Jesús Padilla Gálvez (Ed.)
Philosophical Anthropology
Wittgenstein's Perspective

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Philosophical Anthropology
An Introduction

JESÚS PADILLA GÁLVEZ

If we read Ludwig Wittgenstein's works and take his scientific formation in mathematical logic into account, it comes as a surprise that he ever developed a particular interest in anthropological questions. The following questions immediately arise: What role does anthropology play in Wittgenstein's work? How do problems concerning mankind as a whole relate to his philosophy? How does his approach relate to philosophical anthropology? How does he view classical issues about Man's affairs and actions[1]? I think that in order to find the answers to these questions we should first consider the framework within which they are raised.

Let's begin with a definition of philosophical anthropology.[2] There are currently two broad conceptions. First, it is considered a sort of branch of anthropology; secondly, it points to a specific philosophical perspective. Here I am mainly interested in the first sense of the expression, whereby it is basically understood as a philosophical reflection on some basic problems of mankind. It is worth mentioning that both meanings had their origin in the philosophical crisis of the 19th century rational paradigm. Representatives of philosophical anthropology just had ceased considering rationality as the ultimate explanation for human thinking and action. Rationality is rather determined by the biological and social conditions in which the lives of human beings are embedded. In other words: the autonomy of reason is not situated within the rules of rationality but is

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[1] *Sive*: "τ τ ν λλων νθρ πων πράγματα" Plato, *Leges*, 951a5-b4 and Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1998, 25.

[2] Philosophical anthropology is a scientific field that deals with different ways of understanding human behaviour as interface between the social environment and the creation of values. The movement of philosophical anthropology has been associated with German philosophers, such as Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen and Ernst Cassirer. For instance, Max Scheler addresses the following questions in his work *Man's Place in Nature*, "What is man?" and "What is man's place in the nature of things?" These two questions had defined the frame for the development of philosophical anthropology over the following decades.

rather determined by the conditions of biological life. In fact, the analysis of biological life is a pre-condition for an effective analysis of the rules of rationality. Philosophical anthropological research starts with the analysis of the biological conditions of life and continues to investigate the human mind.

Philosophical anthropology is based on the following presuppositions: first, the analysis of the subject-object relation is carried out by taking up the position of the object; secondly, in order to identify the position of the object we need to focus on life in general with its socio-biological conditions. Third, life is perceived as a point of intersection in which the biological conditions of life intertwine with the characteristics of a particular environment. However, all these assumptions imply a primacy of the natural sciences over the human sciences (e.g. cultural studies, history or social philosophy) and lead us away from a purely philosophical approach. We may therefore characterize this view of philosophical anthropology as the eccentric position in which at least part of its assumptions are based on natural sciences.[3]

In his remarks about anthropology, L. Wittgenstein seems to have been inspired by Frazer's works and uses the anthropologist's considerations to define his own position. Indeed, Wittgenstein does not take into account biological or social considerations as elements of the framework within which anthropological questions should be treated. Neither does he have recourse to the traditional approach to anthropology, since he wasn't an anthropologist himself. Since he comes from a different area he approaches the field from a different standpoint. His interest always centred around language. In fact, he castigates the way the usual anthropologist works for using a particular language in order to describe unknown phenomena. Given this lack of knowledge of the other, of "the primitive", the anthropologist's language appears all too simple to enable us to understand the phenomena we are interested in. He explains this as follows:

> "Alles was Frazer tut ist <es, den> (sie) Menschen, die so ähnlich denken wie er, Plausibel zu machen. Es ist sehr merkwürdig daß alle diese Gebräuche <letzt>endlich sozusagen als Dummheiten dargestellt werde.

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[3] Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. In: *Gesammelten Schriften*, Vol. IV. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 2003.

Nie wird es aber plausibel <sein,> daß die Menschen aus purer Dummheit alle diese Dinge<,> «all das» tun.”[4]

Wittgenstein's anthropological approach cannot be discussed without mentioning James G. Frazer, who is considered as the antecedent of modern social anthropology. In his works, Frazer deals with numerous facts but he was particularly interested in religion, myths and the meaning of rituals. He carried out comparative studies on religious belief and symbolic meaning and described the role of myth in society.[5] Now according to Wittgenstein, the aim of anthropology should rather be to describe how other men can act meaningfully in an environment that is essentially different from ours. The anthropologist should create a framework in which the unknown other can be understood but not as someone strange, foreign or alien. To attain this aim, he would have to uncover incommensurable structures in order to establish a link with us. Wittgenstein quotes from a book of anthropology, which in his view exemplifies the mistaken approach in this field:

“...man könnte ein Buch über [A]nthropologie so anfangen: Wenn man das Leben & Benehmen der Menschen auf der Erde betrachtet so sieht man daß sie außer den Handlungen die man tierische nennen könnte der Nahrungsaufnahme etc etc etc. auch solche ausführen die einen ganz anderen «eigentümlichen» Charakter tragen & die man rituelle Handlungen nennen könnte.”[6]

Clearly, Wittgenstein points out that one could write an anthropological book and describe the life and peculiar behaviour of other people as instinctive and ritual. According to his view a book like that would result in nonsense (*Unsinn*). This is because the anthropologist would interpret the peculiarities he is concerned with as a kind of "wrong physics" pursuant to his background knowledge. Consequently, the anthropologist would never become aware of the fact that the unknown culture he is concerned with has just developed strategies to assimilate to their environment.[7] He illustrates his argument by pointing to Frazer's anthropological approach which describes magic as a kind of mistaken

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[4] Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. VI, *PB*, Item 110, 178.

[5] See: James George Frazer, *The golden bough: a study in magic and religion.* Macmillan & Co., London, 1922.

[6] Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. VI, *PB*, item 110, p. 198; Wittgenstein, 2000, *Typoskript basierend auf* 109, 110, 111, 112, 113 *und dem Anfang von* 114, item 211, 319 *f.*

[7] The original text says: "...fehlerhafte Anschauung über die Physik der Dinge." Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. VI, *PB*, item 110, 198.

physics.[8] Wittgenstein rejects this attitude. He even sees a danger in this perspective, because by making use of our symbolic structures we merely reproduce our own representation of the other's. For instance, in anthropology we use our own language which unavoidably allows us only a restricted or distorted description of other cultures. But we are not normally aware of the fact that our lexicon and grammatical structures that we use for descriptive purposes have already constituted a framework which delimits our perception. Thus, rather than impartially or objectively approaching the other, our views are shaped by prejudice. It is due to our prejudice that we tend to perceive the members of other, more primitive cultures as irrational and in a sense impossible to understand. Hence Wittgenstein raises the issue whether we describe other cultures as they really are. He assumes that it is actually the other way round and that our language makes us attribute irrationality to others when as a matter of fact we behave and live in strikingly similar ways. But we do feel justified in our lack of understanding of the other. He explains this situation as follows:

> "Frazer ist viel mehr savage, als die meisten seine savages, denn diese werden nicht so weit vom Verständnis einer geistigen Angelegenheit entfernt sein, wie ein Engländer des 20sten Jahrhunderts. S e i n e Erklärungen der primitiven Gebräuche sind viel roher, als der Sinn dieser Gebräuche selbst."[9]

Wittgenstein frequently carries out thought experiments (*Gedankenexperimente*) in order to clarify and illustrate his points. He suggests the following scenario: we find an unknown native culture whose members, unlike us, carry out mathematical calculations not to make well-founded predictions, but in order to make prophecies. But why do we ascribe two different purposes to one and the same phenomenon? He invites us to view mathematical propositions from an anthropological standpoint; in particular, he notices an analogy in the representation of anthropology and mathematics. However, most researchers would consider this analogy as rather unusual because anthropologists would never admit mathematical methods in the description and explanation of anthropological questions. Most likely, they would reject the view that anthropological facts could be understood in mathematical terms. Moreover, if we used mathematical logic to describe anthropological

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[8] See: Frazer, 1922 and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'*. Edited by Rush Rhees. Brynmill, Retford, 1979.

[9] Wittgenstein, 2000, *Typoskript der zweiten Hälfte der Vorkriegsfassung der Untersuchung*, item 221, 321.

phenomena we would never be able to verify or falsify our mathematical propositions. On the other hand, if mathematical calculation is completely avoided, how could an anthropologist actually describe and explain mathematical phenomena?

We shall take up the notion of introducing mathematics in anthropology and show its implications by means of an example: let's assume that a group of anthropologists investigates another culture and plans to write a book about the mathematics that the people of this culture have developed.[10] But what is the researchers' approach when they study the peculiarities of the other culture's mathematics? Wittgenstein mentions two contrasting stands, one in which the anthropologist describes the mathematical symbols and the other whereby the anthropologist keeps a record of the mathematical stage the other culture is in. He says:

> "Es ist doch klar, daß wir ein «↓mathematisches» Werk zum Studium der Anthropologie verwenden können. Aber eines ist dann nicht klar: - ob wir sagen sollen: "diese Schrift zeigt uns wie bei diesem Volk mit Zeichen operiert wurde", oder ob wir sagen sollen: "dieser Schrift zeigt uns, welche Teile «welchen Teil» der Mathematik dieses Volk beherrscht hat.".".[11]

Here he points to a paradox that usually occurs in the study of anthropological phenomena. In the first case the researcher is an outsider that describes a set of symbols; in the second case, the anthropologist compares the unknown way of carrying out computations to the standard and methods used in his own culture. The latter uses his own mathematical system as a frame of reference. However, this second position parts from the implicit assumption that our system is not only more complex, but better than theirs. The system under consideration is seen as a subset of ours and therefore less developed and refined. Wittgenstein criticises the second position for having only little cognitive utility in anthropology.

We shall try to make clear Wittgenstein's criticism through another example. Let's consider simple arithmetic according to which 25×25=625. Let's also assume that an anthropologist is confronted with the question whether 625 is a prophecy or a rather a prediction. Wittgenstein seems to think that Frazer would have regarded the calculus as a religious prophecy, as is shown in the following quotation:

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[10] Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. XIII, *PB*, item 117, 172.
[11] Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. XIII, *PB*, item 117, 186.

> "Man könnte die Prophezeihung auch *so* fassen: - daß Übereinstimmung bezüglich des Resultates «↓der Rechnung» erzielt werden wird, wenn Übereinstimmung bezüglich der richtigen Anwendung der Regel erzielt wird.
> Oder: daß es unser aller Meinung nach der gleiche Schritt sein wird «werde», wenn er unser aller Meinung nach dieser <(>eindeutigen<)> Regel ~~folgt~~ gemäß ist.
> Oder wir sind überzeugt, daß ich eine Rech<n>ung so «dadurch» kopieren kann, daß ich sie wieder, der Regeln gemäß' ausführe«en» «wir» «können» «wir». // Rechnung *kopieren* können, indem wir sie ...”[12]

If a particular calculus adopted within a particular primitive culture serves to make prophecies, then the calculus would have the following form: the prediction of future events originates from pure intuition. There is no mathematical rule underlying the calculus. If we take this view as a starting point it appears nevertheless incredible that such "prophecy" sometimes be true. The same applies to anthropological research. Traditional anthropology generally views other cultures as less developed, rudimentary and inferior to the culture to which the researcher belongs. For instance, if we analyse the pyramids of Chichen Itza, the pre-Columbian archaeological site built by the Maya civilization, we come across details on the Maya's religious rituals and the symbolic meaning of their buildings. Still we have only little knowledge about the mathematical foundations and the geometry that enabled the Mayas to construct their polyhedron formed pyramids. Anthropologists tend to proceed in almost the same manner: they concentrate on the symbolic meaning of cultural objects, but tend to disregard the mathematical knowledge that this culture has developed. Such view of anthropology appears rather peculiar because it excludes all the basic knowledge that the other culture has.

The aim of this book is to investigate the anthropological questions that Wittgenstein raised in his works. The answers to the questions raised in this introduction may be found on the intersection between forms of life and radical translation from another culture into ours. The book presents an extensive analysis of anthropological issues with emphasis on language and social elements. The papers included in this collection assess Wittgenstein's philosophy from the point of view of anthropology. Thus, P.M.S. Hacker thinks that Wittgenstein's ethnological approach helps to distance us from the phenomena that puzzle us in philosophy. This approach helps to understand that anthropological facts free us from philosophical myths and makes us understand that grammar and

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[12] Wittgenstein, 2000, Vol. XIII, *PB*, item 117, 174.

grammatical propositions are not to be explained by reference to facts. Many philosophical myths just break down when we adopt the ethnological approach. Robert J. Fogelin argues that Hume's and Wittgenstein perspectives share a number of features, since many of Hume's central themes are independent of what the author calls the First Principle. He also discusses Hume' skeptical argument concerning induction. Alejandro Tomasini Bassols argues that in last analysis Wittgenstein's philosophical meditation on language could be seen as a research about a particular kind of action carried out by men, that is, the speaking of a language. From this point of view, it is easy to understand to what extent Wittgenstein's way of doing philosophy is different from what standard philosophers do. Lars Hertzberg discusses issues concerning responsibility and authority as an expression of will. He raises the issue of whether what the words or actions express are the result of a person's will or whether and to what extent they were produced by someone else. This subject has to do with the autonomy of the will. Christian Kanzian discusses the mind-body problem. J. Padilla Gálvez asks how one can recognize and understand another person and he links this question with the problem of representation. His point is that in order to recognize another person one has to avoid an egocentric position. In his contribution Nuno Venturinha applies examines Wittgenstein's notion of a "natural history of human beings", a notion which plays an important role in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen.* Manuel García-Carpintero discusses the normative character of meaning and therefore illocutionary force. His discussion centers round the existence of a specific conventional procedure as a constitutive feature of linguistic forces. Olli Lagerspetz analyses the concepts of the dirty and the clean as anthropological ones. Judgments about the clean and the dirty imply ideas about what it is to care for the item that is soiled or might be soiled. The question whether dirt objectively exists cannot be answered in this general form. The meanings of our critical concepts are themselves determined in the context of the inquiries in which they are used. So the word 'reality' should not be taken as a metaphysical term, but rather as a tool for solving problems. António Marques argues that in Wittgenstein's writings it is possible to find two conceptions of "form of life". The first one is tied to an ethnological approach, by which Wittgenstein wishes to enlarge the scope of our understanding of what a human life is. In his view, ethnological representations must give up the idea of purely rational explanations of primitive behaviour, since this embodies an oversimplistic reductionism

concerning other forms of life. The second use of "anthropological" representations consists in the design of fictitious societies which then can be studied as in a laboratory. Nicanor Ursúa deals with the so-called converging technologies and its role for human enhancement. He discusses the implications of these technologies for a philosophical anthropology.

This volume is a collection of papers which were read at the International Congress held at the University of Castilla-La Mancha in Toledo (Spain), in September 2009, under the general subject of anthropology. The congress was attended by specialists of different countries. We were delighted to attend lectures by outstanding philosophers as Prof. P.M.S Hacker, R. Fogelin or Lars Hertzberg. What we offer here is the outcome of a careful selection of essays. We were interested above all in editing a book characterized by its unity of subject matter and originality of contributions. The congress was devoted in the first place to Wittgenstein's thoughts concerning philosophical anthropology. To be sure, one of the aims of the congress was to consider and carefully examine the importance of anthropology for philosophical discussion and speculation. So I would like to thank all the colleagues who accepted the invitation to participate in the congress and thereby contribute to the book. Secondly, I am indebted to the public institutions that have financially supported the congress. Financial support was provided by the MICINN, Spanish Government, (FFI2009-05510-E). On this occasion, we benefited not only from the continued and generous support of the Departments of Research and Development of the Government of Castilla-La Mancha (AEB-1501/09), but also from the Diputación of Toledo and the Obra Social de la Caja de Castilla-La Mancha, the City Council of Toledo, as well as from the University of Castilla-La Mancha and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences in Toledo.

Wittgenstein's Anthropological and Ethnological Approach

P. M. S. HACKER

1. The ethnological method

In July, 1940 Wittgenstein wrote 'If we use the ethnological approach, does that mean we are saying that philosophy is ethnology? No, it only means that we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see things *more objectively*'[1]. This remark, written at a time when Wittgenstein's later views were largely formed, is of considerable interest and worth reflecting on.

In his first masterwork, the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had conceived of philosophy as an investigation into the essence of the world and the nature of things. Logic, he later wrote in the *Investigations*,

> …seemed to have a peculiar depth – a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the foundation of all the sciences. – For logical investigation explores the essence of all things. It seeks to see to the foundation of things, and shouldn't concern itself whether things actually happen in this or that way. —It arises neither from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connections, but from an urge to understand the foundations, or essence, of everything empirical. [2]

He had thought that logic showed the scaffolding of the world, and that the essential nature of things *had to be* reflected in the forms of analysed propositions with a sense. It was only in the 1930s that he gradually came to realize that what had appeared to be the scaffolding *of* the world was actually the scaffolding *from which we describe the world*. Again, as he wrote in the *Investigations*,

> We feel as if we had to *see right into* phenomena: yet our investigation is directed not towards *phenomena*, but rather, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. What that means is that we call to mind the *kinds of statement* that we make about phenomena…

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[1] Wittgenstein, *MS*, 162b, 67v; CV 2.7.1940.
[2] Wittgenstein, *PI*, § 89.

> Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one. And this inquiry sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language.[3]

What had seemed to be the logico-metaphysical forms of things that *had to be* mirrored in the logical syntax of any possible language were no more than the shadow cast by grammar upon the world. What seemed to be metalogical[4] connections between language and reality, that pinned names to the objects that are their meanings, and ensured a pre-established harmony between thought, language and reality, were actually no more than instruments of language, and connections within grammar. For what appeared to be sempiternal objects constituting the substance of the world are actually samples, employed in ostensive definitions as explanations of word-meaning and standards for the correct application of words. And what had looked like a metalogical agreement between the proposition that *p* and the fact that *p* that makes it true, is no more than an intra-grammatical rule that allows one to replace the phrase 'the proposition that *p*' by the phrase 'the proposition that is made true by the fact that *p*'. So too, the metaphysical statement that the world consists of facts not things, *correctly understood*, amounts to no more than the grammatical proposition that a true description of (some features of) the world consists of a statement of facts, not of a list of things. And this grammatical proposition is itself a statement of a linguistic rule concerning the use of the phrases 'true description', 'list of things', and 'statement of facts'.

This transformation of philosophical vision that occurred between 1929 and 1931 was, of course, accompanied by a complete reorientation in Wittgenstein's vision of philosophy itself. He had thought that philosophy must investigate

> …the a priori order of the world, that is, the order of *possibilities*, which the world and thinking must have in common. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty may attach to it. —It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction, but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.5563).[5]

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[3] Wittgenstein, *PI*, § 90.
[4] This is Wittgenstein's idiosyncratic use of the expression 'metalogical'.
[5] Wittgenstein, *PI*, § 97.

This, he now saw, was an illusion. This change in his conception of the method of doing philosophy was *perhaps* what he referred to in 1929 as 'my way of philosophizing' and characterized it as being 'still new for me'. He described it thus: 'This method is essentially the transition from the question of truth to the question of sense'[6]. What he meant by this remark is unclear and contentious. But the change in his general conception is surely what he referred to in his lectures in 1930-31 as 'a new method' that had been found. It was a method that made it possible for the first time for there to be *skilful* philosophers, rather than great ones, as in the past[7]. Great philosophers have achieved a sublime vision of the world and of man's place in it, have erected grand systems to articulate their vision. And each such grand system, tormented by questions that brought itself in question[8], collapsed under its own weight. Skilful philosophers are local cartographers, not meta-physicists or meta-physical cosmologists. They have the journeyman's skill to map the terrain where people lose their way, to track their footsteps and to identify the place where they took the wrong turning, and to explain why they ended in bogs and quicksands. This is why Wittgenstein said that philosophy had *lost its nimbus*. For the *Pathos* of the sublime is cast back upon the illusions to which we are subject.

Far from investigating language-independent essences of things, the task of philosophy is to investigate the uses of words that are the source of conceptual problems and confusions. It sketches the logical geography of those parts of the conceptual landscape in which we are prone to lose our way, not for its own sake, but in order that we should know our way around. It is not a metaphysical investigation (there are none such), but a conceptual or grammatical one. It reminds us how we use the words of our language, invites us to bring to mind features of usage in order to get us to realise the way in which we are inadvertently misusing words, crossing different uses of words, drawing inferences from one use that can actually be drawn only from another. It draws our attention to conceptual differences, where we were misled by conceptual similarities. These differences are ones which we may well not have noted, since the mastery of the use of a word does not require mastery of *comparative* use. (How many competent English speakers could, off the cuff, spell out the differences in use between 'nearly' and 'almost'? –   Yet no one would ever

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[6] Wittgenstein, *MS*, 106, 46.
[7] Wittgenstein, *M*, 113.
[8] Wittgenstein, *PI*, § 133.

say 'There is not almost enough sugar in the pudding' as opposed to 'There isn't nearly enough sugar in the pudding'). But when the differences are carefully pointed out, we recognise them.[9] And when we recognise them, the philosophical knots we have tied in our understanding start to disentangle. So, for example, when we are reminded that one can speak quickly or slowly, but cannot mean something quickly or slowly, that one may speak better than one writes, but cannot mean something better than one writes, that one may begin to say something but cannot begin to mean something by what one says, and so forth, it may dawn on us that meaning something by one's words is not an activity of the mind. Philosophy, then, is a conceptual investigation the twofold purposes of which are the dissolution of philosophical problems and the disentangling of conceptual confusions, on the one hand, and the description of the logical geography of our concepts, on the other.

That human beings use language, engage in language-games, perform acts of speech in the context of their activities – these are anthropological facts about the natural history of man. What warrants using the epithets 'ethnological approach' or 'anthropological approach' in describing Wittgenstein's later philosophy is the perspective from which he views conceptual matters. Unlike Frege, Wittgenstein treats concepts not as entities to be discovered, but as techniques of using words. To have mastered a certain concept is to have mastered the technique of the use of a certain word in some language or other. To possess a concept is to be able to use a word or phrase correctly, to explain what one means by it in a given context, and to respond with understanding to its use. Concepts are human creations, made not found. They are comparable to instruments made for human purposes, and their acquisition is comparable to the mastery of the technique of using an instrument. They are rule-governed *techniques* of word use. They are given by explanations of word meaning, and their techniques of application are exhibited in the use of words in practice. The use of words is integrated into the activities of human beings in the stream of life. These activities are part of human natural history. Wittgenstein found it fruitful to view them anthropologically or ethnologically. This comes out in two aspects of his approach to the

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[9] This is not a case of tacit as opposed to explicit knowledge, as these notions have been deployed in recent decades by philosophical theorists of meaning. It is rather a matter of explicit knowledge of correct use (meaning) but lack of a synoptic comparative view.