and, finally, he examines the reflexive use of internal relations in the given context.

In the fifth and last part of the book, *Conclusion*, Mácha sums up the main principles and insights resulting from the previous chapters, now interpreted in terms of the two methodological principles coming from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (4.122) and *Remarks on Colour* (first paragraph):

1. To insist on the distinction between internal and external relations in the depth grammar.
2. The reflexive cases of internal relations are in fact those cases of direct expression where no relation at all is expressed. (p. 199)

The last two chapters discuss the question of why exactly we are expressing internal relations. Propositions that express internal relations do not represent the state of affairs and thus they do not amount to "moves" in a language game. Then is it not the case that they are superfluous and meaningless? No, it is not. Internal relations tell us something about the logic, or grammar of our language – what they

are and what they should be. Their expression can function as an imperative: “Expressing an internal relation can function as a kind of reminder to someone who is not aware of the logic of our language or it can function as a stimulus to improve our logic or grammar. In short: expressing an internal relation has normative force and can also be taken as an imperative” (p. 201). Such statements have their positive role only until the philosophical confusions caused by incorrect use of language are removed. As they change the language in which they are expressed, they cannot be expressed in a modified language (p. 202).

The last chapter deals with *The maxim of no reflexive uses of internal relations*. This is Mácha’s name for a methodological principle, which he finds in Wittgenstein’s work. This maxim actually says that “a reflexive use of an internal relation might be a failed case of emphasis. One should consider whether straightening it out into an intransitive use (where no relation is expressed at all) would make the language-game more plausible” (p. 207). In practice, this means that instead of the expression “Now I see a knife as a knife” we say “I see a knife”. Finally, Mácha summarizes the individual cases of reflexive use of internal relations. He concludes that the maxim in fact requires that there is some difference between the relata of the internal relation. That implies that there has to be some external relation that could explain this difference.

Mácha’s *Wittgenstein on Internal and External Relations: Tracing all the Connections* is a result of thorough examination of Wittgenstein’s lifelong work. The author suggests that the distinction between internal and external relations is one of Wittgenstein’s most fundamental distinctions.

After many monographs and papers on Wittgenstein’s theory of language and his logic, I consider Mácha’s book very refreshing (along with Beran’s “phenomenological” Wittgenstein – Beran 2013, or Glombíček’s detailed study of *Tractatus* – see Glombíček 2016). Mácha’s book is apparently not suitable for readers, who are interested mainly in ethical aspects of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Nevertheless, there are still some interesting and inspiring thoughts that can enlighten also that aspect. Problems, which are more challenging, are accompanied not only with Wittgenstein’s account, but also with Mácha’s examples and explanations. This book is not just another contribution to the debate on the consistency, the nature and purpose of Wittgenstein’s work. It extends to a variety of topics and interesting issues, which may be of interest to all readers having a sympathy with analytic philosophy in general and Wittgenstein’s philosophy in particular.

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## References

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