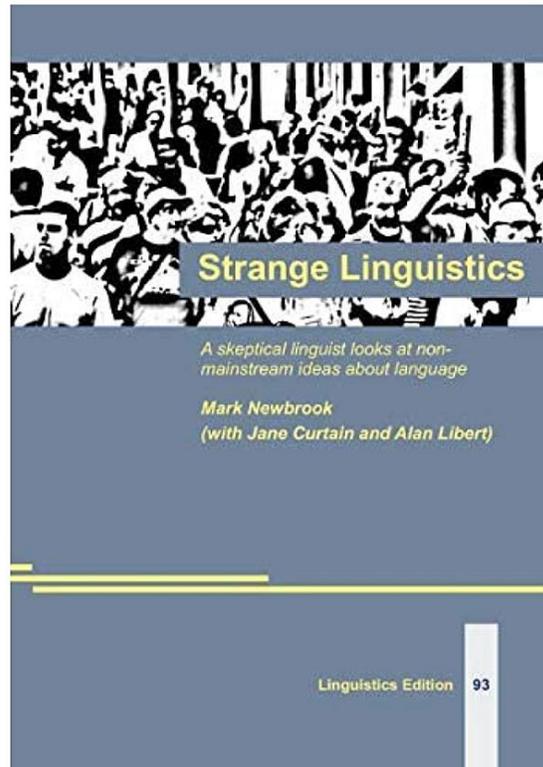# WITTGENSTEIN

Two Philosophers In One

Presented by

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Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) was an Austrian-British philosopher who taught and worked at Cambridge between 1912 and 1947.

Wittgenstein worked primarily in logic and the philosophy of language with an especial focus on language and the world, and secondarily in the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of mathematics and the philosophy of religion (notably the issue of the relationship between religious and scientific propositions).

Wittgenstein adopted two very different philosophical stances in his time (W1 and W2). W2 explicitly rejects W1.

W1: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921; only 75 pages)

W2: Philosophical Investigations (published only posthumously, 1953)

W1 was concerned with the logical relationships between propositions and the world; W2 held that the meaning of words is best understood as their use within a given 'language-game' (see below).

W1 and W2 agreed (there are common threads) that language has limits imposed by its structures and that therefore so does thought. Compare the ideas of the very prominent linguist Noam Chomsky (1957 and after) (but note that many linguists disagree with Chomsky on such matters; see later).

W1 anticipated Chomsky's 'universalism', at least for logical 'deep structure'; but W2 rejected it, holding that the differences between linguistic forms reflect deep differences (there are few 'linguistic universals').

W1 held that awareness of genuine structures in the 'real world' generates the most significant features of thought and thus of language, W2 adopted the reverse view: linguistic structures determine thought, including our view of the structure of 'reality', which thus has no independent grounding and cannot be treated as especially significant.

W2 thus denies that languages can reliably inform us about the world and sees W1 as having succumbed, like most other C19-20 analytical philosophy, to the 'enchantment' of believing that we can really grasp the nature of reality in some kind of objective way (chiefly, according to analytical philosophers, by analysing the linguistic forms used to express propositions).

Even W1 held that some of the most important truths about the world can **perhaps** be 'shown' but cannot actually be **expressed** in language.

W2 argued that in many cases entities or notions which could be thought to be connected by one essential common feature are in fact connected by a series of overlapping similarities or 'family resemblances', where no one feature is common to all. Games provide an example, and W2 used this as an analogy for linguistic usage.

Two specific language-related issues discussed by Wittgenstein:

The (im)possibility of a 'private language'; W2 denied this possibility, but on this view the large issue remains of how language then began in the first place

The notion (adumbrated in W1) of a 'master language' to express logic/semantics; compare the Chomskyan notion of 'Mentalese'