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Language and World. Part One
Essays on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein
Preface

This is the first of two volumes containing the proceedings of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} International Wittgenstein Symposium in Kirchberg/Lower Austria, August 2009.

The overall topic of this conference, “Language and World”, can be seen as central to Wittgenstein’s philosophy. When he was once asked by Yorick Smythies what he regarded as the greatest problem in philosophy, Wittgenstein’s answer was “Subject and predicate”.

We have decided to dedicate this first volume solely to Wittgenstein’s philosophy. The four sections only provide a very basic structure. Several contributions easily fit into more than one section. Some of the contributions even might have needed an altogether different heading. The chapter “Wittgenstein’s Nachlass” results from a workshop on new aspects of Wittgenstein’s published and unpublished writings.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all the contributors and to those who took part in the many and lively discussions during the conference. Without them this volume would never have happened.

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Logic
and
Mathematics
1. Setting the stage

The laws of logic, what appear to be truths of metaphysics, the propositions of arithmetic and geometry are perennial sources of philosophical bafflement. Such propositions we conceive as necessary, not contingent. Our knowledge of them, we say, is a priori, not empirical. They seem an especially apt subject-matter for the Queen of the Sciences. For it is tempting to think that the physical sciences investigate empirical facts – what contingently characterizes the actual world; whereas meta-physical philosophy studies what is eternal, what could not be otherwise, the essence of any possible world. The truths of metaphysics, it used to be thought (and is being so thought again today), are the richest fruits on the tree of philosophy. Although mathematics is not a branch of philosophy, the nature of mathematical truth and the nature of mathematical necessity are surely subjects for philosophical investigation. So too is the adamantine character of the truths of logic and the nature of the laws of thought.

These kinds of proposition (and until the end of the eighteenth century the truths of morality would have been included too) have always seemed exceptional, extraordinary, privileged – their negations being in some sense inconceivable. We cannot even think of a proposition’s being both true and false – the law of non-contradiction is the very foundation of all thinking and reasoning. It seems absurd to suppose that $2 + 2$ might
equal 5 – the truths of mathematics are adamantine. And we cannot con-
ceive of red’s being lighter than pink, or more like yellow than like orange.
But what is the source of the necessity of such truths? What makes them necessary? Surely there must be something in virtue of which they are nec-
essary? Does the source of the necessity of such necessary truths lie in the
nature of things – in the features of non-empirical objects such as numbers
or ideal shapes? Is it the nature of universals that makes such propositions
as ‘red is darker than pink’ necessary? Or does the source of their necessity
lie in the transcendental structures that the human mind imposes upon the
data of sense? Or is it something that flows from the meanings of words?
Are necessary truths a consequence, perhaps an unwitting consequence, of
our conventions?
That such propositions are what we call necessary truths is indisput-
able. But what is the nature of this necessity that seems to impose itself
upon us? In existentialist moments, this may well seem outrageous. Dosto-
evsky wrote:

But twice-two-makes-four is for all that a most insupportable thing. Twice-
two-makes-four is, in my humble opinion, nothing but a piece of impudence.
Twice-two-makes-four is a farcical dressed up fellow who stands across your
path with arms akimbo and spits at you. Mind you, I quite agree that twice-
two-makes-four is a most excellent thing; but if we are to give everything its
due, then twice-two-makes-five is sometimes a most charming little thing too.¹

Why must things be so? What forces our intellect thus, even against our
will?
The source of the necessity of necessary truths seems baffling, but
the further question of how we are able to know such privileged truths
seems no less so. We discover truths of the empirical sciences by observa-
tion and experiment, but we discover truths of logic, mathematics and
metaphysics independently of empirical evidence. So how is a priori
knowledge of such truths possible? Is it by Wesensschau – the intuitive
perception of the relations between universals? Or is it by the power of
pure reason to apprehend analytic and, more importantly, synthetic a priori
truths? Or is our recognition of necessity a special case of recognizing our
own decisions and intentions in laying down conventions and then calcu-

¹ Dostoevsky 1955, in: Magarshak, 137.
lating what truths follow from them? The propositions of logic, mathematics and metaphysics constitute a permanently disputed territory upon which armies of rationalists, empiricists, Platonists, formalists, Kantians, conventionalists and pragmatists clash in vehement controversy.

Wittgenstein approached the task of mapping out this terrain from a unique vantage point – namely his elucidation of internal relations by reference to human practices of using signs. His examination of the concept of following a rule provides the background for clarifying the character of mathematical propositions, of what he called grammatical propositions and hence too of putative metaphysical propositions, and of the propositions of logic. He gave a detailed and comprehensive account of their peculiar status, an account which explains both why we conceive of them as necessary truths and what sense can be made of that conception. The questions of what makes such propositions necessary (what is the source of their necessity) and how a priori knowledge of them is possible (how do we recognise them) lead us astray before we have begun. The prior question is: what is it for a proposition to be a ‘necessary proposition’, i.e. to be a proposition of mathematics, to be a logical proposition, or to be what Wittgenstein called a grammatical proposition? If this is answered by examining and properly describing the roles of such propositions in our linguistic transactions, the traditional questions can be resolved or dissolved.

Wittgenstein’s reflections on these themes are far more revolutionary than is commonly recognised, in ways that are not widely understood. It is important to note a remark he jotted down in his diary in 1931:

It was characteristic of theorists of the past cultural period to want to find the a priori where it isn’t. Or should I say a characteristic of the past cultural era was to form //to create// the concept, or non-concept, of the a priori. For it would never have created the concept if from the start it had seen things// the situation// as we do. (Then the world would have lost a great – I mean, signifi-

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2 It has been suggested that ‘the philosophical problem of necessity is twofold: what is its source and how do we recognize it’ (Dummett 1959, 327). Nothing could be further removed from Wittgenstein’s approach to the multifaceted problem. For he aimed to undermine these very questions, to show that once the logico-grammatical features of these various types of proposition is correctly understood, these puzzles will dissolve.
He wished to challenge the conception of a priori knowledge that lies at the very foundation of much of the Western tradition in philosophy. Philosophers from Plato to Descartes and beyond have held that our knowledge of arithmetic, geometry and logic is the paradigm of genuine knowledge. Once properly grasped, it was absolutely certain – indeed, it displayed the highest kind of certainty there is. The very idea that there is such a thing as a priori knowledge and necessary truth was, Wittgenstein suggested, rooted in the supposition that empirical knowledge must rest on absolutely secure and indubitable foundations (CE 408), and that supposition calls out for investigation. The idea that there are two kinds of knowledge, a priori knowledge and empirical knowledge, is deeply engrained in the Western tradition. And so too is the thought that knowledge has two different kinds of objects, contingent truths and necessary truths; as well as the idea that the latter are more certain than the former. But these preconceptions, however natural they are, are also profoundly misleading. They distort our vision of the conceptual phenomena. To look at things thus is to begin one’s investigations on the wrong foot – and one may well never regain one’s balance.

A challenge to the distinction between a priori and empirical truths may seem to philosophers, especially those influenced by Quine, to be very proper. Viewed from an American pragmatist perspective, there is no such distinction – only a distinction between degrees of embeddedness of propositions in our ‘total theories of the world’. But that is precisely the opposite of Wittgenstein’s guiding ideas. Far from arguing that there is no deep difference between propositions of logic, mathematics and grammar, on the one hand, and empirical propositions, on the other, he argued that the differences are far deeper than, and quite different from, the picture presented by the epistemological distinction between a priori propositions and empirical ones. The traditional dichotomy makes things look far too similar. We need to break with that tradition far more radically than anything dreamt of by pragmatists, and in the opposite direction from the movement of their thought.

Since most of the discussions of Wittgenstein’s treatment of these themes seems to me to start on the wrong foot and move in a direction that
is at best tangential to Wittgenstein’s thought, in this lecture I shall try to sketch how an investigation of his ideas should start and in what direction it should move. For Wittgenstein is not a full-blooded conventionalist, and not a modified one either, he was not introducing an assertability-conditional semantics as opposed to a truth-conditional one – nor any other theory of meaning for a natural language. He was not a de-psychologized intuitionist or closet constructivist in his philosophy of mathematics, and neither a finitist nor a strict-finitist. He tried to clear the ground of houses of cards, and to enable us to survey the ground of human linguistic practices and their normative forms as it actually is.

2. Leitmotifs

Running through Wittgenstein’s later writings on necessary propositions is a number of leitmotifs. These are, at first glance, startling. For they are, in the true sense of the word, radical. On the one hand, they aim to get at the very roots of our thought. On the other, they are dramatically at odds with traditional conceptions of the nature of necessary truth. Judging by reactions to them over the last fifty years, the temptation to dismiss them is evidently powerful. But it should be resisted. What Wittgenstein demands of us is above all that we look and see, examine differences, note analogies and disanalogies, investigate (LFM 55). It is precisely this that I shall try to do here. In this lecture I shall endeavour to describe the motifs that recur in Wittgenstein extensive discussions of the nature of necessary truths of logic, mathematics and grammar or metaphysics. This, I hope will set us facing the right direction.

2.1 Necessary propositions are heterogeneous

Philosophical accounts subsume true logical, mathematical and metaphysical propositions under the rubric of ‘necessary truths’ and often offer a uniform explanation of their necessity. Wittgenstein emphasized the differences between such propositions.

Already in the Tractatus he had observed that tautologies and arithmetical equations are fundamentally dissimilar. Logical truths are propositions that are true no matter how things stand. Their truth, therefore, does not constrain reality in any way. They can, therefore, be deemed to be
senseless propositions – limiting cases of a proposition with a sense. For although they are well-formed, they convey no information whatsoever about reality.

Equations, unlike logical truths, are rules for substituting and transforming expressions, in particular transforming quantitative empirical propositions. Equations also do service in generating further theorems by means of proofs. For arithmetic (like geometry) is a system of propositions interwoven by ever more complex networks of proofs. The whole point and purpose of this system as a whole (but not of every strand within it) lies in its empirical application. These propositions and their techniques of application inform a multitude of basic and pervasive ways of thinking, speaking and, above all, of acting. But although the trunk of mathematics is firmly rooted in the earth, some branches of mathematics are very different, having little or no application.

What we commonly conceive to be true propositions of metaphysics – which Wittgenstein referred to as grammatical propositions – (e.g. that every event is temporally related to every other event, that effects cannot precede their causes, that nothing can be red all over and simultaneously be green all over) differ from propositions of arithmetic in fundamental respects. Though they often form networks (as in the case of ‘colour-geometry’), they are not bound together by a system of proofs. They are expressions of rules in the guise of descriptions of the natural world.

So, it is important to bear in mind that Wittgenstein did not advance a single account of all the kinds of propositions that we deem necessary truths, but different accounts of different kinds of necessary propositions.

2.2 Necessary propositions do not describe the essential features of the world
Contingent propositions are commonly held to be descriptions of things in terms of their external properties and relations. Necessary propositions, by contrast, are held to be descriptions of things in terms of their internal properties and relations. Internal properties are partly constitutive of the nature of their bearer. Every rod has a length, we say. Having a length is an

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3 In the Tractatus Wittgenstein argued that equations are not really propositions at all.
internal property of rods – if something lacks a length it is no rod and if a
rod ceased to have a length, it would cease to be a rod. Similarly, internal
relations are conceived to be essential to the identities of their relata. Red is
darker than pink – if a colour is lighter than pink, it cannot be red. Neces-
sary propositions, we have always been told, describe the essential features
of the world.

But we should be wary of this traditional conception:

What is the characteristic mark of ‘internal properties’? That they persist al-
ways, unalterably, in the whole they constitute; as it were independently of
any outside happenings. As the construction of a machine on paper does not
break when the machine itself succumbs to external forces. — Or again, I
should like to say that they are not subject to wind and weather like physical
features of things; rather they are unassailable, like shadows. (RFM 74)

So, while internal properties and relations appear to be essential properties
and relations of their bearers, the hardest of the hard as it were, they are
actually no more than shadows of logico-grammatical relationships of im-
pletion, exclusion, compatibility and incompatibility between concepts
(techniques of using words (MS 163, 57r) and between propositions (what
is said by the use of a sentence). We are inclined to think, for example, that
a proof that a square consists of two right-angled triangles specifies an es-
sential, internal property of squares. For, we are inclined to say, it

“has to be

so. And, in a sense, that is true. But in another sense, in the sense in which
we think of the proof as disclosing and describing necessities in re, it is
misconceived. Wittgenstein responds to this tempting conception with
great power:

“This shape consists of these shapes. You have shown an essential property of
this shape.” — You have shown me a new picture.
It is as if God had put them together like that. — So we are employing a simile.
The shape becomes an ethereal entity which has this shape; it is as if it had
been put together like this once and for all (by him put the essential properties
into things). For if the shape is to be a thing consisting of parts, then the pat-
tern-maker who made the shape is he who also made light and dark, colour
and hardness, etc. (Imagine someone asking: “The shape … is put together out
of these parts; who put it together? You?”) …
And I want to say: when one uses the expression, “the proof has taught me –
shown me – that this is the case”, one is still using this simile.
I could also have said: it is not the property of an object that is ever ‘essential’, but rather the mark of a concept. (RFM 64)

Necessary propositions exhibit neither factual or super-factual (“metaphysical”) nor ideational (psychological) truths, but rather conceptual connections. They determine concepts and transitions from one concept to another. Internal properties and relations are shadows cast by grammar upon the world. I shall elaborate below.

2.3 Necessary propositions are not descriptions at all

Philosophers throughout the ages have taken for granted the thought that truths of reason are descriptions of their respective domains. Empiricists such as Hume held that they describe connections of ideas – a view that found favour with nineteenth century German psychologicians, whose conception was in turn hammered by anti-psychologist logicians. Propositions of logic, Platonists such as Frege aver, are laws of truth. They describe perfectly general relationships between truth-values of thoughts (propositions) irrespective of the contents of the thoughts. Or, as Russell argued, they describe the most general and abstract features of the universe, the ultimate logical forms of all facts.\footnote{See: Russell, Bertrand 1984, chap. IX.} Propositions of arithmetic, mathematicians such as Hardy hold, describe relationships between arithmetical objects. And until the invention of alternative geometries, Euclidean geometry was thought by Platonists to describe the structures and relations of ideal shapes, or, by Kantians, to describe the necessary structure of phenomenal space. Meta-physicists, such as Kripke and his followers, hold that metaphysical propositions describe necessary features of the world, features that are independent of contingencies, and that obtain in all possible worlds. Assuming that they are descriptions, it seems that their necessity simply reflects the necessity of what they describe. But, of course, that leaves the character of the putative necessity altogether mysterious. As a first step towards demystification, Wittgenstein denied that these necessary propositions describe anything. They do not describe this world, but nor do they describe an ideal world of abstract or ideal objects. One might see this leitmotif in his reflections on logic, mathematics and metaphysics as a further extension of his criticism of the Augustinian conception of language,
according to which the fundamental role of words is to name, and the fundamental role of sentences to describe. For the role of necessary propositions is not descriptive at all.

2.4 The way to attain an overview of necessary propositions is to focus upon their roles
To clarify the differences between necessary and contingent propositions we must focus upon the roles of necessary propositions. Rather than being mesmerised by their adamantine necessity, awe-struck by the impossibility of things being other than they seemingly describe them as being, and impressed by their eternal truth, we need to investigate their function – what we do with them and what we use them to do. For ‘a proposition which it is supposed to be impossible to imagine as other than true has a different function from one for which this does not hold’ (RFM 225).

Wittgenstein’s insight here should be extended to critical reflection on current views on necessity. Merely to insist that the propositions of metaphysics describe ‘the necessary features of the world’, or the ‘modal properties of reality’, or the characteristics of ‘all possible worlds’ is to do no more than advance a picture instead of an elucidation. And it is a potentially misleading picture. Talk of ‘being true in all possible worlds’ is no more than a picturesque way of characterizing a proposition as true come what may, i.e. as necessarily true. After all, there are no possible worlds – the only ‘world’ there is is the familiar actual world – which admittedly might have differed in various ways. But the actuality of possibilities must not be confused with the existence of possible actualities. Invoking ‘possible worlds’ contributes nothing to the problem of elucidating the nature of necessary truth. Talk of ‘the necessary features of the world’ presents the physicist as describing and explaining the contingent features of the world, and the meta-physicist as describing its necessary features. Or, according to an alternative conception, the physicist describes features of the world and the meta-physicist sorts them into two different categories. So the world is conceived as consisting of two kinds of facts – contingent facts and necessary facts. But no non-trivial explanation is offered of what ‘a necessary fact’ might be. Moreover, these ‘necessary facts’, unlike truths of reason which were always thought to be transparent in a manner in which empirical facts are not, are now presented as being every bit as brut-
ish, every bit as impenetrable to reason, as ultimate contingent facts (e.g. facts concerning basic particles and constants in nature). What is left utterly obscure is what is meant by saying of a truth that it is necessary. To answer that, however, we must examine the roles of so-called necessary propositions of metaphysics.

Similarly, we say that mathematical propositions assert necessary truths of mathematics – and we often dress up this description in Platonist garb, insisting that mathematical propositions are eternal truths about objects in the realm of number. But the atemporality of mathematical truths is not the same as sempiternal (being true at all times). Moreover, the Platonist guise goes no way to explaining why we think of such truths as necessary, and what their putative necessity amounts to. Why must 2 and 2 always make 4? Why not sometimes 5 – as Dostoevsky suggested; or 22? What is the nature of this ‘mathematical necessity’? To answer this we need to examine the functions of propositions of mathematics. And the fundamental question to ask is not ‘What makes mathematical propositions necessary?’, but rather ‘What makes a proposition a mathematical one?’

Finally, we commonly aver that the propositions of logic are sempiternal truths – ‘boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow but never displace’ as Frege put it (BLA i, Introduction, p. xvi). They are, in his view, perfectly general laws of truth. The propositions of logic hold with absolute generality. But that goes no way to explain their necessity. Why, for example, must every proposition be either true or false? Is this, as Russell supposed, akin to ‘Every swan must be either white or black’? To shed light on the anankastic nature of the propositions of logic, we need to look at their role and their relation to rules of inference – at their functions in our linguistic and cogitative transactions.

2.5 The primacy of practice and the need for agreement
One upshot of Wittgenstein’s extensive discussion of following a rule is the demonstration that internal relations are rooted in human practices of using expressions, of applying expressions in accordance with rules and of shared techniques of application. Following a rule, he reminds us, is a [polymorphous] human activity (RFM 331). The regular employment of an expression in accordance with a rule, and the determination that doing such-and-such is what is called ‘following this rule’ (and that doing that
counts as transgressing it) forges grammatical relationships between uses of expressions, and between applications of concepts. Consequently grammar expresses the essences of things (PI §371) – and what we conceive of as internal relations between things are reflections of these grammatical relations between expressions and their rule-governed uses. Shared rules involve shared practices. Shared practices involve consensus, agreement. The agreement of human beings that is presupposed by logic is not an agreement in opinions (RFM 353). Similarly, the agreement of people in calculation is not an agreement in convictions (RFM 332). It is an agreement in form of life, and that means: an agreement in concepts and their application, and hence in the behaviour consequent upon their application. It is an agreement on the measures by which we judge reality, and hence also, an extensive agreement on the results of measurement (PI §§241-2).

2.6 Necessary truths are normative or systematically related to norms of representation
What we call necessary truths are not descriptive but normative, i.e. expressions of rules (or, as we shall see, systematically related to rules). The rules in question are rules or, as Wittgenstein sometimes put it, norms, of representation – rules for describing things. They are, one can often say, norms for re-presenting facts or features of what we take to be facts. When told that an area is two by four metres, we can re-present it as 8 metres square; when told that the curtains are red, we can redescribe them as darker than the pink chairs; when informed that the bank owes us £1235, and we owe it £1335, we can present our financial situation more concisely as one in which we owe the bank £100.

‘Of the propositions of mathematics’, Wittgenstein wrote, ‘one can say that they are normative propositions. And that characterizes their use’ (MS 123, 49v). It is important to realise that what Wittgenstein meant here by ‘normative’ is not what Frege, Peirce and Ramsey (in slightly different ways) meant when they asserted that logic is a normative science. Frege held that ‘Like ethics, logic can also be called a normative science. How must I think in order to reach the goal, truth? We expect logic to give us the answer to this question … the task we assign logic is only of saying what holds with the utmost generality for all thinking, whatever its subject-
matter. We must assume that the rules for our thinking and for our holding something to be true are prescribed by the laws of truth ... Consequently we can say: logic is the science of the most general laws of truth' (PW 128). Hence, according to Frege, rules of inference (laws of thought) are akin to technical norms (i.e. means-ends rules contingent on laws of nature) such as ‘If you want to build something that floats, you must ensure that it weighs less than the water it displaces’. For example: ‘If you wish to reason truly, then you must infer $q$ from the premise that $p$ and the premise that $p \supset q$, because it is a law of truth that whenever it is true that $p$ and it is true that $p \supset q$, then it is true that $q$’. The rules of logical inference spell out how we ought to reason if we wish to attain truth in our inferences. Peirce held that ‘logic is the ethics of thinking, in the sense in which ethics is the bringing to bear of self-control for the purpose of realizing our desires’ – a remark that Ramsey liked to quote. All three viewed logic as an instrumental science.

In Wittgenstein’s view, mathematics is normative in a quite different sense. It is not a body of instrumental rules subservient to an independently given end. The propositions of arithmetic are networks of rules the collective point and purpose of which is the transformation of empirical propositions concerning magnitudes and quantities of countables and measurables. Geometry, he held, consists neither of descriptions of ideal geometrical objects (Platonism) nor of the description of the a priori structure of our spatial intuition (Kant); nor does it consist of uninterpreted calculi the primitives of which are implicitly defined by the axioms (Hilbert). Rather, a geometry for space consists of complex interwoven norms of representation for the description of spatial objects and their spatial properties and relations. Alternative geometries for space are not alternative theories of space, but alternative grammars of space. Without an application, mathematics as a whole would be meaningless games with signs. It would be, as it were, a complex system of rules for description that never gets used for describing anything – but then it would no longer be a system of rules for description – merely a system of rules for the manipulation of signs which are used for generating more rules for the manipulation of signs. That is why Wittgenstein remarks that it is essential to mathematics that it should also appear in mufti (RFM 257). Of course, it seems otherwise – for mathematicians apply mathematics to mathematics, and is that
not to describe mathematical relationships in mathematical terms? We shall not examine this metamathematical objection here.

So called metaphysical propositions are either nonsense (e.g. time is unreal; or: colours are merely ideas in the mind; or ‘the self is a bundle of perceptions’), or inchoate recommendations to adopt a novel form of representation. So we might regard methodological solipsism in the form adopted by Carnap in his *Logischer Aufbau* or Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Remarks* as a recommendation to adopt a new form of description of experience, in which personal experience is described without the first-person pronoun, and the experience of others is described in behavioural terms. So when he is in pain the methodological solipsist says ‘There is pain’ and when others are in pain it is said that they are behaving as the Centre (the solipsist) behaves when there is pain. Alternatively, what appear to be anankastic statements about the world, such as ‘red is darker than pink’, or ‘every event is prior to, contemporaneous with, or subsequent to any other event’, or ‘events are ontologically dependent on substances’, are norms of representation in the guise of super-physical descriptions of the scaffolding of the world. But far from describing the scaffolding of the world, these norms of representation are grammatical propositions that constitute the scaffolding from which we describe the world in empirical propositions.

The tautologies of logic, by contrast, are not rules at all. They are limiting cases of propositions with a sense. But each logical proposition is internally related to an inference rule. So although they are not rules, they are systematically related to rules.

The suggestion that the propositions of arithmetic, geometry, and what Wittgenstein called grammatical propositions are essentially normative is fundamental to understanding his reflections on the nature of mathematics and putative metaphysics. Although we perfectly properly call these propositions truths, and conceive of them as necessary, we should put those ideas aside for the time being and focus upon the thought that they are rules, or are best compared with rules, not with empirical truths. If we wish to understand Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics, we should think through the consequences for our conception of mathematical propositions of the idea that they are rules, belonging to systems of
rules, rather than true descriptions – and only then turn to elucidating what their truth and necessity amount to.

2.7 The necessity of necessary propositions can be elucidated by reference to their normative role or their relationship to normativity

We say that \(2 + 2 = 4\) is a necessary truth of arithmetic. We insist that the proposition that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180° is a necessary truth of Euclidean geometry. Meta-physicists aver that red is darker than pink in all possible worlds. The propositions that every event is spatio-temporally related to every other event, that causes cannot succeed their effects, perhaps even (as has been argued in recent years) such propositions as ‘Water is H₂O’, are held to be necessary truths concerning the world. And propositions of logic are likewise said to be necessary truths ‘set in an eternal foundation’.

Wittgenstein sought to demystify these anankastic propositions and to explain why we conceive of them as necessary truths. In each kind of case, the key to the ‘necessity’ lies in the normative (non-causal) character of the associated ‘must’. If A is red and B is pink, we insist, then A must be darker than B; if you have 25 bags of 25 florins each, then you must have 625 florins; if it is true that \(p\), and it is true that if \(p\) then \(q\), then it must be true that \(q\). The hardness of the ‘must’ is a reflection of the inexorable manner in which we cleave to a method of description (RFM 84) or rule of inference. The ‘must’ corresponds to a track laid down in language, which is employed by those who accept the proof. ‘The proof changes the grammar of our language, changes our concepts. It makes new connections, and it creates the concepts of these connections’ (RFM 166). We learn to calculate and remorselessly insist on uniformity of results of correct calculation – if anyone gets a different result, they must have miscalculated.

We say: “If you really follow the rule in multiplying, you must all get the same result”. Now if this is only the somewhat hysterical way of putting things that you get in university talk, it need not interest us overmuch. It is, however, the expression of an attitude towards the technique of calculation, which comes out everywhere in our life. The emphasis of the must corresponds only to the inexorableness of this attitude both to the technique of calculating and to a host of related techniques.

The mathematical Must is only another expression of the fact that mathematics forms concepts. (RFM 430)
The ‘must-s’ and the ‘cannot-s’ signify our commitments to forms of description and inference, on the one hand, and to the exclusion of apparent forms of description and inference on the other. Their inexorability corresponds not to necessities in re, but to our inexorability in cleaving to our conventions and systems of representation. For they determine what we call ‘thinking’, ‘inferring’ and ‘reasoning’. Failure to draw inferences thus is what is called ‘invalid reasoning’, failure to calculate thus is what is called ‘miscalculating’ or even ‘not calculating’. Do these conventions not correspond to reality – to what really follows (RFM 40), to the internal properties and relations of things (RFM 74-6)? No.

2.8 Truth and falsity among necessary propositions requires scrutiny
As a result of his attention to role and function, Wittgenstein’s reflections on necessary truth and falsehood differ profoundly from traditional accounts.

First, it is standard to distinguish between true and false necessary propositions. For example, ‘2 + 3 = 5’ is called a true equation, ‘2 + 3 = 4’ a false one; and ‘2 + 3 ≠ 4’ is called a true inequation, ‘2 + 3 ≠ 5’ a false one. Wittgenstein argued that to be a proposition of arithmetic is to have a certain role, to function typically (but not only) as a rule for the description and transformation of descriptions of how things, in fact, are. But only the arithmetical propositions we call ‘true’ have this role. The ones we call ‘false’, e.g. 12 × 12 = 1212, have no such role. We do not intelligibly reason that since you have been given 12 bags of 12 florins each, therefore you have 1212 florins. False propositions of arithmetic do not have the characteristic roles of propositions of arithmetic (although they may have a role in reductio proofs). Note the analogy here with false propositions of logic and of geometry. Contradictions do not count as propositions of logic. Similarly, ‘The sum of the angles of a triangle is greater than 180°’ is not a proposition of Euclidean geometry. One might even say that a false proposition of arithmetic is not a proposition of arithmetic at all; and here lies a contrast between arithmetical propositions and empirical ones.5 For a false empirical proposition is an empirical proposition.

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5 One might be tempted to go so far as to say that a false arithmetical formula is a nonsense. Since 25 × 25 is 625, since the two expressions ‘25 × 25’ and ‘625’ are
Even greater qualms can be elicited from reflection upon other kinds of necessary propositions. ‘Red is a colour’, we are inclined to say, is a necessary truth. But is its negation a necessary falsehood? After all, ‘red is not a colour’ does not describe a state of affairs that does not obtain. We have no idea what it would be for red not to be a colour. If we say that it is false that red is not a colour, we do not know what it is that we are excluding as false. So, we might say, ‘red is not a colour’ is a kind of nonsense—a form of words to which we can attach no sense. But the negation of a nonsense is a nonsense. Yet surely ‘red is a colour’ is not nonsense—it is a necessary truth! Evidently we must investigate further.

Secondly, it is standard to identify something as a necessary proposition independently of knowing whether it is true. Goldbach’s conjecture (every even integer greater than 2 is the sum of two primes) is widely held to be a necessary proposition whose truth-value is unknown. It is, we may be inclined to think, either necessarily true or necessarily false (one day we may discover which). Wittgenstein thought this confused. In advance of a proof, he argued, an arithmetical conjecture does not have the uses of an arithmetical proposition, and its sense is not determined. It is the proof that gives it its sense. Furthermore, an impossibility proof (e.g. in the case of the trisection problem) shows that such-and-such a mathematical conjecture is a form of words or signs excluded from the system of mathematics. This insight has dramatic ramifications.

2.9 The question of how we recognise necessary truths disintegrates once the nature of so called necessary truths becomes clear
We noted above that the question of how we recognize necessary truths is commonly held to be a pivotal one. Most mainstream philosophers since

intersubstitutable, since they mean the same in extra-mathematical contexts, ‘25 × 25 = 624’ patently makes no sense, any more than ‘red is lighter than pink’ makes sense. In both cases, the obtaining of an internal relation is denied. But internal relations are logically constitutive of their relata—and the result of denying that they obtain is nonsense.

It is striking that Wittgenstein did not go down this road. Instead he remarked ‘Well, this “meaningless” road has now been trodden so often that it has become muddy and one cannot see one’s way clearly; it needs rolling’ (LFM 92). Instead he examined what one can and cannot do with a false arithmetical proposition.
Kant have thought that all necessary truths are known a priori (although, to be sure, learnt in the course of experience). Our knowledge of such truths, it was held, is not validated by reference to experience (they are not ‘evident to the senses’) or by reference to evidence derived from experience.

Kant held that all mathematical truths are synthetic a priori. Frege, by contrast, held that truths of arithmetic are analytic (and a priori), but he agreed with Kant that the truths of geometry are synthetic a priori. Whether a proposition is known a priori, he wrote, is a matter of ‘the ultimate grounds upon which rests the justification for holding it to be true’ (FA §3). In his view, the ultimate grounds of logic and arithmetic consist of the axioms of logic which are self-evident to our logical faculty. The logical positivists, eager to banish the very idea of synthetic a priori truths and to defend a ‘consistent empiricism’ held that our knowledge of a priori truths was a matter of knowing our conventions for the use of words and calculating what truths follow from our conventions.

By focusing primarily on the normative function of so called necessary propositions, Wittgenstein’s reflections involved a major reorientation in point of view, undermining the ‘epistemological problem of necessity’ as traditionally conceived. For, he argued, the question ‘What makes a necessary proposition true?’ (or: ‘What is the source of necessary truths?’) is itself confused. If nothing makes them true in the sense in which empirical propositions might be said to be made true by the facts, if they are true without being made true, then the question of how we know necessary truths is not answerable by reference to knowing what makes them true. If a proof of a mathematical proposition is not akin to the verification of an empirical one, then knowing its proof is not akin to knowing the evidence for it. If the mathematician, for example, is more akin to an inventor than to a discoverer (RFM 99), to a creator (like a composer) than to an explorer, then asking how he knows the truth of the necessary truths he unfolds is not like asking a Columbus how he reached America (i.e. what route he took to a pre-existing destination), but is more like asking an inventor of a new style of painting, or a composer of a work of music how he solved such-and-such problems in creating what he created.
2.10 It is not the task of philosophy to interfere in the mathematical activities of mathematicians

It is a cardinal principle of Wittgenstein’s philosophy that ‘philosophy leaves everything as it is’ (PI §124). That is, it leaves the grammar of our language as it is, and it is not its business to introduce a new grammar for a more perfect language, or to reform our existing grammar – to make it ‘better’. Of course, that does not mean that philosophy leaves everything as it is, i.e. that it is impotent, that is has no effect on anything. On the contrary, its task, among other things, is to dispel conceptual confusion, and that may have far reaching effects both within philosophy itself, and in the natural sciences (in psychology, cognitive neuroscience, economics, physics). In the case of mathematics, it is not the task of philosophy ‘to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to render surveyable the state of mathematics that troubles us – the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved’ (PI §125). It is not part of the philosopher’s job to interfere in the mathematician’s construction of theorems, but rather to examine what Littlewood and Hardy called the ‘gas’ with which he surrounds them – the mathematician’s interpretations of his symbols and theorems (LFM 13). The construction of calculi is the logicians’ and mathematicians’ business – but the examination of the apparent philosophical implications of these inventions, and of their meaning, may well fall within the province of philosophy. The results of such conceptual inquiry will not show proven theorems to be wrong, nor will it prove novel theorems. But it may well reveal that what the proven theorem, the baffling contradiction, or the new calculus show is very far from what their creators thought they show. Hence too, ‘Philosophical clarity will have the same effect on the growth of mathematics as sunlight has on the growth of potato shoots. (In a dark cellar they grow yards long.)’ (PG 381). Once the aura that surrounds certain branches of mathematics is dispelled, interest in them will fade, and once the nature, role and point of mathematics is clearly understood certain parts of mathematics will be seen to be pointless.

These observations should be borne in mind in relationship to Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics. Any interpretation of his remarks that implies a form of mathematical revisionism is, at least prima facie, mistaken. For the only alternative is that he was being blatantly inconsis-
tent – too blatantly for it to be plausible without very deep probing. Hence the suggestions that he was a ‘finitist’ or even a ‘strict finitist’, that he rejected the applicability of the law of excluded middle to arithmetic and embraced a de-psychologized form of mathematical intuitionism, that he was an ‘anti-realist’, adopting an assertability-conditional theory of meaning as opposed to a truth-conditional one, and so forth, should be viewed with the greatest suspicion.6

2.11 Proof within logic and mathematics is altogether different from proof by means of logic or mathematics in the domain of empirical propositions. Already in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein noted that ‘a logical proof of a proposition that has sense and a proof in logic must be two entirely different things’ (TLP 6.1263). A proof in logic is the generation of one senseless proposition (tautology) from other senseless propositions (tautologies). What is proved is that a certain symbol is an empty tautology. That is altogether unlike a hypothetico-deductive inference from a set of empirical propositions to an empirical conclusion. Similarly, he was later to argue, a proof of an empirical proposition by mathematics (e.g. in an inference from empirical premises involving magnitudes to an empirical conclusion involving a magnitude) and a proof in mathematics are totally different. A proof in mathematics weaves a new norm of representation into the body of norms of representation that constitute mathematics. Reasoning within logic and mathematics is as different from extra-logical reasoning by means of logic or mathematics as making a net differs from catching fish. Knotting in new strands may be crucial for the success of one’s fishing, but extending the net is not a form of fishing and the new strands are not a special kind of fish that one has caught in one’s net.

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6 ‘Finitism and behaviourism are as alike as two eggs’, he remarked, ‘The same absurdities, and the same kind of answers. Both sides of such disputes are based on a particular kind of misunderstanding – which arises from gazing at a particular form of words and forgetting to ask what’s done with it’ (LFM 111).

‘Brouwer talks of a range of propositions for which the law of excluded middle does not hold … [But what] Brouwer has actually discovered [is] something which it is misleading to call a proposition. He has not discovered a proposition, but something having the appearance of a proposition’ (AWL 140).

‘Intuitionism is all bosh – entirely’ he said to his pupils (LFM 237).
2.12 It is not the task of philosophy to describe the necessary structure of the world

The method of philosophy is descriptive. The task of philosophy is to resolve philosophical problems, *inter alia* by describing the uses of expressions, tabulating rules for their use, delineating their relationships and ordering them in such a manner as will shed light upon the problems. Contrary to the conception of metaphysics as an investigation into the necessary structure of reality, clarification of the ‘necessary propositions of metaphysics’ requires only a grammatical investigation. Philosophy clarifies our forms of description and the rules for the transformation of our descriptions of the contingent features of the world. For the world has no necessary structure – that is, contrary to the pronouncements of metaphysicists, there is no such thing as ‘the necessary structure of the world’. What meta-physicists hold to be descriptions of necessities *in re* are at best expressions of our norms of representation in the guise of descriptions or grammatically related to our norms of representation and our forms of transformation of expressions.

It is against this background that we should seek to understand Wittgenstein’s writings on the philosophy of logic and mathematics. He is not advancing any theories on the same level as Platonists, formalists and intuitionists. He is not propounding any theses like the finitists. He is concerned with describing the uses of logical and mathematical propositions, with comparing and contrasting them with empirical propositions and noting their different roles. As he himself insisted, he is not advancing any *opinions* (LFM 103) – he is painstakingly describing our practices of using propositions of logic and mathematics, and thereby of drawing our attention to their nature. He is pointing out analogies and disanalogies between empirical propositions, on the one hand, and mathematical and logical propositions, on the other, that we do not normally notice, but which, once noticed, are most striking. In so doing, he undermines the traditional conceptions of the a priori and of the nature of necessity.
Literature


Many texts could illustrate my subject. Here is one, almost at random. It is the third and last paragraph in one of the numbered remarks in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

> One would like to say: the proof changes the grammar of our language, changes our concepts. It makes new connexions, and it creates the concept of these connexions. (It does not establish that they are there; they do not exist until it makes them.) (*RFM* III, §31.1)

For a tiny bit of context, the previous remark, §30, ended by saying, ‘I want to say that the *must* corresponds to a track which I lay down in language.’

Why might one want to say these things? I shall suggest one possible reason. I shall couch my answer in terms of what I have read in Wittgenstein, but I am not a scholar aiming at a correct interpretation of his texts.

In addition, although this essay is about proof, I have made the tactical decision, on grounds of brevity, to pass by Wittgenstein’s remarks about perspicuous or surveyable proofs. They are of fundamental importance to his philosophical thinking about mathematics. The omission here means most of what follows is in need of qualification in this respect. I also omit his important insistence on the motley of techniques of proof. (*RFM* III, § 46, 48.)

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2 The motley is emphasized in Hacking 2009 and in Hacking 2000.
First reactions to the publication of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*

Passages such as the two just cited were very much discussed, once upon a time, but they have fallen rather by the wayside, overtaken, as it were, by the so-called ‘rule-following considerations’. The *Remarks* were published in 1956, which happens to be the year I went up to Cambridge to read Moral Sciences. As a completely ignorant undergraduate with some prior training in mathematics, I was captivated, and have been so ever since.

Reactions by more mature minds to this posthumous collection of writings were various.

One was Georg Kreisel’s, in a review published two years later: ‘it seems to me to be a surprisingly insignificant product of a sparkling mind.’\(^3\) It will be recalled that Kreisel attended Wittgenstein’s classes on some of the topics of the *Remarks*, and had deeply impressed him as the rare mathematician who had a philosophical sensibility.

What depressed Kreisel most, was Wittgenstein’s discussion of Cantor and the infinite. I shall say not one further word about Wittgenstein and the transfinite.

A different reaction to the publication of *RFM* was to gnaw away at the suggestion that proofs somehow change, or make more determinate, the concepts that are involved in the theorem proved. Or that a proof provides a new criterion for the use of a concept. Many of Wittgenstein’s remarks suggested this idea to his early readers, although often what he wrote was more in the form of an internal dialogue than unqualified assertion. Note the ‘One would like to say’, and the ‘I want to say’, of my two opening quotations.

Some philosophers, starting with Alice Ambrose and Michael Dummett, publishing in 1959, took the *Remarks* very seriously indeed.\(^4\) Despite the fact that their philosophy, and indeed their lives, had been profoundly influenced by Wittgenstein, these two philosophers were very dubious. One thing that preoccupied them was the suggestion, or group of suggestions, that proof changes concepts by providing new criteria for the application of the concepts involved in the proof. And on reflection, the

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\(^3\) Kreisel 1958, 158.

\(^4\) Ambrose 1959, Dummett 1959.
first generation of readers could not accept it. For brevity I shall speak of the suggestion that proofs modify concepts. Of course Wittgenstein sometimes proposed what may or may not be a different formulation of the same thought, that ‘a proof introduces a new concept’, by which he says he ‘meant something like the proof puts a new paradigm among the paradigms of language’. (III, §31.)

Ambrose argued very clearly and cogently against such suggestions. It is important to contrast, she said, most ordinary proofs, and cases in which a new domain comes into view and there are real choices to be made. For example, the concept number had certainly been ‘fixed’ or at any rate extended in the course of history. Yes, mathematicians made decisions when they extended the numbers 2, 3, 4 etc., to include 1, and, later, zero. Certainly they did so when they moved on to rational numbers, complex numbers, and real numbers. But in proving, say, that there is no greatest prime number, no decision was made, nor did any new criterion for prime number come into being.

**Michael Dummett and the ‘ellipse theorem’**

Michael Dummett might have been initially tempted by the suggestion that the proofs modify concepts, but he concluded that it was plain wrong. In 1973 he illustrated his considered position using the fact that a plane intersecting a cylinder forms an ellipse.\(^5\) Let us call this the ellipse theorem. It is a special case of a quite elementary result in the theory of conic sections.

In what Dummett calls a ‘banal’ sense of the words, a proof of the theorem provides a new criterion for being a plane intersecting a cylinder. But in no interesting sense does the theorem furnish a new criterion. Nothing we would reject as a cylinder using this criterion would have passed the old, pre-proof criteria for being a cylinder. The ‘standard view’, Dummett insisted, is that nothing we admit as an ellipse using this criterion would have failed to be an ellipse by the old criteria.

Dummett thinks that the standard view is right, and that if Wittgenstein denied it, he was wrong to do so. More generally, Dummett wrote

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\(^5\) Dummett 1978, 300f.
that: ‘Wittgenstein’s vision of mathematics cannot be sustained; it was a radically faulty vision.’

To quote him again: ‘If Wittgenstein’s thesis is to be more than a statement of the obvious, [...] it must be understood as involving that there are, or may be, plane figures formed by the intersection of a cylinder with a plane which could not have been recognized as ellipses before the proof was given.’ And that, Dummett insists, is just false.

The ‘thesis’ referred to is, in Dummett’s words, the proposition ‘that a proof induces us to accept a new criterion for the truth of the conclusion’. We may well expostulate, with Peter Hacker in another connection, that Wittgenstein explicitly insisted that he propounded no theses in philosophy.6 I shall not harp on that again, and instead will cavil at a more immediate point of English grammar. (Ordinary grammar, not philosophical grammar!)

Dummett wrote that ‘there are, or may be, plane figures formed by the intersection of a cylinder with a plane which could not have been recognized.’ He should not have written ‘are, or may be’, but ‘might have been’ so as to obtain, ‘there might have been plane figures formed by the intersection of a cylinder with a plane which would not have been recognized as ellipses before the proof was given.’ I have also changed his ‘could’ to ‘would’. Modalities play a significant role in careful exposition of these ideas.

Here I cannot resist a certain childish smugness. I have a proprietary interest in the example. Dummett implies that it comes from Wittgenstein. In fact it comes from the first pages of Hilbert and Cohn-Vossen’s Anschauliche Geometrie of 1932, published in English as Geometry and the Imagination.7 The book derives from Hilbert’s lectures in the winter of 1920-1. Dummett first encountered the example in a talk I gave in Oxford, in 1960, and in a work of mine that he refereed some months later. I used it as an example in my own jejune discussion of these issues to illustrate the ‘concept fixing’ idea. By 1973, he remembered the example as coming from Wittgenstein himself. No, it did not, but at the time I felt both flat-

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7 Hilbert / Cohn-Vossen 1952, 6-8.
tered and amused, rather than aggrieved, by the implied attribution. His referee’s report was, by the way, negative; he was probably right.

I take the opportunity to note, before proceeding, that there is a consequence of the ellipse theorem that looks as if it could be investigated experimentally. I quote Hilbert and Cohn-Vossen: ‘The fact that we have just proved can also be formulated in terms of the theory of projections as follows: The shadow that a circle throws on to an oblique plane is an ellipse, if the light-rays are perpendicular to the plane of the circle.’ (p. 8) It is quite common to illustrate the theory of conic sections using shadows. Shine a light at some distance from a sphere, and the shadow cast is an ellipse; shine it very close, and the shadow cast is a parabola.

The debate of the decade

Many other readers took up the discussion, often expressing a wish to agree with what they took Wittgenstein to be saying, but finding it impossible to do so. To give an idea of the debate, I may mention Chihara (1961, and 1963), Nell (1961), Castaneda (1961), Wood (1961), Levison (1964), Stroud (1965), and Sloman (1968-9). In general, readers of the Remarks before 1970 attended to what they often called a conventionalist strand in Wittgenstein’s writing about mathematics. There was the tantalizing assertion that proofs somehow ‘fixed’ or modified concepts, somehow made them more determinate. One also noticed the importance of proofs being perspicuous or surveyable.

These early reactions and loci of interest were faithful to the published text. The most frequently occurring term in the first edition of the Remarks is not ‘rule’ but ‘proof’. Another key noun is ‘application’: Anwendung ranks very high in an analytical index. Then we have ‘calculation’, ‘experiment’, ‘inference’, ‘measure’, and ‘picture’. This is not to say that there are no ‘rule-following considerations’ in the first edition of the Remarks. But although rules are often mentioned, it is seldom in that context. A more typical statement is: ‘The effect of proof is, I believe, that we

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8 In the numeration of the revised edition, we have I-§§1-3; I-§§113-118; IV-§§8-9; VII-§§39-40. I do not mean to imply that these passages do not have application elsewhere in the texts.
plunge into the new rule’ (RFM IV, §36.). This may very naturally be read as a variant on the concept-modification theme, even if it can also be read as about ‘rule-following’.

‘The rule-following considerations’

So matters stood throughout the 1970s: Wittgenstein’s apparent suggestions fascinated some readers but were taken with much salt. Then there was a great sea-change. Enter the so-called ‘rule-following considerations’ most famously and brilliantly advanced by Saul Kripke, but also, quite independently and for different philosophical reasons, by David Bloor. These considerations were immediately taken up by a whole phalanx of philosophers. No rule determines its own application. Nothing in previous use fixes meanings. I shall take no position on that vast literature. Still, it will influence how you read what I shall say, so for the record: If all positions already held were plotted by some genius on the surface of a globe, I would be somewhere on the continent inhabited by Peter Hacker, and not on the one inhabited by Saul Kripke. Admire, yes. Imitate, no.

Indeed, given that the context of Kripke’s reflections was Wittgenstein, it is remarkable that he seemed not to consider application, Anwendung, which will be a critical notion in what follows below. The example used was 68 + 57 = 125. What was the point of adding 68 to 57? If it is just a calculation in rote arithmetic, there is not much point except in testing a child’s skill. But adding is embedded in, indeed embodied in, the world. If you take 68 one euro coins and 57 two euro coins, you have 125 coins in all. Let us be more practical still. The head of a large but very elementary school ensures that classes have exactly 25 members. Last year he had 24 such classes. The school is enlarged to have 25. He is arranging picnic lunches for the first holiday outing of his pupils. Previously he has never multiplied past 24 times 25. Qultification agrees with multiplication up to 24 times 25, but 25 times 25, he says, makes 5.

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9 Kripke 1982.
10 Bloor 1983. Bloor continued this theme with for example his 1997.
He must be quultifying; he meant quimes when he said ‘times’ – who is to say (to paraphrase Kripke) that he did not mean quimes all along? Well, if this is just rote arithmetic, who indeed? But the head teacher wants to know the number of school lunches to bring. Last year he multiplied (or quultified, no one cared, then) and brought 200. This year he is to bring only five? One imagines the pupils and teachers might have something to ‘say’ about this! It is curious that the enormous literature on Kripke’s arguments seldom discusses the uses, the applications, of arithmetic. That would surely have been Wittgenstein’s first question? One is tempted to ask why clever people did not think it would be clever to say: ‘don’t ask for the meaning of ‘plus’, ask for its uses.’ Uses in the ordinary sense of the word, however: thus one of the uses of multiplication is to work out the number of school lunches to bring.\(^\text{12}\)

I shall leave that worry to one side. The rule-following considerations are entirely general; quusification must work for the ellipse theorem. It may or may not be significant that ellipses are not as easy as for ‘quus’. I think it is significant, because with ellipses we are so readily drawn to conic sections, and hence to real-life material projections of light and shadow, as mentioned by Hilbert himself.

Evidently it must, however, be possible to quusify ‘ellipse’ just as you can quusify ‘plus’. (Note that it is easier to gruify ‘ellipse’ than to quusify it.\(^\text{13}\)) You might try this. You (or rather a pseudo-Apollonius in late antiquity) have been doing only plane geometry. You turn to three dimensions. Consider the concept of an \textit{ellapse} (with two \textit{l}s) which applies to ellipses in two dimensions and, in three, to circles inscribed on planes. There is nothing in the history of usage to determine that the noun ‘ellipse’ does not refer to ellapses. When pseudo-Apollonius turns to the cylinder and considers it intersected by a plane, he infers that if the plane is orthogonal to the cylinder, the curve of intersection is an ellapse, but otherwise not.

\(^{12}\) These observations parallel, in a different key, Mary Hesse’s (1969). In her terminology, working out the number of school lunches is one of the ramifications of arithmetic.

\(^{13}\) It is seldom noticed that Goodman and Kripke mesh less well together than is sometimes thought. See Hacking 1993.
Let us suppose that such an imagined sequence of events is logically possible.

It is certainly not much more possible than that: the rule following considerations inhabit the space of logical possibility, not real human possibility. Of course there are real contingencies of meaning, such as I recently illustrated with Putnam’s example of ‘jade’, with the example of ‘measles’, or long ago with the case of the rule for a draw in chess, an example that I took from J. E. Littlewood. A game is drawn if the same position recurs three times. What if the same spatial position recurs three times, but with black’s rooks interchanged? Does the rule mean same spatial position, or same historical position? This ambiguity is not just logically possible. According to Littlewood, it actually arose in an important match in 1924. But the rule following considerations are not like that, they are not about possibilities, but about logical possibilities.

How would the logical possibility that ‘ellipse’ meant ‘ellapse’ as just defined, bear on Dummett’s concern, rewritten by me as, whether ‘there might have been plane figures formed by the intersection of a cylinder with a plane which would not have been recognized as ellipses before the proof was given.’ At best, it would be something like this: It might have been the case that plane figures formed by the intersection were not recognized as ellipses, because when people first transferred 2-D notions to 3-D, they carried on using the word ‘ellipse’ to mean ‘ellapse’. But although this is not irrelevant, I believe it quite literally changes Dummett’s topic of conversation. Dummett’s concerns altogether preceded the rule following considerations, and to introduce them here is a red herring. They enter at a different stage in the argument, as we shall briefly see below.

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14 Kripke does not put things in this way, with good reason preferring to contrast normative and descriptive accounts of dispositions to speak in certain ways. See: Kripke 1982, 37.
Logical positivism reduced to absurdity

One of my favourite pair of sentences in the history of analytic philosophy is from Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*: ‘[O]ur knowledge that every oculist is an eye doctor depends on the fact that the symbol “eye-doctor” is synonymous with “oculist.” And the same holds good for every other *a priori* truth.’ This is the reduction to absurdity of the rather sophisticated idea circulating in Vienna, that necessary truth and propositions known *a priori* are true by convention, conventions about the meaning of the words. Among the innumerable virtues of Ayer’s absurdity is that the noun ‘oculist’ was used in 1936 British English – that is, when Ayer first published his magnificent polemic – to mean what is now called, in Britain and elsewhere, an ophthalmologist. So it is a real example of a word not maintaining its meaning. But the same holds good for every other *a priori* truth?!!!

We can also play the quus game with the word ‘oculist’, calling in question the claim that prior conventional synonymy suffices to explain, or perhaps even legitimate, the status of Ayer’s exemplar proposition as a necessary truth. Doubtless it can be argued that the quus game confutes the entire doctrine of truth by convention. But of course that had already been done in the year that Ayer came back from Vienna and published *Language, Truth and Logic*. For 1936 was also the year that Quine published ‘Truth by Convention’. His was not the last word in a debate among the logical positivists and their heirs, but I find it just as compelling today as I did the morning I read as an undergraduate. That in no way implies that I feel compelled by a next move, the denial of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic. More than one thoughtful and knowledgeable philosopher has said to me that ‘Truth by Convention’ was Quine’s best paper.

There is little doubt that the doctrine of truth by convention came into being when members of the Vienna Circle were forming an acquaintance with the *Tractatus* and indeed with Wittgenstein himself. How much of the doctrine did they think they took from that book? How much did they think they took from the man himself? Those are questions best left to scholars. Many readers, including the judicious Scott Soames, appear to

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17 Ayer 1946, 85.
18 Quine 1936.
believe that Wittgenstein held, or at any rate was strongly attracted to, some version of the doctrine of truth by convention throughout his life. I have encountered no evidence for that belief.

**Pure mathematics**

Ayer reminds us of what the doctrine of truth by convention was all about: necessary truth and *a priori* knowledge. It is also about Kant’s first question: *How is pure mathematics possible?* Whatever Kant meant, the definitive 20\textsuperscript{th} century gloss on Kant is due to Bertrand Russell, 1912. ‘The question which Kant put at the beginning of his philosophy, namely “How is pure mathematics possible?” is an interesting and difficult one, to which every philosophy which is not purely sceptical must find some answer’.\(^{20}\)

Why, in Russell’s opinion, must all philosophers find an answer? Because: ‘The apparent power of anticipating facts about things of which we have no experience is certainly surprising.’\(^{21}\)

Note that Russell’s worry is about the *a priori*, not necessity. Kant asked about apodictic certainty rather than logical necessity. Necessity, in my opinion, arises from scholastic philosophy, often expressed as a concern about what were called eternal truths. In the high Middle Ages the problematic was usually different from ours. The schoolmen focussed on the question whether God could make the eternal truths different from what they in fact are.

There is a tradition in analytic philosophy of mathematics of regarding necessity and the *a priori* as one of the two central problem areas.\(^{22}\) The second area is trying to understand profound new results, with which we rightly associate the names of Cantor and Gödel. Allow me an aside that may be pertinent.

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\(^{19}\) The material in this and the next section is developed at much greater length in Hacking 2009. References will be found in that paper.

\(^{20}\) Russell 1946, 84. Kant’s question is stated in Kant 1929, 56 (B 20).

\(^{21}\) Russell 1946, 85.

\(^{22}\) To repeat, if the axes of traditional problematization of mathematics are (a) the *a priori* and (b) necessity, then (a) is Kantian, while (b) is mediaeval. This is a sub-text, I suppose, of my 1973 lecture, ‘Proof and Eternal Truths’, reprinted in Hacking 2002.
Consult the Stanford and the Routledge encyclopedias of philosophy. Early in the Routledge, we read that,

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the most influential ideas [in the philosophy of mathematics] have been those of Kant. In one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent, the main currents of foundational thinking during this period – the most active and fertile period in the entire history of the subject – are nearly all attempts to reconcile Kant’s foundational ideas with various later developments in mathematics and logic.23

Kant does not even occur in the Stanford article on the philosophy of mathematics. Necessity and the a priori hardly surface. That is not to say they are not elegantly and informatively discussed. But not under mathematics, philosophy of.

The difference between Stanford and Routledge depends on fairly recent events and emphases. There is something both less and also more local in the question of why 20th century analytic philosophy was obsessed by necessity and a priori knowledge.

The less local is this: From the time of Galileo to the nineteenth century, mathematics was primarily what we call applied mathematics. Geometry, we all know, was Plato’s idol. Newton dismissed it as merely practical, an aide to architects.

Mathematics, in his opinion, was rational mechanics, the use of mathematical reasoning to understand the nature of God’s handiwork. He was not rejecting geometry as applied, but as superficial, as not investigating nature deeply enough.

Leave out God, sometimes, and these are the views of Lagrange, Legendre, and Laplace. Of Euler and Gauss. In Newton’s Cambridge, virtually every young man who won the coveted annual Smith’s Prize in mathematics won it for distinction in what we would call applied mathematics – I am thinking of host of famous names from 1768 onwards, names such as John Herschel, G. B. Airy, G. G. Stokes, William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), P. G. Tait, and the greatest physicist of the 19th century, James Clerk Maxwell. Physicists all, but in the terminology of their education, mathematicians.

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Neither Plato’s questions about geometry, which lead on to the philosophical problems of the *a priori*, nor the mediaeval questions about the necessity of mathematics, interested Newton or subsequent cohorts of men who thought of themselves as mathematicians and Natural Philosophers. Those questions simply did not arise. Their prevalence in some twentieth century schools of mathematics is a result of history, not of mathematics, that is, a history that made pure mathematics seem to dominate the field. I suggest that philosophical interest in the *a priori* is the result of wholly contingent developments in the development of what was called mathematics.

Although Francis Bacon had distinguished pure and mixed mathematics, as he called it, mathematicians did not much bother with the distinction, except that it was used to make a place for probability theory. Where could one stash that, whether in its guise as the doctrine of chances or as the art of conjecturing? Answer: as mixed mathematics. But historically, probability and statistics has wandered all over the tree of knowledge. For instance, once it was the prime example of mixed and not pure mathematics, but Cambridge University has for some time had a Department of Pure Mathematics and Mathematical Statistics, as opposed to Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics.

The philosophers from Bacon to d’Alembert and on to Kant liked the distinction between pure and mixed, but it became institutionalized among mathematicians only in 1810 with Gergonne’s *Annales de mathématiques pures et appliquées*, confirmed in 1826 with Crelle’s *Journal für die reine und angewandte Mathematik*. If you think that necessity and the *a priori* are core issues in the philosophy of mathematics, you are an heir of Kant, and the Routledge Encyclopedia is right on the mark. It was Kant who directed subsequent philosophers to pure mathematics, which is not to say that he meant by that label what we do.

**Wittgenstein, mathematics, and Cambridge**

Wittgenstein was trained as an aeronautical engineer, a science that we classify, perhaps, as applied mathematics. When he came to Cambridge, he entered a world where pure mathematics was king. As I have just said, it had not always been so, not at all. Only in 1863 was the Sadleirian Chair of
Pure Mathematics created. But by the time Wittgenstein arrived at Russell’s door, pure mathematics reigned, in the form of G. H. Hardy, who caused pure mathematics to be the dominant kinds of maths at the University, the applied mathematics being designated Natural Philosophy, physics, and/or applied mathematics. Because his predecessor Hobson was long-lived, and did not retire until he reached the age of 75, Hardy did not assume the Sadleirian Chair until 1931, but he was the man almost from the time he took up a lectureship in 1906. Alongside Hardy there was Littlewood, elected fellow of Trinity in 1908, and actually elected to a chair before Hardy. Hardy always had his eye on the Sadleirian chair. And then there was Whitehead: ‘The science of Pure Mathematics, in its modern developments, may claim to be the most original creation of the human spirit.’

You may well think this did not impinge on Wittgenstein, but of course it did, and not only via Russell. For an explicit contact, consider the discussions much later, in the 1939 lectures edited by Cora Diamond. It is well known that they begin by mentioning a remark of Hardy’s. Look, however, at the discussion of the construction with ruler and compass of the heptacaidecagon, the name he uses for a 17 sided regular polygon, or 17-gon as I shall call it. He moves on to the constructability of the pentagon and non-constructibility of a heptagon (5-gon and 7-gon respectively). Why should this have come up?

Because Hardy and Wright’s *Introduction to The Theory of Numbers* had just been published in 1938. It contains an elegant new proof of the fact first proved by Gauss, namely the constructability of the 17-gon. (Hardy and Wright called it a heptacaidecagon, which is the name that Wittgenstein used, although it is only one of several possible names for the figure.) Locally, in Cambridge, the proof was regarded as one of the triumphs of the book, and it was the talk of the town.

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24 Whitehead 1925, 28.
Applied mathematics, von Mises, and Vienna

I’ve been making it sound as if Wittgenstein’s life as a philosopher of mathematics was moulded in Cambridge. But he was Viennese! I owe to Friedrich Stadler the realization that there was a great debate about pure and applied mathematics even within the Vienna circle. The chief protagonist was Richard von Mises (not to be confused with his brother Ludwig, the economist). Von Mises is now best known to philosophers for his frequency theory of probability, a thorough work of, among other things, logical positivism.

Von Mises strongly identified himself as an applied mathematician, and regularly insisted, against some other members of the Vienna circle, that mathematics could be properly understood only by its applications. His dissertation was on the determination of flywheel masses in crank drives. You may fancy a connection with Wittgenstein’s example of flywheel diagrams.\(^{26}\) He was also an aeronautical engineer, giving the first university lecture course ever, anywhere, on powered aircraft in Strasbourg, 1913, and himself becoming a test pilot during the Great War, and designing the Mises-Flugzeug, a 600 HP flying machine that was too late for development into a fighter plane.

Immediately after the war von Mises became head of the new Institute of Applied Mathematics in Berlin, and in 1921 he founded the Zeitschrift für Angewandte Mathematik und Mechanik.\(^{27}\) Although most of the Vienna circle were ‘Russellian’ and thought of mathematics in terms of pure mathematics, the residual effect of von Mises was strong, and, I would guess, really influential on a thinker of Wittgenstein’s stripe. In a fanciful mood I would suggest that it may be helpful to look at the man stereoscopically, with one lens focused on Vienna, and the other on Cambridge. Through the Vienna eye he sees application, thorough the Cambridge eye, he sees purity.

Wittgenstein became fascinated by the Kantian problems when he went as a young man to Cambridge, and acquired the philosophical problematic of pure mathematics, that is, of Russell and Whitehead and of turn-

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\(^{26}\) Eg. RFM IV §21; VII §72. Also Wittgenstein 1976, 195.

\(^{27}\) See Siegmund-Schultze 2004.
of-the-century Cambridge as a whole. But he retained his applied instincts, reinforced, I suggest, by von Mises.

The by-product theory of tautology, logic, and mathematics

The *Tractatus* has a definitive resolution of traditional difficulties. The sentences of logic are tautologies. My positivistic way of putting an insight, that one can derive from the *Tractatus*, is that tautologies are by-products of notation.\(^\text{28}\) If you have the notation for truth functions, for constructing complex sentences out of atomic ones, you will thereby generate extreme points, complex sentences that say nothing. How are necessary truths possible? In the case of tautology, they are falsely assimilated to truth. But if truths say something about the world, then tautologies are not truths. They are degenerate.

But that will not quite do. Notations are optional, we choose them by convention. That may appeal to logical positivism but not to Wittgenstein. It is tempting to give a transcendental status to tautology. The very possibility of stating more than atomic propositions brings degeneracy in its wake.

The situation for mathematics appears similar if, as Wittgenstein seems to say, the propositions of mathematics are identities. Identity was a matter on which Ramsey and Wittgenstein strongly disagreed, and I am not sure that their disagreement was resolved to the satisfaction of either. Wittgenstein entered a long period of wandering: I will for the nonce follow the views that James Conant has stated at this very conference: I think of the so-called second Wittgenstein as operating after Norway, 1937. That is when most of the new thoughts and worries about mathematics began to be written down.\(^\text{29}\)

We can entertain a residual idea of the ‘by-product’ type. We should not think of some truths as contingent and others as necessary, as if logical necessity were an eternal property of some but not all truths. The feeling of necessity should be thought of as a by-product – of what we do

\textsuperscript{28} The metaphor of by-products was first used in Hacking 1979.
\textsuperscript{29} Of course old ones persist. *RFM* III §33 (iii): ‘But what about \(p \supset p\)? I see in it a degenerate proposition, which is on the side of truth.’
with certain sentences. Wittgenstein hardly ever used the philosophers’ terminology of logical necessity.\textsuperscript{30} But we can suggest one of his thoughts using our tired jargon. We come to treat a proposition as logical necessary, to use it as necessary, only when it is proven.

But was it not always true, true all along? Very likely, although as Imre Lakatos’s \textit{Proofs and Refutations} has taught us, don’t be so sure that counterexamples do not lurk.\textsuperscript{31} The property of logical necessity, however, is acquired only with proof and use.

Surely the very meanings of the words, and the criteria for their use, settle that the proposition was not only true all along, but also necessarily true? \textit{This} is where the rule-following considerations may be invoked, in this reconsideration of what we might learn from reading Wittgenstein.

The notorious ‘hardness of the logical must’ is there – but only when we have made a proof. It is the dust stirred up by this conviction, this \textit{must}, that creates philosophical confusion. The philosophical theorizing is prompted less by proof than by the dust which it stirs up.\textsuperscript{32}

The proof convinces us of something – though what interests us is, not the mental state of conviction, but the applications attaching to this conviction. For this reason, the assertion that the proof convinces us of the truth of this proposition leaves us cold, – since this expression is capable of the most various constructions. (\textit{RFM} III, §25.)

From this point of view we may return to the starting point of our opening quotation. At some points in his internal monologue Wittgenstein wanted to say that a proof ‘makes new connexions, and it creates the concept of these connexions. (It does not establish that they are there; they do not exist until it makes them.)’ And: ‘I want to say that the \textit{must} corresponds to a track which I lay down in language.’

\textsuperscript{30} He did mention it in scare quotes, as in \textit{RFM} V §41: ‘Concepts which occur in “necessary” propositions must also occur and have a meaning in non-necessary ones.’ This is importantly connected to Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the applications of mathematics.

\textsuperscript{31} Lakatos 1970. I showed in Hacking 2000, §§ 7-8, that Lakatos and Wittgenstein complement each other more than one would expect, or, indeed, more than either of them would have liked.

\textsuperscript{32} This is, perhaps, a one-sentence summary of Hacking 2000.
The laying down in language is not a choice, in the sense of a deliberate, free-will sort of choice. It is an event in the experience of proof. Dummett’s idea of self-conscious, explicit, conventionalism is highly misleading as a representation of Wittgenstein’s chain of reflection.

Wittgenstein goes in for a full-blooded conventionalism; for him the logical necessity of any statement is always the direct expression of a linguistic convention. That a given statement is necessary consists always in our having expressly decided to treat that very statement as unassailable.33

No, we do not decide. Yes, there is a line in the dialogue, a question: ‘Why should I not say: in the proof I have won through to a decision?’ (RFM III, § 27.) Let us attend less to the question than to the assertion: ‘The effect of proof is, I believe, that we plunge into a new rule.’ (RFM IV, §36.) Plunge – what a wonderful choice of words!34 Necessity is the by-product of a track that we lay down in language: So much is a residue of the Tractatus. But, pace passages in the dialogue that contemplate the contrary, we do not literally decide to lay down the track. To mix the metaphors, we plunge into a new rule, bringing a new sense of necessity with it.

Internal relations – necessary connections – come into being in the course of proof. We make no self-conscious decision. And we think of them as necessary only when there is the picture of application in the background. That is the core of the a priori. As Russell put it in 1912, ‘The apparent power of anticipating facts about things of which we have no experience.’

Return to the ellipse theorem. Might there have been (to repeat my rephrasing of the question Dummett regarded as critical) plane figures formed by the intersection of a cylinder with a plane which would not have been recognized as ellipses before the proof was given? As a matter of fact, rather than of Kripkian rule-following logical possibility, no. But this does not mean that the ‘track had been laid down in language’ with what we philosophers call logical necessity. If we wish to use the jargon, that happened only after the proof, and in conjunction with the idea of an application of the theorem.

33 Dummett 1978a, 170.
34 „Der Effekt des Beweises sei, so meine ich, dass der Mensch sich in die neue Regel hineinstürzt.“ (One may question whether the sei is correctly translated as ‘is’.)
Dummett was right to assert that (in all probability) nothing we admit as an ellipse using the criterion provided by the ellipse theorem would have failed to be an ellipse by the old criteria. We could put it this way: nothing is a criterion until it is used as a criterion. And the ellipse theorem is used as a criterion only when it is proven. That way of putting things is obviously grossly simplistic. It may however suggest that what Dummett called the trivial sense of being a new criterion has its deeper side, and is one of those things so obvious that we do not notice it.

All this ties in well with the idea that a proof is a picture of an experiment. This is yet another thought expressed in the dialogue form of, in this case, ‘might say’. ‘Thus I might say: the proof does not serve as an experiment; but it does serve as the picture of an experiment.’ (RFM I, § 36.)

We saw that David Hilbert himself drew attention to the way in which the proof of the ellipse theorem can be illustrated by an experiment (or what looks like an experiment!): ‘The fact that we have just proved can also be formulated in terms of the theory of projections: The shadow that a circle throws on to an oblique plane is an ellipse, if the light-rays are perpendicular to the plane of the circle.’

Now take this seriously as an experiment. How would we go about determining that the shape of shadow cast on the plane really is an ellipse? What measurements would we take, in real experimental life? You can tell just by looking, but if someone insisted that it is not quite an ellipse, what to do next? In truth no one would care, but if we imagine some crackpot being sceptical, then, if the proof is to hand, it overrides experiment. And if it is not to hand, well, the sceptic may well be allowed to ramble on, for no real-life measurements are going to bear on the question.

If we stop thinking about necessity as an abstract and timeless property of propositions, and see it as something connected with application, then the thought that ‘proofs fix concepts’ (and the litany of related thoughts) no longer appears paradoxical. The first readers of Wittgenstein were on to something of great importance to traditional (Kantian!) philosophy of mathematics, but they were not able to overcome their scholastic conception of necessity as deriving from eternity – eternal truths – rather than from use.\footnote{For an earlier way of coming at these issues, see Hacking 2002a.}
**Literature**


The Rule-Following Problem Problem and Its Solution

Jaakko Hintikka, Boston

1. What does it mean to be guided by a rule?

One of the overarching problems Wittgenstein struggled with is the question of how language is related to the reality that it can represent. In the *Tractatus*, his answer was the so-called picture theory. By 1933-34, he had changed his mind. The language-world links were now created and maintained by rule governed human activities which he later called language-games. This led him to a new problem: What does it mean for an activity to be governed by a rule? One can scarcely hope to develop a viable philosophy of language without answering the question.

The problem of rules thus came to play an important role in Wittgenstein’s philosophy at large. But what precisely is the problem? This is the problem figuring in the title of this paper.

Wittgenstein explained his problem almost as soon as he began to expound his new way of thinking. This he does in *The Blue Book* pp. 12-14. Unfortunately, his explanations pose more questions than they answer.

Following a rule can apparently mean two different things. It can perhaps mean simply acting in accordance with the rule. But if so, following a rule is merely a fact about the rule-follower’s behavior. The only questions that can be asked about it concern merely the causal antecedents of such behavior. For instance, teaching one to follow a rule in this sense is a drill, a training to act in a certain way. It has no necessary connection with one’s actual awareness of the rule.

Hence something more is required for us to be justified in speaking about authentic rule-following. This additional requirement according to Wittgenstein is that an actual physical expression of a rule must play a role in the process of rule-following. Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem is to understand how a rule does so. To put the same question in somewhat
more colloquial terms, he is asking how a rule can guide its follower. And he obviously takes this guiding in the most concrete sense, which includes guiding one’s actions, not only guiding one’s thoughts.

Indeed, Wittgenstein repeatedly discusses the phenomenon of being guided and its phenomenology, for instance in *PI*, secs. 170, 172-3, 175, 177. These are all passages that go back to Wittgenstein’s earlier period (1936-37).

But if this is what Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem is, several questions arise. The first strange thing about Wittgenstein’s problem is brought out by asking: What more can there conceptually speaking be then in acting in accordance with the rule? If so acting is not enough, what more is needed? How else can rule-following manifest itself? Wittgenstein is the least likely philosopher to require that some mental event or state is required. On the contrary, for him it is the “inner process” that needs external criteria. Wittgenstein argues at some length against the idea that there are characteristic experiences of rule-following. And even if there were, he argues, having those experiences is not what rule-following means.

Also, most importantly, what does he mean by a rule’s playing a role in rule-following? Suitable examples can give you an idea. An especially instructive one is Wittgenstein’s thought-experiment of a language community in which color words are used only by means of a color chart, whose color samples a language user compares with the colors of objects. Here the rule codified in the chart plays a concrete role in the use of color language. (A color aphasic patient is like a member of this Wittgensteinean tribe who has lost his color samples.)

Such examples show some remarkable things. They show that the rule-following problem in Wittgenstein has nothing to do with intentionality or knowledge. It is natural to ask here: Why does Wittgenstein require this kind of participation of a rule-expression in the acting in accordance with the rule? It is natural to require that following a rule requires more than going through certain motions. But the requirement that most philosophers undoubtedly would think of here is a knowledge of the rule at least in the sense of awareness of it. This interpretation of Wittgenstein’s meaning is in fact accepted tacitly or in so many words by many commentators from Saul Kripke down. Yet it goes against Wittgenstein’s way of thinking. His discussion is predicated on the assumption that rule-following is a public
process, not a private mental one. Whatever happens in my consciousness is as such irrelevant to the connection between the rule and an action guided by it. Much of Wittgenstein’s so-called rule-following discussion in the *Philosophical Investigations* is calculated to make this point, to illustrate it and to emphasize it. As Wittgenstein puts it, a rule does not act at a distance.

Undoubtedly what is involved in full-fledged rule-following is an understanding of the rule. But that understanding must itself be guided by a concrete expression of the rule: As Wittgenstein expressed this point, if I am asked how I can understand what you mean, since I only have your symbols (words), I can answer: How can I understand what I mean, since all I have to go by are my symbols? Hence the problem about understanding a rule is essentially the problem of how a rule-follower’s actions are guided by an actual physical expression of the rule. As Wittgenstein says, “we can for our purposes, imagine the calculation being done entirely on paper.” (Wittgenstein 1980, 13)

What Wittgenstein is puzzled by is not the connection between what takes place in my consciousness, my thoughts, and their symbolic expression. The problematic relation is the connection between the symbols and the action. Of course, I can know what a rule is in the vulgar sense. I can even have the right formula or recipe in mind or on paper. The problem is how those symbolic expressions guide my actions.

Hence, Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem does not involve anything intentional. The problem is for Wittgenstein the same as the problem of how the blueprint of a machine determines its movements. He uses in fact machine analogies in trying to understand human rule-following.¹ What is for instance the real connection between the software of a computer and the mathematical operations it performs? Today, many people are inclined to ask: Does a computer *think*? Wittgenstein asks instead: Does a computer *compute*? Less provocatively, a Wittgenstein redivivus might ask: Does a chess-playing computer really play chess?

Wittgenstein tried to solve his problems with his characteristic intensity. But he kept running into sundry difficulties. For one thing, in order for a rule to guide my actions, it must be immediately present to me. Such

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¹ See e.g. RFM, PI §122-125, §193.
given objects would have to be for him phenomenological objects. They are what for him “the world we live in” consists of. And if so, I should be aware of them. But there are lots of instances of perfectly normal rule-following where the rule is not present in my consciousness. Much of Wittgenstein’s discussion of rule following is a sustained criticism of the phenomenological reality of rules. Admittedly, we have particular experiences on the different occasions when we are guided by something or somebody, but there is not a generic experience of being guided. (See *PI* I, sec. 172.)

This is connected with a significant peculiarity of Wittgenstein’s logic. The logical and mathematical expressions of rules are functions. But he has no logic of functions. Unlike properties and relations, functions are not a part of the logical language of the *Tractatus*. They are not nonlogical primitives in the kind of logically purified language envisaged there. (If they had been, Wittgenstein would have had no difficulties in solving the color incompatibility problem.)

This neglect of functions in logic might look like a harmless idiosyncrasy of Wittgenstein’s. In reality it reflects the same neglect in his ontology. Whether Wittgenstein preferred physicalistic or phenomenological ontology, functions are not part of its primitives. Hence they could not be objects of direct knowledge or otherwise play a role in Wittgenstein’s epistemology or theory of language. This matter becomes, contrary to a widespread dogma, functions cannot be fully reduced to predicates in any (conceptual) sense.

In general, Wittgenstein found it hard to avoid a dichotomy of completely automatic rule-following and rule-following accompanied by awareness of the rule one is following. In a way, his quest was for a tertium datur. One might say that Wittgenstein could not figure out what goes on in what might be called intelligent rule-following that is not automatic like a robot’s rule-following but nevertheless does not involve continuous attention, either. He discusses various examples, the most prominent of which is reading in the sense of reading aloud from a text. There the rule governing the process is of course the alphabet, the proverbially simplest object of knowledge. Whoever can read cannot be said to be ignorant of her or his ABCs. But I am not aware of the alphabet whenever I read from a text.
The Rule-Following Problem Problem and Its Solution

A philosophically interesting special case of rules is the rules of logic. Wittgenstein discusses them as an application of his general rule-following or rule-guidance problem. In his mind, the problem gets associated with the problem of logical necessity. This is strictly speaking a somewhat different problem. The general rule-following puzzle leads us to ask merely: “How do the premises guide us to a conclusion?”, not “How do they necessitate the conclusion?” The real issue is the relation of purely formal rules to the applications of logic in real-life language-games.

Wittgenstein thus discussed his problem, whatever precisely it is, extensively and intensively in many of his writings. In the end, something drastic happens. He realizes that he cannot solve his problem, and he comes to believe that it cannot be solved. We cannot account for how a rule embodied in a formula or recipe guides a rule-follower’s actions. Wittgenstein thus had to revert to the alternative he originally rejected in The Blue Book and to say that all that is involved in rule-following is acting in accordance with a rule. Logically speaking, but only logically speaking, we do follow a rule “blindly”.

How precisely Wittgenstein came to change his views and when precisely he did so calls for a separate investigation. His change of language paradigm from phenomenological to physicalistic can be dated down to the two decisive days of October 10-11, 1929. Can we date the change of his idea of rule-following equally accurately? Pending further investigation, it appears that the fundamental change took place on May 26-30, 1940. His agonizing dialogue with himself covers no fewer than 24 pages of MS 123 (in von Wright’s catalogue) viz. pages 73-97.

Wittgenstein’s words show his keen awareness of what the problem is:

We can describe purely behavioristically the mode of operation of teaching, execution and utilization of calculations. Must we use for the purpose a rule? The appearance that one could describe these matters only in terms of the function of a rule is where my entire problem lies. (Loc. cit., pp 73-74. German text given in an appendix.)

In the end Wittgenstein endorsed the purely behavioristic conception of rule-following. This might look like the conception he had rejected in The Blue Book. The difference is that the teaching of a rule is no longer construed by Wittgenstein as merely causing by training the learner to behave
in a certain way. Now the teaching of a rule is at bottom still a training, as it were a drill, but now what the learner is trained to do is to play the whole language-game of which the rule-following is a part. Hence Wittgenstein’s admission of the insolvability of the rule-guidance problem becomes a major shift in his philosophical views, a shift in fundamental priorities. In his middle period, rules had been the end-all and be-all of language. “Do not look behind rules, there is nothing there”, he said. Now language-games claim this pride of place.

The change in the way Wittgenstein asked his basic question originally and later is brought out by *PI I*, sec. 198 (a new one)

> “Then can whatever I do be brought into accord with the rule?” Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule – say a sign-post – to do with my actions? What sort of connexion is there here?

This question of the “connexion” is Wittgenstein’s earlier guidance problem. Now he gives it an answer that in a sense means returning to the alternative he rejected in *The Blue Book*. He continues

> Well, perhaps this one: I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it.

But Wittgenstein now gives a new, different spin to this “being trained” alternative. He recalls first the old interpretation of training as merely creating causal links.

> But that is only to give a causal connexion; to tell how it has come about that we now go by the sign-post; not about this going-by-the sign really consists in

The new spin is the following:

> On the contrary, I have further indicated that a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom.

Instead of “custom” Wittgenstein could have said “language-game”. What Wittgenstein does not do in his position in the *Philosophical Investigations* is to allow us to ask for an analysis of that custom, for instance to ask for its rules. The weakness of his position is that he forces a philosopher to swallow an entire language-game as in one fell gulp.

Wittgenstein did not highlight this conversion in his writings. He probably saw it as a natural development of his earlier ideas, so that his earlier lines of thought were still relevant. In his expositions of the problem,
he combines material from different periods of his history of his ideas. But it is not difficult to see even in the texts the differences between his earlier and later ideas.

In any case, there are unmistakable differences between the sections from different periods. For instance, in one of the older paragraphs (PI I, sec. 197) Wittgenstein speaks of “the list of rules of the game”. In contrast, rules are not prominent in the new sections. For the first time training is mentioned in connection with rule-following in an isolated new section 158.

The importance of this change of mind for Wittgenstein’s philosophy in general has not been sufficiently recognized. One thing it seems to me to imply is that the *Philosophical Investigations* does not express a fully worked-out position. It is a work in progress. Wittgenstein does not there yet work out fully the implications of his new position. When he realizes these implications, he runs into further questions that prompt him to continue his lines of thought.

This, I believe, provides an answer to questions concerning the relation of the so-called two parts of *Pi*, concerning the alleged “third Wittgenstein”, among others. What Part II and related writings are is a discussion of those problems that Wittgenstein’s new construal of rule-following implied but which he did not discuss there, perhaps because he was not yet aware of them. They include the idea that there are immediate links between language and reality. This is made dubious by the omnipresent language-games mediating the links between language and the world.

From all of this it is seen that Wittgenstein’s problem was not initially epistemological. In particular, Wittgenstein’s problem was not the Humean problem of induction. He is not asking how to anticipate the next step in rule-following, but how to find out how the rule that governs the entire series operates at any given step. But there is nevertheless a connection between induction and Wittgenstein’s problem, as we will find in sec. 3 below.

It still remains to see what Wittgenstein’s problem was. Once we see that we can see that the problem is not unsolvable, even though he cannot reach a solution. Hence, I do not agree with Wittgenstein’s new position. However, this does not make a difference to the rule-following prob-
lem problem. Wittgenstein’s giving up the problem does not show what it was.

2. The logic of rule-following

What I will do next is to solve the rule-following problem by solving the rule-following problem itself as a conceptual problem. I will solve it by means of a method that in our day and age often seems forgotten or otherwise neglected, they are also misunderstood and abused. I will solve it by logical analysis. I propose to ask: What is the logical form of rule-following? What does it mean to know how to follow a rule? What it means is obviously to be able to answer conclusively the question “how does one follow a rule?”

Once you ask this question in so many words, you can see what kind it is logically. It is a dependence question. What an answer should do is tell the rule-follower what to do at each stage. It should tell what the right action is depending on the stage the process is at. It should make it true to say of the agent, “She or he knows, at each stage of the rule following, what actions to take”. (Technically, this is called the desideratum of the question.) Its logical form is in the independence-friendly notation

\[(2.1) \ K(\forall x)(\exists y/K)A(x,y)\]

Here \(A(x,y)\) says that at stage \(x\) the agent should do \(y\). You need not be scared by the independence-indicator (no doubt unfamiliar to you). It has in fact a most intuitive meaning. What a slashed variable \(y/K\) can be thought of as doing is to range over known individuals. Hence what (2.1) does is to say just what it was supposed to say, namely to say that at each stage there is an action that the agent knows she or he should do.

What does it mean to answer conclusively such a dependence question? Let us first consider the same matter in the case of a simple wh-question, for instance

\[(2.2) \text{Who murdered Trotsky?}\]

The desideratum of (2.1) has the form

\[(2.3) \ K(\exists x/K)M(x,t)\]
A reply “b” will make true (if correct) the statement

(2.4) $KM(b,t)$

That is, “b murdered Trotsky”. But the truth of (2.4) does not mean that you know the answer for you may be ignorant of who b is. But (2.4) does imply (2.3) if the questioner knows (or is made to know) who b is, in other words if it is true that

(2.5) $K(\exists x/K)(b=x)$

This (2.5) will be called conclusiveness condition. Thus answers to simple wh-questions have two components. A conclusive answer will provide a reference to the inquired-for individual, and also provides an identification of that individual.

My fundamental point here is to distinguish these two components (in an answer to a question) from each other and understand the difference between the two. This difference is logical. Reference to a right individual is a matter of fact. The identification is essentially a matter of meaning. This is seen most clearly when a proper name is offered as a reply. Then the conclusiveness condition merely identifies the bearer of the name, which in this case is a matter of mere meaning.

The same analysis applies mutatis mutandis to dependence questions. There the desideratum is of the form (2.1). A proffered reply might specify a function g (in the set-theoretical sense of a class of ordered pairs) and be of the form

(2.6) $K(\forall x)A(x,g(x))$

The conclusiveness condition will be of the form

(2.7) $K(\exists f/K)(\forall x)(g(x)=f(x))$

This could also be written

(2.8) $K(\exists f/K)(g=f)$

In other words g has to be a known function. (Note the analogy between (2.5) and (2.8).)
These points come into play in an important and special case of dependence questions, viz. experimental questions. In such a question an experimental scientist is asking how the observed variable y depends on the controlled variable x in other words, what value of the observed variable corresponds to each value of the controlled variable x.

Nature’s response to such a question can be represented as a number of points on a x-y graph paper which ideally are combined into a curve. But does knowing this curve mean that I know how y actually depends on x? It does not. What is also needed is knowledge of what the mathematical function is that the graph represents.

This is a separate question from knowing the curve. It is answered by identifying the function in question. This would be satisfying the conclusiveness conditions (2.3) and (2.7)-(2.8). It is not answered automatically by the knowledge of the graph of the function. You can look at the curve until you are blue in the face and still the identity of the function is not revealed to you. It could thus be called also the problem of interpreting the curve or of specifying its meaning. In order to avoid the misleading connotations of all these different ways of referring to the same problem, I propose to give it a neutral technical name and refer to it as the Lorelei problem in honor of Heinrich Heine, recalling the first line of his so-called poem, “Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten.” (“I do not know what it is supposed to mean”.)

The Lorelei problem is like the corresponding problem in the case of simple wh-questions. It is conceptual, in this case mathematical, in nature. It is not solved by more observations or by more accurate observations, but perhaps by manipulating mathematical formulas as applied to the physical subject matter at hand. It shows the truly remarkable fact that even in completely factual question of the kind we ask all the time in science and in everyday life there is a tacit component of conceptual question asking for conceptual knowledge.

3. Wittgenstein’s Lorelei problem

In the light of what we have found out, it is possible to see what Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem is. It is the Lorelei problem for rules. To say this is to pay a major tribute to his conceptual acumen. Even though Witt-
Wittgenstein did not have an explicit logical framework or a technical terminology at his disposal to spell out his insight, he realized that there are two logically different components involved in rule-following. An analogy with experimental questions shows the difference. Merely acting in accordance with a rule is like tracing the curve that codifies graphically the dependence of the observed variable on the controlled one. Hence we cannot in any direct sense see what determines the curve in the sense of knowing the function that guides the drawing of that curve. I cannot continue the curve without knowing what function it is supposed to represent. In the same way, from one’s acting in accordance with a rule one cannot see what the rule is that guides the actions of following it. This is not an epistemological difficulty, but a conceptual distinction. It amounts to the question as to how the rule guides the actions of a rule-follower.

For a sufficiently abstract-minded reader, the character of Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem as a Lorelei problem should be obvious. For what are the words that he uses for the step from the expression of a rule to the action it prompts? They are expressions like “guiding”, “determining”, “influencing” etc. In the cold eyes of an abstract mathematician, these are all expressions for different kinds of functional dependence. Hence Wittgenstein’s question as to how an expression of a rule guides my actions is in effect a question as to what that function is, that is, of identifying their function, that is, the Lorelei problem.

Even the idea that an answer to a Lorelei problem must be an identification of the rule (or other function) in question seems to be present in Wittgenstein. This is suggested by the fact that identification is closely related to definition when he says that

The rule can only seem to me to produce all its consequence in advance if I draw them as a matter of course. (PI I, sec. 238.)

Wittgenstein continues

As much as it is matter of course for me to call this color “blue”

A little later he writes

“Red” means the color that occurs to me when I hear the word “red”— would be a definition (PI I, sec. 239)
In brief, Wittgenstein’s brilliant insight was to recognize the Lorelei problem about rules as a problem separate from all questions of acting in accordance with the rule. “What more could there be”, we are tempted to ask. But this question is merely the analogue of the corresponding question about functions where one is tempted to ask, “What more can there be to the function than the curve? Set-theoretically the function is nothing more than the class of ordered pairs of argument values and function values, which is precisely what the curve codifies. One just cannot conjure away the conceptual dimension that necessitates the identification of that function, and likewise for rules.

But don’t we often in fact succeed in identifying the function, and doesn’t the same hold for rules? Wittgenstein’s discussion might give the impression that he is talking about epistemological difficulties of identifying the rule (function). He marshals with great glee examples to illustrate how no sequence determines its continuation and how every symbolic representation can be understood in more than one way. If this were his entire point, one could respond by pointing out that as a matter of fact we often can for instance identify without any real trouble the function (law) that governs a sequence of numbers. I can recognize the rule for the sequence of Fibonacci numbers from its initial segments, and no mathematics student will fail to realize how the sequence 314159… is determined. We have here perfectly realistic language-games which by Wittgenstein’s own principles should suffice to give meaning to questions of knowing a rule. The naturalness of this idea is testified to by Wittgenstein:

When you said “I already knew at the time…” that meant something like “if I had been then asked what number should be written after 1000, I should have replied [correctly] ‘1002’”, And that I don’t doubt. (PI 1, sec. 187)

The answer is that Wittgenstein is not making an epistemological point, skeptical or not. His point is conceptual, not epistemological. It is true that an initial segment of a rule-governed sequence does not determine the rest and that there are difficulties of finding the rule form a sample of its cases. But these difficulties are different in kind from the difficulty of anticipating the next step. The ‘difficulties’ Wittgenstein intends are for instance not due to the finitude of the sample. Even knowing the entire infinite curve of a function does not imply knowing what function it is a curve of.
If there had not been his “horror of infinity”, Wittgenstein might likewise have pointed out that even if someone acts in accordance with a rule always, forever and to the bitter end, that would not necessarily identify the function. Wittgenstein’s apparently skeptical remarks are his way of calling our attention to a conceptual distinction. If you try to interpret such remarks epistemologically, you are missing their point, their “Witz”, as Wittgenstein might have said.

The distinction involved here does not only split philosophers’ hairs. It shows up in an important way in scientific reasoning. The difference between the two dimensions of dependence questions means that experimental induction and indeed what is usually called induction has the same two dimensions, that is, involves two different tasks. These two tasks require different modes of reasoning. The so-called inductive logic deals only with the factual component and with the confirmation of already established generalizations. In our day and age, the other component, that is, the search of the functions that govern phenomena is often brushed under the carpet called constructing “mathematical models”. In earlier times, the most prominent instances of the search of mathematical functions and other laws were attempts to extend partial laws and especially to integrate different partial laws. Indeed, such attempts were what was typically meant by “induction” or epagoge.

We can now also see interesting connections between Wittgenstein’s different views. His requirement that the rule must play an actual rule in one’s act of following it is reminiscent of a requirement that knowing a function must give me a recipe for computing its value for a given argument. If so, Wittgenstein’s initial conception of rule-following would be related to his constructivistic position in the philosophy of mathematics.

Wittgenstein nevertheless realized that to ask the Lorelei question is to ask for understanding rather than for a recipe. More specifically, the Lorelei question is conceptual rather than epistemological. In the RFM, sec. 3, he poses the following question:

*How do I know* that in working out the series +2 I must write “20004, 20006” and not “20004, 20008”? — The question “How do I know that this color is ‘red’ ” is similar. (Italics in the original.)
This should also show that Wittgenstein’s rule problem is not an epistemological problem of being aware of the rule. On the analysis offered here what is required for genuine rule-following is not an awareness of the rule that one is following, but being able to identify the rule. Such ability need not be actualized, but it must be there ready to be used.

This enables us to understand what a genuine or, as I will call it, informed rule-following is like. Wittgenstein himself seems never to have been quite clear about what is involved. What happens is this. We have seen what it means for someone to follow a rule in the full sense Wittgenstein was trying to capture. This full sense involves acting in accordance with the rule, but it also involves an ability to consider what one is doing in the proper conceptual framework. The important point is that a rule-follower’s knowledge of the rule she is following is normally potential, not actual, most of the time. An example used sometimes in discussions of rule-following is the use of multiplication-table. It is usually taught to children as a mere rote, as a mere automatic behavior in accordance with a rule. But in fact in its normal use it is an instance of informed rule-following. Suppose that I am carrying out a multiplication semi-automatically, but suddenly have cold feet. “Seven times six – now what is it?” The chances are that I say to myself something like, “Let’s see. Five times six is thirty, two times six is twelve, hence seven times six must be forty-two.” And I happily go back to calculating automatically. Here we have an example of informed rule-following. One can in fact learn and internalize multiplication tables without learning them by rote. There are in Europe some progressive schools where elementary mathematics is taught without teaching children to memorize the multiplication table.

Likewise, in Wittgenstein’s favorite example, in reading aloud from a text in a foreign language I may, say, suddenly hesitate regarding how to pronounce an unusual letter or letter combination. Then I can and have to resort to my conscious memory of the relevant phonetic rule.

In brief, intelligent rule-following does not involve actual awareness of the rule, but it requires potential awareness. It requires knowing what the rule is, but not being aware of it at the time.

The apparently opposite pole to informed rule-following is automatic rule-following. In general terms, one can look at Wittgenstein’s development as involving an initial attempt to find a way of interpreting
automatic rule-following as being guided by a concrete embodiment of the rule. The failure of this quest led him to acknowledge the autonomy of automatic rule-following. His mistake was that this autonomy is only true of informed rule-following which can be automatic. Hence the autonomy of the automatic is only psychological, not conceptual. An apparently automatic rule-following can be autonomous only if it at bottom is informed rule-following.

**Literature**


**Appendix**

German text of the quotation above:

Wir können, rein behavioristisch, die Arbeitsweise des Lehrens und Ausführens und der Benützung von Rechnungen beschreiben. Müssen wir uns dazu einer Regel bedienen?

Diese Erscheinung des Sachverhaltes, man könne das Funktionieren einer Regel nur wieder mittels des Funktionierens einer Regel beschreiben, in ihr liegt unser ganzes Problem.
Wittgenstein in Comparison
Metapher als Entzug – Metapher als Gabe: 
Wittgenstein mit Blumenberg lesen?

Matthias Kroß, Berlin


I

Als Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) zur konzeptionellen Mitarbeit am Historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie eingeladen wurde, schlug er vor, nicht nur das Lemma Metapher aufzunehmen, sondern umgekehrt etliche Metaphern zu Lemmata zu machen. Bekanntlich wurde sein Ansinnen vom Herausgeberkreis abgelehnt, mit höflichem Bedauern, doch mit einiger Entschiedenheit:

Der Herausgeberkreis hat, nicht leichten Herzens, darauf verzichtet, Metaphern und metaphorische Wendungen in die Nomenklatur des Wörterbuches


Im englisch-amerikanischen Raum scheint das Interesse an der Metapher vor allem über die Literaturtheorie zum Gegenstand des philosophischen Interesses geworden zu sein; in die analytische Philosophie hat die Diskussion vor allem seit dem 1976 erstmals publizierten Metaphern-Aufsatz von Donald Davidson Eingang gefunden (Davidson 1986). Davidson’s Aufsatz war eine Reaktion auf die vielen vergeblichen Bemühungen vor allem innerhalb der angelsächsischen Philosophie, entweder die Logik der Metaphern unter Verwendung des Begriffs der Bedeutung aufzuklären oder eine Theorie der Metapher zu entwickeln. Das „Wunder“ der Bedeutungsübertragung, welches die Metapher nach landläufiger Vorstellung vollbringe, lässt sich laut Davidson per definitionem nicht aufklären –

schließlich unterstelle man mit der Definition der Metapher als übertragene Bedeutung einer literalen Ursprungsbedeutung bereits jenes Paradox, das man hinterher verzweifelt und erfolglos aufzulösen versuche. Gordische Knoten lassen sich bekanntlich nicht lösen, sondern allenfalls zerschlagen. (Es wäre gewiss hierbei reizvoll zu untersuchen, was Wittgenstein meinen könnte, wenn er von den „Verknotungen des Verstandes“ spricht).


Zur Verblüffung des Lesers hindert dies Davidson allerdings nicht, in einer ebenso knappen wie beeindruckenden Schlusspirouette am Ende

II

Da Davidsons virtus metaphorica als Schlussstein seines Argumentationsbogens kaum zu überzeugen vermag, könnte man seinen Aufsatz trotz der Vielzahl von Kommentaren, die er in der englischsprachigen Philosophie ausgelöst hat, getrost zur Seite legen, wenn sein erratischer Schluss nicht zugleich etwas für die Metaphorologie Interessantes anzeigen würde. Es ist klar, dass Davidson das Geheimnis der Metapher natürlich keineswegs dadurch löst, dass er es in die Metapher zurückbiegt, indem er nachweist, dass aus ihr keine spezifische Bedeutungstheorie herauszuholen ist. Die von ihm vollzogene Inklusion des Metaphorischen in Sprache und deren propositionale Grundstruktur (jedenfalls bestimmt Davidson die Metapher ausschließlich in Relation zu dieser Struktur) wirkt deshalb befremdend, weil laut Davidsons eigenem Bekunden durch die Metapher doch etwas zur Sprache kommen soll, was sprachlich gerade nicht zu erwarten ist. Die Metapher erbringt eine Leistung, die sich in Sprache zeigt, deren Ursprung aber noch nicht auf der Oberfläche der propositionalen Sprache zu verorten ist. Davidspons Einschluss der Bedeutung des Metaphorisierens in die Sprache impliziert also in einem Zug die konträre Geste des Ausschlusses eines wichtigen Aspekts des metaphorischen Redens aus der Sprache. – Aber was wird hier durch Einschluss gerade ausgeschlossen?

Davidson selbst untersucht in seinem Text lediglich die (von ihm zu Recht als unzureichend erachteten) Antworten seiner angelsächsischen Kollegen. Andere interessante Antworten hat aber die von der analytischen Philosophie oftmals so fahrlässig ignorierte Tradition des historisch-hermeneutischen Denkens zu geben versucht (zu den Hintergründen dieser


Während jede Anschauungsmetapher individuell und ohne ihresgleichen ist und deshalb allem Rubrizieren immer zu entfliehen weiß, zeigt der große Bau der Begriffe die starre Regelmäßigkeit eines römischen Kolumbariums und
Blumenberg bemerkt allerdings schon 1960, dass es eine bestimmte Gruppe von Metaphern gibt, die sich nicht zu Begriffen verfestigen, weil sie ihrerseits gleichsam die Bedingung der Möglichkeit für die Festlegung von Begriffsbedeutungen sind. Er nennt sie „absolute Metaphern“. Sie sind weder angemessen noch unangemessen – sie sind vielmehr die Voraussetzung dafür, dass wir über den falschen oder richtigen Gebrauch von Begriffen entscheiden können. Absolute Metaphern stellen das Instrumentarium der philosophischen Operationen dar – als Beispiele nennt Blumenberg Begriffe wie ‚Welt‘, ‚Geschichte‘, ‚Bewusstsein‘, oder solche Begriffe wie ‚Begriff‘, ‚Urteil‘, ‚Logos‘ etc.

Dass die Metaphorizität dieser Metaphern in der Philosophie und Theorie so häufig übersehen, ja in der Metaphysik geradezu verleugnet wird,² leitet Blumenberg, hier wiederum in enger Anlehnung an Nietzsche, von einer evolutionären Anthropologie der prekären Selbstbehauptung her. Nietzsche hatte in Über Wahrheit und Lüge als Grund für das „Übersehen“ der begriffskonstitutiven Leistung der Metapher erkannt, dass der Mensch


In Blumenbergs Adaption liest sich dieser Gedanke folgendermaßen:

Das animal symbolicum beherrscht die ihm genuin tödliche Wirklichkeit, indem es sie vertreten läßt; es sieht weg von dem, was ihm unheimlich ist, auf das, was ihm vertraut ist. Am deutlichsten wird das dort, wo das Urteil mit seinem Identitätsanspruch überhaupt nicht ans Ziel kommen kann, entweder

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² Diesen Vorgang konstatieren auch Heidegger und Derrida, die den „normal- philosophischen“ Metapherngebrauch als ausschließlich der Metaphysik zugehörig begreifen.

Ob sich mit dieser evolutionär-anthropologischen Transposition des nietzscheanischen Gedankens eine überzeugende Theorie des Unbegrifflichen begründen lässt, muss allerdings bezweifelt werden. Blumenberg diagnostiziert einen Bedarf an Metaphern für drei Lebenssituationen: (1) die Identitätslogik „normaler“ Urteile versagt angesichts einer feindlichen und lebensbedrohlchen Umwelt („genuin tödliche Wirklichkeit“); (2) die Empfindung der „Unheimlichkeit“ etwa der „Welt“ oder des „Bewusstseins“, führt zu einem symbolischen Vertretungshandeln, das Unheimlichkeit in Vertrautheit zurückverwandelt; (3) Reaktionen auf Umweltzwänge, die keine Spielräume für reflexiv gesicherte Urteile zulassen, sondern „rasche Orientierung“ und „drastische Plausibilität“ verlangen.

Es ist leicht zu sehen, dass sich Blumenberg mit seinen Argumenten in einen anthropologischen oder, zeitgemäß ausgedrückt, in einem evolutionsbiologischen Zirkel zu verstricken droht. Dieser besteht darin, dass aus dem evolvierten Sachverhalt auf seine evolutionäre Zweckmäßigke...
aus der Lebenswelt ableiten, sie dann aber wiederum der Lebenswelt wie-
der gegenüberzustellen zu müssen. Es scheint daher ratsam, „Normal-“, und „Widerstimmigkeit“ von Intentionen als lebensweltlich gleichursprünglich anzusetzen oder sie als Ex-post-Bestimmungen allenfalls in einem analyti-
sche Sinne zu verwenden. Ihr Zusammenwirken, nicht ihr Gegensatz ist Voraussetzung der Intentionalität. Keine der beiden lässt sich gegenüber der jeweils anderen prioritär oder fundierend auszeichnen.3

Auch wenn Blumenbergs husserlianische Verortung des Metaphorischen in der Lebenswelt nicht schlüssig zu der von ihm vorausgesetzten Anthropologie führt, die den Menschen mangelbedingt als eben ein symbo-
isierendes Tier oder Distanzierungswesen begreift (vgl. Blumenberg 1981 und Blumenberg 2006), so eröffnet sie doch die Möglichkeit zur Bestim-
mung „absoluter Metaphern“, die sich dem „kristallisierten“ Sprach-
gebrauch entziehen und daher ihre metaphorische Qualität bewahren, auch wenn sie quasi-begrifflich verwendet werden. Diese Qualität besagt, um die weiter oben gegebene Beschreibung noch einmal aufzugreifen, dass sich solche Metaphern nicht in eine begrifflich erstarrte, formalisierbare oder terminologisch zu vereindeutigende, geschweige denn ontologisch oder metaphysisch konstruierbare Sprache eingemeinden lassen. Dadurch kann Philosophie als Umgangsweise mit solchen Metaphern selbst als eine Gabe und als Aufgabe bestimmt werden, die Metaphorizität solcher Meta-
phern aufzuweisen, zu dokumentieren oder, um es pathetisch auszudrücken, zu bezeugen. Umgekehrt lässt sich aus dieser Einsicht folgern, dass jeder Versuch, aus absoluten Metaphern Termini im oben genannten Sinne zu machen, zum Scheitern verurteilt sein wird, weil dieser Versuch Philoso-
phie „überfordern“ würde, um hier Blumenbergs Formulierung aufzugrei-
fen. Ohne auf Blumenbergs anthropologische Festlegung des Menschen auf ein Mängelwesen und, in Reaktion darauf, ein diese Mängel durch Symbole kompensierendes animal zurückgreifen zu müssen, könnte man zumindest der absoluten Metapher jene zentrale und betörende, wenn auch unvermeidlicherweise immer wieder „übersprungene“ und, wie Nietzsche

3 Vgl. dazu bes. Müller 2005, 236ff. und zusammenfassend 239 „Letztlich hat Blu-
menberg keine einheitliche kulturanthropologische Theorie aufgestellt, sondern vielmehr versucht, seine metaphorologischen und phänomenologischen Untersu-
chungen anthropologisch zu fundieren.“
schreibt, „vergessene“ Kraft zuschreiben, die auf das Unsagbare geht, weil sie die terminologische Kristallisationskraft des Begriffs noch überschreitet und ein spezifisches „Weltverhältnis“ konstituiert. Man würde ihr auf diese Weise jene „verborgene Kraft“ zurückgeben, die Davidson aufgefallen ist, die er aber aufgrund der von ihm vorgenommenen Inklusion des Metaphorischen in eine auf ihre propositionalen Gehalte reduzierte Sprache nicht begreifen kann.

III


stein sei bestrebt, das Denken auf festem Grund und dieses einer Grenze zum Sumpf der Unbestimmtheit zu halten, auch wenn dies zu willkürlichen Demarkationslinien führe, hinter dem zurück, was Wittgenstein in seinen Überlegungen verhandelt: Widerstimmigkeit und Normalstimmigkeit sind für Wittgenstein allenfalls zwei Pole in einem Sprach- und Handlungsfeld, innerhalb dessen sie ihre kontradiktorische Valenz entfalten – und nicht umgekehrt, wie Blumenberg unterstellt (vgl. dazu Menke 2009).

**IV**


Nicht von ungefähr hat Wittgenstein sich immer wieder der Metapher des Lichts bedient – im Hinblick auf seine philosophischen Gedankengänge, doch auch im persönlichen Leben, wo er nach innerer moralischer Erneuerung, nach

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4 Blumenberg hat 1957 eine erste größere begriffsgeschichtliche Studie der Metapher des Lichts gewidmet, ohne freilich dabei auf Wittgenstein einzugehen (Blumenberg 2001b).
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einem Leben im Geist strebte, das für ihn identisch mit einem Leben im Licht war.

[...]


Die bildhaften Redewendungen dienen allenfalls zur lebhaften Untermalung seiner Beispiele, wenn auch seine Methode mit dem Ziel, philosophische Probleme zu klären, stets präsent ist und er das Bild des Lichts häufig mit einbezieht. Durch die adäquate Beschreibung mittels richtiger Wahl der Worte gelangen wir dazu, die Dinge zu verstehen, sie im richtigen Licht zu „sehen“. (Somavilla 2004, 364)

Der von Somavilla vorgenommenen Trennung zwischen einem „philosophisch irrelevanten“ und einem, im Gegensatz dazu, philosophisch bedeut- 
Psalm 51,12 heißt, auf den sich Wittgenstein mit der Wendung „reines Herz“ offensichtlich bezieht: „Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz, und gib mir einen neuen, beständigen Geist.“


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5 Diese Bemerkungen stehen in folgendem Kontext:
11 Verbirg dein Antlitz vor meinen Sünden, und tilge alle meine Missetat.
12 Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein reines Herz, und gib mir einen neuen, beständigen Geist.
13 Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht, und nimm deinen Heiligen Geist nicht von mir.
14 Erfreue mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe, und mit einem willigen Geist rüste mich aus.
(zit. nach der Lutherbibel, rev. Standardausgabe 1984)


6 Somavilla stützt ihren Befund mit einem Beleg aus MS 107, 156: „Kann noch immer nicht ordentlich, oder gar nicht, arbeiten. Die philosophische Gegend meines Gehirns liegt noch immer im Dunkeln. Und erst wenn da wieder das Licht angezündet wird geht die Arbeit wieder an.“
Diese von Somavilla so genannte „Tätigkeit“ ist es, die Wittgenstein im Sinn hat, wenn er in der *Abhandlung* schreibt, dass Philosophie keine Lehre, sondern eine *Tätigkeit* sei. Sie ist eine philosophische Übung, eine *Askesis*, nach deren erfolgreichem Vollzug man die Welt im richtigen Licht zu sehen vermögt und nicht länger einer Sehhilfe, und sei es der *Abhandlung* selbst, bedürfe, wie es am Ende der Frühschrift bekanntlich heißt.

Als ein weiteres Beispiel kann die Eintragung in MS 183 dienen:

> Das Höchste aber, das ich zu erfüllen bereit bin, ist: 'fröhlich zu sein in meiner Arbeit'. [...] Was aber höher liegt, kann, oder will, ich nicht anstreben, ich kann es nur anerkennen [...]. // *Es muss dazu, gleichsam, durch die Decke, den Plafond, unter dem ich arbeite, über den ich nicht steigen will, ein Licht durchschnimmern.* (MS 183, 168; Wittgenstein 1997a, 78)

Wittgenstein spielt hier wiederum auf das AT an, diesmal auf das Buch Kohelet. Es heißt dort in Kap. 3, 9–13:

> 9 Man mühe sich ab, wie man will, so hat man keinen Gewinn davon.  
> 10 Ich sah die Arbeit, die Gott den Menschen gegeben hat, dass sie sich damit plagen.  
> 11 Er hat alles schön gemacht zu seiner Zeit, auch hat er die Ewigkeit in ihr Herz gelegt; nur dass der Mensch nicht ergründen kann das Werk, das Gott tut, weder Anfang noch Ende.  
> 12 Da merkte ich, dass es nichts Besseres dabei gibt als fröhlich sein und sich gütlich tun in seinem Leben.  
> 13 Denn ein Mensch, der da isst und trinkt und hat guten Mut bei all seinem Mühen, das ist eine Gabe Gottes.7


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7 Ich zitiere nach der revidierten Luther-Übersetzung von 1912.  
8 Vgl. 1 Kor 13:  
8 Die Liebe höret nimmer auf, so doch die Weissagungen aufhören werden und die Sprachen aufhören werden und die Erkenntnis aufhören wird.
dass er das „NT umschwirre wie die Motte das Licht“, und eine genauere Auswertung der Paulus-Briefe würde so manche weitere überraschende Einsicht in Wittgensteins Werk ermöglichen, auch wenn Wittgenstein durchaus kein Anhänger des Paulus war.)

Ganz ähnlich formuliert es Wittgenstein in dem bereits zitierten MS 134:

Ist, was ich tue überhaupt der Mühe wert? Doch nur, wenn es von oben her ein Licht empfängt. Und ist es so, – warum sollte ich mich sorgen, daß mir die Früchte meiner Arbeit nicht gestohlen werden? Wenn, was ich schreibe, wirklich wertvoll ist, wie sollte man mir das Wertvolle stehlen? Ist das Licht von oben nicht da, so kann ich ja doch nur geschickt sein. (MS 134, 95; Wittgenstein 1997b, 114)

V


9 Denn unser Wissen ist Stückwerk, und unser Weissagen ist Stückwerk.
10 Wenn aber kommen wird das Vollkommene, so wird das Stückwerk aufhören. […]
13 Nun aber bleibt Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe, diese drei; aber die Liebe ist die größte unter ihnen.

9 Dies betrifft insbesondere die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl, die Paulus in Römer 9 knapp darlegt.


torischen Wörterbuchs der Philosophie zitierte, ihre „Kristallisation“ und damit sprachliche Unbeweglichkeit zu nehmen.

Unter einem solchen Blickwinkel würde zugleich deutlich, welche Exklusionen die Inklusion Philosophie in die Sprache miterzeugt. Sie entzieht Ästhetik, Ethik und Religion dem Bereich der Sagbarkeit; sie überführt Philosophie als terminologisch gegen Metaphern immunisierte Tätigkeit der Unsinnigkeit, rehabilitiert sie freilich als Tätigkeit der Metaphorisierung zum Zwecke einer existenziellen Klärung, die sich nicht anders als in einer metaphorischen Spur manifestieren kann. Wie Nietzsche und Blumenberg gezeigt haben, liegt in diesem Entzug immer eine doppelte Bewegung: Durch sie und in ihr werden – um hier einen Lieblingsausdruck Wittgensteins zu verwenden – „kristallisierte“ Überzeugung wieder verflüssigt – diese Bewegung entzieht Gewissheit und Evidenz, sie unterminiert das Projekt der Petrifizierung von philosophischen Termini, weil und indem sie das als Metapher erweist, was als Begriff daherkommt.

Zugleich ist der Entzug, den uns Wittgenstein mit seiner Grenzziehung sinnvollen Sprechens zumutet, zugleich doch auch eine Gabe. Indem er philosophische Sätze auf den raunen Boden ihrer metaphorischen Herkunft zurückführt und damit das bisherige Philosophieren als Entziehung dieser metaphorischen Herkunft deutlich werden lässt, überreicht Wittgenstein zugleich eine Gabe: etwa die, die Welt richtig zu sehen, Friede in Gedanken zu erzielen, sich im alten Chaos wohl zu fühlen, das Philosophieren abbrechen zu können, wann man will, nicht länger der Tröpfcheninfektion der Metaphysik zu erliegen und so fort – besitzt damit nicht das Konzept der „absoluten Metapher“ nicht vielleicht eine noch verborgene, aber nichtsdestoweniger nachhaltige Kraft für das philosophische Denken?
Literatur


Wittgenstein vs. Rawls

Rupert Read, Norwich

‘What the liberal really wants is to bring about change which will not in any way endanger his position’ – Stokeley Carmichael.

‘Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself’ – Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Introduction

Liberal political philosophy is the dominant political philosophy of our time. Perhaps then it is simply unsurprising that many Wittgensteinians (and especially Americans) are card-carrying liberals. Wittgensteinian thinkers as otherwise diverse for instance as Richard Rorty,1 Stanley Cavell and Burt Dreben have explicitly praised Rawlsian liberalism, at length.

Like some other British Wittgensteinians2, I disagree. I believe that the good is prior to the right. A conception or family of conceptions of the good must be paramount. Life is moral. It’s not good enough to ‘do the right thing’ in some limited sphere, and otherwise just do (and buy) whatever you want. If you live in that way, you are plainly not above reproach, and (more importantly) nor is your society.

I would favour a broadly virtue-ethical approach and an egalitarian moral perfectionism.3 Moral perfectionism (following Emerson) is alleg-

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1 Consider also Rorty’s key recent Wittgensteinian opponents, my fellow ‘new Wittgensteinians’ Alice Crary and James Conant. The whole tenor of Conant’s critique of Rorty, and the crucial closing sentence of Crary’s “Wittgenstein and political philosophy” (in our (2000)), make very clear that Crary and Conant consider themselves to be united with Rorty in his political liberalism, even as they are divided from him over Wittgenstein.

2 I am thinking here particularly of Nigel Pleasants and Phil Hutchinson.

3 This need not be a contradiction in terms. In my view, a perfectionist project that openly favours some conceptions of the good above others (e.g. that favours ‘high’ culture) can be perfectly compatible with a truly egalitarian distribution of material goods among an entire population, etc.
edly what Cavell offers, too. But Cavell is very soft on liberal political philosophy in his most sustained engagement with it, in the pages of *Conditions handsome and unhandsome*. I submit that Cavell’s ‘moral perfectionism’ is neutered, by his unwillingness to confront liberalism. Cavell wants to recover a non-elitist model of perfectionism, but in fact, by going along as much as he does with Rawls, he both (1) goes along with a model of culture that prioritises consumerism above real culture, and (2) nevertheless preserves an economic elite: made up of those systematically favoured by the difference principle.4

Liberalism of course has its attractions as a political philosophy, for followers of Wittgenstein.5 Most strikingly, perhaps, in its ringing endorsement of freedom of thought. Wittgensteinians strive above all for mental liberation (aka ‘the liberating word’). But what gets called ‘economic freedom’, and freedom to consume: these are not as attractive, I hope, to a Wittgensteinian. Especially not if they amount, as I shall briefly suggest below, to the freedom to milk other people and to milk the future...

And in any case (though I shall not argue for this here): the ‘neutrality’ between conceptions of the good promised by contemporary liberalism (especially by Rawls) is in my view a fake. It disguises a deeper non-neutrality, a hidden bias. A deep commitment, in fact, to a quasi-relativistic culture of consumerism.

This is why I seek, in this paper, to set Wittgenstein against Rawls. I will offer in what follows a series of reasons for thinking that Wittgensteinians in particular have no excuse for being Rawlsians. These reasons can in the main be briefly summed up under three headings:

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4 Such as e.g. the class described in the (to my mind) unpleasant scenario via which Rawls first details how the difference principle might play out in his ‘just’ society, on p.78 of Rawls’s (1971).

5 Similarly, Wittgenstein has his serious attractions, at least superficially for Rawlsian liberals (for those impressed by Rawls’s founding assumption, interrogated below, that “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions”). Take for instance the following quotes, from “Philosophy” from the Big Typescript (p.171 and p.181): “THE GOAL [OF PHILOSOPHY]: THE TRANSPARENCY OF ARGUMENTS. JUSTICE.” “Our only task is to be just. That is, we must only point out and resolve the injustices of philosophy, and not posit new parties—and creeds.”
• Rawls’s taking of justice as the first virtue of social institutions is problematic; he more or less assumes this (whereas Wittgenstein would consider other possibilities), and the content of the assumption is certainly very questionable.
• The heart of Rawlsian thinking is, surprisingly (given Rawls’s care to argue for the superiority of his view to Utilitarianism), non-action-guiding. Both the difference principle and the ‘just savings’ principle are open invitations to bad faith. This is because they are non-genuine contracts which nevertheless in some sense pretend to be as-if contracts. I will draw an analogy with Wittgenstein’s anti-‘private-language’ considerations: which are against the ‘idea’ of a non-language which nevertheless pretends to be as-if a language.
• I submit, in sum, that Rawlsian thinking (see e.g. the previous point) is fundamentally dishonest. Whereas honesty is the paramount watchword of Wittgenstein’s thinking. Honesty is for Wittgenstein the first virtue of philosophy…

Harvard Wittgensteins

Let us begin with a tale of two Wittgensteins: Cavell’s and Dreben’s…

There have been two great contrasting ‘strands’ of Wittgensteinianism in and from Harvard, and according to some these are even the two great strands of Wittgensteinianism of our time: Burt Dreben's and Stanley Cavell's. But they have something in common, something surprising: a belief that their Harvard colleague, John Rawls, is in line with their own views and with Wittgenstein’s, and that he has roughly got ethics and political philosophy right.

This convergence of two otherwise crucially-divergent thinkers, to me, is a sign that something is awry. It is a sign of a far more general phenomenon: the over-determined wish of many academics and intellectuals to believe that Rawls's political philosophy is roughly right. Because the psychologically-gorgeous fact about Rawls is that he (apparently) powerfully enables one simultaneously to believe the following three attractive

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(though surely in any case mutually-incompatible, on serious reflection) propositions: (1) To believe that one is being radical, leftist, even (allegedly) 'egalitarian'; (2) To believe that one can proudly uphold the values of liberalism and tolerance; and (3) To believe that, actually, hardly anything actually needs majorly changing in our world… As Stokely Carmichael held: The liberal wants to radically reform the world and make it better - so long as such reforms do not contain any risk of resulting in any diminution of his own position of privilege…

In a justly-famous paper, “On Rawls and political liberalism”, Burt Dreben argued that Rawls's mature political philosophy is compatible with Wittgenstein (and is right). Dreben was always a Rawlsian (and arguably vice versa, too), and so this isn’t that surprising. But Cavell’s case is more interesting:

Cavell, from a very different starting point (he is keen purportedly on some kind of perfectionism, and favours a ‘dialogical’ and highly non-scientifical vision of Wittgenstein that was often at odds with Dreben and that would at first blush seem less akin to Rawls) argues much the same in the Preface of his ‘Conditions handsome and unhandsome’ (Cavell is, in other words, very soft on Rawls, and surprisingly unwilling to put any clear water between himself and Rawls; he ends up only insignificantly differing from any standard Rawlsian liberal.).

Cavell emphasises an interesting term, the ‘conversation of justice’. There is a danger lurking here (to which I will return in the section called “Contractarianism and the anti-‘private-language’ considerations”, below), of buying into the contract-fiction as if it were something like fact. And of restricting the ‘reach’ of true justice only to those who can converse.9

7 See especially the opening paragraph of this paper of Dreben’s.

8 Page numbers in the body of the text. Is there a clear-sighted glimpse in Cavell of the liberal apologia for inequality (injustice?) in Rawls, at p.108 of his text?: “We know what the original position has prepared us for, what the liberal veil has disclosed: the scene of our lives. The public circumstances in which I live, in which I participate and from which I profit, are ones I consent to. They are ones with an uncertain measure of injustice, of inequalities of liberty and of goods that are not minimal, of delays in reform that are not inevitable.”

9 As suggested below: this is especially dangerous in that it removes future generations from (the conversation of) justice.
Let us consider some of the key moments in Cavell’s quasi-endorsement of Rawls:

“If I am right that the project of Emersonian perfectionism demands no privileged share of liberty and of the basic goods, Rawlsian justice should hold no brief against it.” (xxii)

“To prove that at any time within the circumstances of justice…there is an optimal resolution to [the conversation of justice] (a set of principles whose choice will receive optimal agreement) is one of Rawls’s notable achievements.” (xxv)

“[I am] speaking of Perfectionism not as a competing moral theory (say requiring a principle of justice or ordering of principles different from the proposals of Rawls) but as emphasizing a dimension of the moral life any theory of it may wish to accommodate.” (xxx)

“[When] perfectionists find their lives to be without justification (perhaps explicitly because they would be ashamed to argue to those less advantaged that those others are without claim against those more advantaged that those others are without claim against those more advantaged and that nevertheless society continues to deserve their consent from below) that then what they show is their consent to their lives, hence consent from above to the society that makes both their lives and the other lives possible.” (p.124).10

At various other points in the book, Cavell sounds somewhat as if he is going to seriously differ from Rawls, and defend Emerson. But his disagreement with Rawls turns out to be only on the claim (of Rawls’s) that a rational plan of life is (of) a life that can be lived “without reproach”.11 Cavell doesn’t contest the architecture of the original position, he doesn’t contest the difference principle,12 he doesn’t contest the primacy of justice.13 Cavell is too keen for Rawls to be basically right.

10 I am not certain that I understand Cavell’s meaning here, but it certainly seems an outright endorsement of elitism as well as inegalitarianism. (Cf. also p.103, p.108). This is very disappointing, given the apparent clarity of the parenthesis about what the fundamental problem with the difference principle surely is.

11 I return in the section on “Honesty”, below to just how strong a way into what is wrong with Rawls this idea contains the germ of.

12 Contested in my “Three strikes against the difference principle”, forthcoming.

13 Contested in my “How ought to think of our relationship to future generations?”, forthcoming, and also in the section of the present paper immediately following.
Is justice the first virtue of social institutions?

My view is that both Cavell and Dreben are wrong. Rawls is a profoundly un-Wittgensteinian thinker (and is not right). Rawls was influenced to some extent by (his other key Harvard colleagues) Quine and Goodman, but not in any meaningful way by Wittgenstein. For example:

- This is intimated from the outset, in his title ‘A Theory of Justice’. For a Wittgensteinian, pushing a theory in philosophy is bound to be suspect. The only way that Rawls’s approach, of developing a theory of justice, can I think be defended as Wittgensteinian is by positing this theory as merely an ‘object of comparison’ (to use Wittgenstein’s term) by means of which we are assisted in our quest to attain ‘reflective equilibrium’ (to use Rawls’s term). But this defence is implausible: e.g. Because if one is constructing merely an object of comparison, one does not need to go into the kind of extreme detail that Rawls goes into.

- Rawls moreover provides a justification for the exploitation of persons and for the exploitation of the Earth by all, harnessing the power of science (and of ‘social science’) in order to do so. This too would have been anathema to Wittgenstein, who was deeply concerned that scientism was debasing our civilisation.

But I shan’t push or try to develop these two points here. They would need sustained argument that I cannot give space for here, and might take us into unfertile debates about the nature of philosophy or about the nature and limits of scientism or about civilisation, ‘progress’, and pessimism. I don’t for instance want to get bogged down into a tedious rehash of questions over the place if any of ‘theory’ in philosophy.

Instead, I want to highlight the more certainly anti-Wittgensteinian aspect of Rawlsianism in its initial assumption (stated in the famous opening sentences of ‘A theory of justice’) that “Justice is the first virtue of so-

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14 See my “Is the difference principle exploitative of persons?”, forthcoming, joint-authored with Phil Hutchinson.

15 See my “Wittgenstein and greens on ‘progress’”, forthcoming.
cial institutions. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust”. (ToJ p.3) I want to contest the founding Rawlsian assumption, of the primacy of justice.

Assuming that “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions” would I believe have been anathema to Wittgenstein. Alternative possibilities deserve serious consideration: e.g. That care, love, or the fostering of love and care, is the first virtue of social institutions. These possibilities may seem utopian: But if it is true (as I believe to be the case) that a society that seeks above all to provide justice, where that ‘justice’ is in fact largely a coded apologia for the status quo, and where the status quo is long-term profoundly unsustainable, is doomed, then the only realistic thing to do is to seek – to demand - the allegedly-utopian.

The second sentence of this quote from Rawls at first blush seems completely unobjectionable. How could anyone deny that “A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust”? And Rawls wants the claim to seem natural, unobjectionable, to pass without sustained attention. But for a Wittgensteinian, it is cases such as this that are exactly what real philosophy is for: To unravel the trick that biased the pitch before we even noticed that the game had begun.

I don’t like the unquestioned scientistic-looking analogy in the second sentence here. But as I say, I am not going to rely on that worry of mine. What is more deeply troubling is what it leads Rawls to do (or more precisely: not to do): namely, to fail to consider seriously alternative possibilities as candidates for being the first virtue of social institutions.

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16 Here I am thinking especially of the later Gordon Baker’s reading of Wittgenstein.
17 On p.106, Cavell rightly points out that Rawls himself is a utopian thinker in A theory of justice. It is this point of course which has prompted Sen’s recent magisterial response to Rawls, The idea of justice (2009). My point is that Rawls is, by contrast, not utopian enough.
18 For development of this theme, see again my “How ought to think of our relationship to future generations?”, forthcoming.
There is of course some consideration of perfectionism etc in Rawls’s text. And of utilitarianism. But there is no explicit or serious reconsideration of the claim begun with (It is not even really recognised as a claim)... e.g. in the light of possible questions about how good or how important fairness really is; or how complete in its reach it is. Possible questions about whether fairness can for example take seriously the interests of those who cannot converse with us.

Is justice the first virtue of social institutions? My claim is that Rawls has biased the pitch, by assuming that justice trumps the rest. He makes it by fiat impossible to ask the deep questions which could undermine liberal political philosophy. The conjuring trick is made at the outset, and it was the very move that appeared entirely innocent.¹⁹

Contractarianism and the anti-‘private-language’ considerations

Central to Rawls’s project is the idea, that he is quite explicit about as a kind of claim: that his is a contractarianism for our times. But contractarianism has a familiar problem: How are we to understand a non-actual contract?

Let me take an important for-instance of this. I have already touched on my suspicion that assuming justice to be the first virtue of social institutions creates real difficulties in taking seriously the claims of those with whom we cannot have a conversation, and to whom fairness therefore is likely to be an inadequate attitude: for instance, animals, the very ill, the very young, the very disabled, and the unborn. The latter, in totality, is probably the most important category: for it includes all future generations.

So far, so familiar: as I say, this is a familiar problem with contractarianism. But it ought to make Wittgensteinians especially wary thereof. For there lurks hereabouts a real risk of descending into a mire of nonsense.

What do I have in mind? Let me explain, by dwelling briefly on a case where this problem is particularly stark, namely, the case just alluded to: the political and ethical place of future generations in the design of our

¹⁹ Cf. PI 308.
social institutions. An absolutely fundamental question for political philosophy.

Rawls’s approach to the question of future generations is to admit that it cannot be straightforwardly included within his contract schema. Instead, he introduces his ‘just savings’ principle, a principle that can be (very crudely and very approximately) understood as a kind of intergenerational analogue to the difference principle. Enough must be saved to allow the next generation to be at least as prosperous as this one.

This principle is extremely closely analogous to the principle of ‘sustainable development’ that has dominated international institutions’ thinking about the 3rd world and about future generations for the last generation, ever since the Brundtland Report. But it is extraordinarily vulnerable to the central problem with contractarianism: that there is no real contract. Rather, you fantasise a contract…

The worry is that if we are allowed to fantasise a contract, we are almost bound to drift into bad faith. With contractarianism which centres upon the current generation, this difficulty is not necessarily disastrous: for, actually-existing people who can answer back function as a kind of reality check upon any imagined contract. With regard to future people, there is no such check.

Compare here sections 243-282 of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*… The absence of a real contract and the presence of a through-and-through fantasised ‘contract’ in a situation (i.e. our relations with future people) where there could not possibly be a contract (in part because our decisions will partly decide which future people there are!20) is roughly analogous to Wittgenstein’s questioning in this celebrated central body of the anti-‘private-language’ considerations of the through-and-through fantasised ‘language’ under consideration there. In the end a ‘language’ through-and-through of one’s own is no language at all; similarly, a contract with the future which in the end is only a contract with ourselves is no contract at all. Thus one can I think deploy Wittgenstein’s considerations here against the concept of ‘sustainable development’, against

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20 Compare here Wittgenstein’s oft-repeated nonsense-riddle, “What time is it on the Sun?” The Sun determines our time calculations…
closely-parallel alleged principles of justice such as Rawls’s ‘just savings’, and in fact against any application of Rawlsian thinking to the future.

A ‘contract’ which surely is not and could not possibly be a contract… Are you really happy using the word ‘contract’ here at all, still? This is the question that Wittgenstein asks of his unwary reader again and again, as he plunges that reader again and again into the waters of doubt: Are you really happy to call this language? And this? And that? (And even: is there any this there?) A pretence of language when one will oneself on reflection feel that there is none: this is the worry that Wittgenstein raises I think for the concept of Rawlsian ‘contractarianism’ 21 (and for the way we fool ourselves with analogous reassuring ideas such as ‘sustainable development’ 22).

The very idea of a ‘private language’ is absurd, nothing. Similarly, the ‘contract’ of Rawls and his predecessors is a contract with nobody, a contract ‘private’ to its purveyors. There is no real contract, and there could not possibly be a contract with future people.

Now, Rawls’s backers might here stress the fact that Rawls doesn’t reply on strictly contractarian thinking to help decide how we ought to treat future people. He treats them, rather as a kind of special case, and (as mentioned above) puts forward his ‘just savings’ principle to decide on their treatment (See section 44 of ToJ.) But to me, this makes things if anything even worse. Because it is ludicrous to pretend that future generations are a special case, something to consider secondarily. This is another disastrous consequence of treating justice as the first virtue of social institutions: it inclines us to think of people contemporaneous with one another and able to contract with each other as our paradigm case for political philosophy. Whereas, any political philosophy that fails to place centrally our responsibility for the future is condemnable, it seems to me, grossly derelict in its duty.

Rawls is held captive by an interlinked set of pictures: of people as at base individuals, juridical subjects; of social institutions as (like) law; of political philosophy as (like) science. All these three pictures, for Wittgen-

21 I am thinking here for instance of the closing sentences of PI 258.
22 See John Foster’s The sustainability mirage (2008).
steinians, are (a) ungrounded, (b) in dire need of being challenged by alternative pictures, and/or (c) if not so challenged, then anathema.\textsuperscript{23}

**Honesty: the first virtue of philosophy**

These considerations above can be brought together under the heading of a reflection on the degree to which these two thinkers, Rawls and Wittgenstein, were intellectually honest.

Wittgenstein was overwhelmingly concerned with the intellectual virtue of honesty, especially honesty with oneself. I believe that he would see in Rawls a philosophy that for each of us entertaining it courts dishonesty, projected to recommend a society that would be systematically dishonest with itself.

Cavell says the following, at the beginning of *Conditions handsome and unhandsome*:

“What I have to say...in these lectures builds from my sense of rightness and relief in Rawls’s having articulated a concept of justice accounting for the intuition that a democracy must know itself to maintain a state of (because human, imperfect, but), let me say, good enough justice.” (3) I am denying this. Though – indeed, 	extbf{because} – I profoundly agree with the injunction to democracy: Know thyself. I think that a democracy that cannot know itself cannot really be a democracy. The people do not rule if they do not know their own principles and practice.

I hold that Rawls’s is a political philosophy only well-suited to a society that is in the final analysis relatively unworried about the ‘congruence’ of its principles. “Congruence” is Rawls’s term for the self-transparency and self-acceptability to a society of a set of principles of justice. It is, one might say, honesty writ large. Honesty gone fully public.

\textsuperscript{23} The point might also be put in this way. The concept of agreement involved in Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘agreement in opinions’ (see \textit{PI} 240-2) is basically the ordinary concept of agreement. Agreement to make (say) a real contract. But by hypothesis there \textit{is} no real contract, in contractarianism. The hypothetical contract: can it be compared to (what Wittgenstein calls) agreement in judgements? In form of life? Well: not very easily. For where such agreement is not present then \textit{it is not present}, and one cannot pretend one’s way around that. Agreement over fairness is not like agreement over colour-concepts. It is dangerously mythical to pretend otherwise.
I hold this because the ‘difference principle’ is not even genuinely action-guiding (and thus, ironically, is no better than the Utilitarianism it was specifically-designed to better): it can be used to justify any level of inequality whatsoever, if one makes rigid enough assumptions about the level of incentives required to motivate the rich, and loose enough assumptions about the plasticity of mind of the poor. Just insofar as a Rawlsian society thought itself egalitarian while promoting inequality via the difference principle, and/or thought itself Pollyanna-ishly indefinitely able to be sustained and ‘develop’ into the future while taking a ‘fair share’ of what the future may very well turn out desperately to need … so far Rawlsianism is not honest, not ‘congruent’. Just insofar as Rawls says to the poor “Though shalt not envy the rich”, or to the future “Be unreprouchful of us for what we have done which was in your best interest – Honest!”…

And I believe that Cavell’s own text actually does supply the resource that can enable us to recognise a key element of this:

“If there is a perfectionism not only compatible with democracy but necessary to it, it lies not in excusing democracy for its inevitable failures, or looking to rise above them, but in teaching how to respond to those failures, and to one’s compromise by them, otherwise than by excuse or withdrawal. To teach this is an essential task in Rawls’s criticism of democracy from within. My sense of affinity, yet within it an unease, with A Theory of Justice, turns on the content of this teaching, epitomized by Rawls’s injunction to the democrat to find a way of life that is “above reproach” (ToJ p.422). My unease here is roughly the sense that looking for such a life is not enough to contain the sense of compromise done to my life by the society to which I give my consent (I assume that living “above reproach” is meant to do this, and that the life looked for is not like the one Thoreau found.).” (p.18; cf. also p.113).

Rawls does indeed want us to feel above reproach in what we do for the poor, what we do for the future ones, etc.: “we have the guiding principle that a rational individual is always to act so that he need never blame himself no matter how things finally transpire.” (ToJ p.422). Being a Rawlsian liberal means never having to say you’re sorry… My suggestion has been that liberals’ striving to be ‘above reproach’ results in a fundamental dis-

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24 For detailed argument to this conclusion, see my “The difference principle is not action-guiding”, forthcoming.
honesty: because we nevertheless don’t do enough to create a decent, congruent society that can be sustained.

Honesty is the first virtue of intellectuals. It is that without which.
It is an essential element in the moral life, and the essential pre-condition of intellectual life.

Wittgenstein urged upon one the ceaseless practice of honesty, including the practice of owning up to and allowing to consciousness all one’s desires, so that one could work on them and in many cases overcome them. Wittgenstein thereby pursued in himself and urged upon his reader a highly perfectionist (and therapeutic) version of philosophising. Here is a lovely remark of Cavell’s from Conditions handsome and unhandsome, about this: “I think Philosophical Investigations may be seen not as a repudiation of [the Tractatus], but as a further way of responding to the, let’s say, absolute responsibility of the self to itself [starkly laid out in the Tractatus]… Call this the absolute responsibility of the self to make itself intelligible, without falsifying itself.” (xxvii).

What is Rawls’s raison-d’etre? To pull off the mind-bending propaganda coup of getting people to think that one can be an egalitarian, as left as is respectable in a democracy, while building inequality into the basic structure of society. The trick of getting the rich to think that it is in everybody’s interest for them to be rich, and of getting the poor to think that their envy of the rich is irrational and that they ought to think their way out of it. And all this, in the name of reflection! (‘Reflective equilibrium’)
What could be more self-falsifying...

Compare now Jerry Cohen’s beautifully-entitled book, If you’re an egalitarian, how come you’re so rich? I call the motivation of Rawls’s philosophy self-deceiving, and the society that he envisaged basically dishonest – dishonest at the base, from the roots up. Just plain uncongruent.

And more so than ever, in an age wherein humanity has reached the limits to growth, as people perhaps first became painfully aware that we as a species were doing in the very decade during which Rawls wrote A theory of justice. Rawls’s Minervan owl had flown before the ink was even dry on his pages. Because, at the limits to growth, you can’t keep ‘efficiently’ taking from the Earth to sustain growth and inequality and thus drag up the hindmost. And you have instead, if you foster a competitive
society, to face a kind of zero-sum game for resources, in which everyone doesn’t gain in the way claimed for by the difference principle.

Compare the following important moment in Rawls’s text, in the infamous section of *Theory of Justice* on “Envy and equality”. Here, Rawls is trying to draw the sting from the claim that envy can be justified and undermines the difference principle:

“Suppose first that envy is held to be pervasive in poor peasant societies. The reason for this, it may be suggested, is the general belief that the aggregate of social wealth is more or less fixed, so that one person’s gain is another’s loss. The social system is regarded, it might be said, as a conventionally established and unchangeable zero-sum game. Now actually, if this belief were widespread and the stock of goods were generally thought to be given, then a strict opposition of interests would be assumed to obtain. In this case, it would be correct to think that justice requires equal shares [i.e. true equality, not difference-principle-style-‘equality’]. Social wealth is not viewed as the outcome of mutually advantageous cooperation and so there is no fair basis for an unequal division of advantages. What is said to be envy may in fact be resentment which might or might not prove to be justified.” *(ToJ*, 539; italics mine)

The situation envisaged here is (roughly) our collective situation, as a species. This is a rough picture of our shared world, our finite world. A world in which a possible zero-sum-game can be turned into a scheme of genuine co-operation, as it must be, only through the kind of uncompromisingly uncompetitive and genuinely egalitarian thinking found for example in World War Two Britain (with the rationing system, etc), or in stone-age economies – or in some peasant societies – writ large.25

Whatever was left standing in Rawls of the difference principle before, the dire need for ecosystemic awareness and for respect of the limits to growth makes fall.

A second strand, I believe, of willed self-deception in Rawls and like-minded liberals concerns the absurd pose that it makes any sense to be neutral between conceptions of the good. Such ‘neutrality’ covertly fosters certain conceptions of the good – It covertly favours societies where more and more is privatised. It turns everything into a question of consumerism. It makes it impossible for many of one’s deepest commitments to be considered anything other than one’s ‘interests’.

25 For explication, see the work of Richard Wilkinson and Marshall Sahlins.
I cannot hope to justify this claim in the present paper. But it does lead neatly into the final point I wish to make in this paper:

**The later Rawls: A more Wittgensteinian Rawls?**

Rawls did not, contrary to the beliefs/desires of many Wittgensteinians (most notably, Dreben, and Juliet Floyd, and of course Rorty) genuinely overcome his leanings toward scientism, theoryism and the hazards of contractarianism in any serious way in his later work. Rawls’s later work *is* in a certain sense less theoreticistic, which is good; *but* it is *more* individualistic than his early work. It thus moves in exactly the *wrong* direction, if one believes that what will be needed to save us is a god, or a shared ethic of love or of care, or anything pointing in the opposite direction to consumeristic materialism and the taking of income and wealth as ‘primary social goods’.

In brief (in the current context, I can only sketch my view on this matter, as this paper has primarily concentrated on *ToJ*, not on *Political Liberalism* etc): The later Rawls in fact *generalises* consumerism and individualism more than the early Rawls thought of doing: As a denizen of a pluralistic society, one is taken, in the later Rawls, to have what I call a consumeristic attitude towards religion, towards ethics, towards political theory, what Rawls calls ‘comprehensive views’, and thus even, in a way, towards philosophy itself. Rawls abandons any hope of society unifying around one such view or family of views. This is a vision of society gone irrevocably into fracture.

In such a scenario, there is less chance of adoption of a conception of the good that could conceivably trump or turn the tide of our devotion at the temple of materialism, the religion that is killing us and killing our collective home.

The later Rawls is an apologia for consumerism gone mad.

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26 A view developed in my “On Rawls’s failure to preserve genuine (freedom of) religion”, forthcoming; this paper is previewed in the part of my *Philosophy for Life* (2007) on ‘Religion’. 
Conclusion

Many Wittgensteinians, especially a number of ‘New Wittgensteinians’ (philosophers very similar in outlook to myself) who pride ourselves on taking a rigorously ‘therapeutic’ approach to philosophy, have been seduced by Rawls (In my view, the likely reason for this is that given earlier: the immense psychical attractiveness of Rawls’s supposed ‘egalitarian liberalism’ as at once confirming one’s radicalism and removing from one the requirement to actually do anything to seriously change things). It is time that this wrong-headed love affair came to an end. To be a real Wittgensteinian, one has rigorously to probe the seductions and bewitchments to which one is prone – even if doing so has uncomfortable consequences in terms of the need to alter one’s level of affluence and/or one’s practical political commitments.

This suggests scope perhaps for developing the moral perfectionism of Cavell, but on egalitarian foundations rather than on the basis of Rawls’s inegalitarianism. Building on Wittgenstein’s honesty, developing a society-wide honesty and congruence incompatible with Rawlsian liberalism. Openly favouring some conceptions of the good over others (this will necessarily involve some conflict; honesty about that is necessary, too), and developing and fostering the virtues to / that favour those. Such a perfectionism would simultaneously face three ways: toward the self (making oneself morally as good as possible), toward others (caring for them, as for oneself; loving them – One is by definition not morally perfect if one cares too much about one’s own moral perfection!27), and toward the culture as a whole (making it one to be proud of and that genuinely improves, rather than declining because of what gets called, ironically, the march of ‘progress’). Such a perfectionism, particularly in its emphasis on perfection being about genuinely doing one’s best for and toward others naturally fits with egalitarianism. Including toward the future ones, ridding ourselves of the out-of-date self-serving illusion that they are likely to be richer than us.28 Loving them, and being the kind of person who does enough,29 who cares-and-loves-in-action, not just in theory.

27 This perhaps was a moral flaw in Wittgenstein the man.
28 For development of this line of thought, see once again my “How ought to think of our relationship to future generations?” forthcoming.
But one doesn’t need to accept all of that, to accept at least this, that I hope to have shown here: that to be a Wittgensteinian is ipso facto to be at the very least in serious tension with Rawls, and not, as too many have had it, to be onside with him. And this lesson is hardly restricted to Rawls: for he is but the icon of liberal political philosophy, a massive and dominant tradition including other thinkers too, as diverse as Dworkin, recent Habermas, and even (in many respects) Sen or Stiglitz.

Wittgenstein’s philosophy ought to make anyone who holds to it deeply suspicious of liberalism, in all its forms – and interested in looking for an alternative that might actually be liberating for us, intellectually and otherwise.30

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29 Enough to ensure that we as a species win the ‘climate war’, for instance. As Winston Churchill once remarked: ‘It’s not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required.’

30 This paper was first presented at the Kirchberg Wittgenstein Symposium, August 2009. My thanks to those present there, and also to an audience at the University of Helsinki, for very helpful comments.
**Literature**


The goal of philosophy is, as Wittgenstein famously put it, to help the fly out of the fly-bottle. Socrates, in the *Apology*, uses the image of the philosopher being a fly in a quite different manner. He compares his philosophical activity with a horsefly which is stinging the proud state of Athens which has, as Socrates puts it, become “tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred to life.”¹ Now it is obvious that both philosophers describe a completely different setting. Socrates defends his philosophical activity with reference to a moral obligation; a duty to stir up the citizens of Athens in order to prevent them from leading a mindless, an unexamined life. He will never cease, he claims, to stop and interrupt the Athenians and ask them whether they are “not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul?”² It is the care of the soul, or, to use an apt expression of Michel Foucault, the ‘care of the self’ at which Socrates’ intervention on the *agora* aims. In this respect, Socrates can be said to represent the dominant philosophical ideal of antiquity: Philosophy is thought of as a noble, moral activity, which tries to *form* the philosophizing subject rather than just *inform* it.³

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¹ Plato, *Apology*, 30e.
² Plato, *Apology*, 29d.
³ The notion of the ‘care of the self’ is introduced in the 2nd volume of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. Foucault’s interpretation of antiquity owes quite a lot to the studies of Pierre Hadot, who, in turn, was an attentive reader of Wittgenstein. Hadot’s interpretation of ancient philosophy can be found in Hadot 2002; his articles about Wittgenstein are collected in Hadot 2004.
Wittgenstein, on the other hand, seems to have a methodological problem in mind. There is evidence in his unpublished notes that his remark about the fly-bottle initially was targeting at the solipsist.⁴ The solipsist holds that there can be no thoughts, emotions or experiences other than his own; he is the speaker of private language against which Wittgenstein is arguing in his Philosophical Investigations. Even though there has been no coherent theory of solipsism in the history of philosophy, it spells out the consequences of the widespread view that the individual gets his own psychological and mental concepts only from “his own case”, that is, by abstraction or reference to his private “inner experience”.⁵ Solipsism reveals the common ground of both empirical realism and skepticism and thus exposes the fragility of our conception of mind and world. Seen from that vantage point, helping the philosophic fly out of the fly-bottle amounts to a demanding philosophic task: the demonstration of the incoherence and instability of a common view which is so difficult to localize precisely because of its pervading omnipresence.

I think there is no doubt that Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations are, on one level, establishing such an argument. They show that the solipsist’s Cartesian assumptions – the idea of a privileged access to one’s own mind; a language theory which concentrates on denotation; and finally the postulate of an insurmountable gap between the mental and the physical – are all wrong (or have to be understood differently). But still, there remains the question why this struggle against solipsism and its derivatives is of any importance for us, for the readers and interpreters of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. If it is true that “Cartesianism” is a view so common that it pervades our everyday life and language – what, then, is the consequence of denying it? And how can defending or criticizing this view be only a question of arguments, of wrong or false assumptions?

I want to suggest that Wittgenstein’s philosophical troubles have to be seen in line with the classical ideal of philosophy, as e.g. in Socrates. It is true that Wittgenstein’s topics and questions in the Philosophical Investigations seem to be rather technical. As opposed to the questions treated in

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⁴ Cf. MS 149: 67 (in the Bergen Nachläß); a paradigmatic exposition of this view can be found in Tugendhat 1979, 92.
⁵ Tugendhat 1979, 94.
Socrates’s *Apology*, it is already hard work to convince someone who does not already have a professional interest that Wittgenstein is indeed discussing important subject matters at all. What is the rather absurd skepticism of other minds compared to the moral incitation that the only life worth living (and eventually dying for) is an examined life, a life striving for the “greatest improvement of the soul”? But Wittgenstein’s philosophy continues the antique tradition in two ways. First, he demands a closer examination of one’s own doings and sayings, which amounts to a closer examination of one’s own life; and secondly, it also demands that, in order to solve the problems of philosophy, it is necessary to transform the subject which is doing philosophy. So even though there is no doubt that Wittgenstein’s idea of philosophy is in many respects distinctively modern – he does not, for example, propose any substantive good according to which one should live – he retains or picks up the classical Greek conception that philosophy is a way to *form*, or better to *transform*, the self.

In the following, I will first introduce my interpretation of Wittgenstein’s understanding of philosophy and how it represents a continuation of the classical ideal. I will then concentrate on the requirement for transforming the subject, comparing this idea with Foucault’s notion of a “technology of the self”. In a third part, I will try to articulate some consequences of this idea.

I.

It is Wittgenstein himself who wrote, in a note included in *Culture and Value*, that the work of philosophy is a “work on oneself”. ⁶ This self-understanding can be defended by looking at the epistemological status of such rather abstract issues as solipsism or the fantasy of a private language. What does it mean, here, to be mistaken? These theories – if they are theories at all – cannot be simply refuted, nor are they just pathological illusions. The modern problem of the relation of mind and world is, as John McDowell reminds us, intimately tied to an equally modern and disenchanted understanding of nature. But still, this modern view is not just a pair of glasses we can put on and take off according to our philosophical

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⁶ CV, 24.
insights. It is coupled with our modern ways of life, which are, of course, in an emphatic way our ways of life, whether we like it or not. Solipsism and Cartesian subjectivism, rightly understood, are not just ideologies; they must be woven into the patterns of our lives, into the way we ordinarily act and think. It is in this sense that Wittgenstein’s philosophy aims at self-knowledge: If we take his claim seriously, that language has to be seen as constituting a part of our practical activities, this in turn means that our discursive understandings of ourselves cannot be completely detached from them. So the roots of the philosophical bewitchments that Wittgenstein’s philosophy is struggling with cannot be just sought in thoughts, but must be looked for in our actions.

It is thus impossible to separate Wittgenstein’s theoretical reasoning from a practical and in particular moral understanding. Neither Wittgenstein’s positions nor those he attacks can be reduced to valid or invalid arguments, as if logic alone would be the battlefield. Numerous interpreters, such as Stanley Cavell or Cora Diamond, offer such a reading.7 They stress that the “ordinary”, as Cavell calls it, is an indispensable source for doing philosophy and Wittgenstein’s philosophy calls for an exploration of ordinary, everyday practices. The problem is not just what we do, but our relation to what we do. I quote Cora Diamond: “Our practices are exploratory, and it is indeed only through such exploration that we come to see fully what it was that we ourselves thought or wanted to say.”8

According to Diamond, the goal of the exploratory practice of philosophy is to see better what it was that we “thought or wanted to say”. Diamond is adopting here a well-known antique vocabulary. For Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, theory was literally seeing, a way to see things; the analogy between knowledge and vision ranges from Plato up to the Enlightenment. And it is indeed surprising how often Wittgenstein refers to visual metaphors in the Philosophical Investigations. Think, for example, of the image that held us captive (§115), or of Wittgenstein’s request: “Don’t think, but look!” (§66) Both Cavell and Diamond rightly agree that one of Wittgenstein’s central goals in philosophy is to teach us to see things, and people, differently. And the consequence of such a different

7 Cavell 1979; Diamond 1991.
8 Diamond 1991, 27.
view, its practical implication, is of course a different way of acting and judging.

This idea of philosophy leading to a different view allows us to formulate the second Socratic aspect in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. The first one being that philosophy is concerned with an examination of one’s own life, this examination now turns out to be an attempt to gain a new point of view, a new perspective. Socrates wants to stir up the Athenians in their complacency, wants them to realize how shaky the moral foundations of their lives are. In the same manner, Wittgenstein hopes that philosophy can lead us, against our instinctive reactions, out of the fly-bottle by teaching us to see (and to value) things differently. And yet, this different “way of seeing” is not just a new interpretation of things. It is more than the acquisition of a new vocabulary; rather, it is thought of as a real discovery which concerns the subject and the world as a whole. Considering Wittgenstein’s insistence that even the most private subjectivity is pervaded by public language and its public schemes of use, such a change affects the subject as such – that is, the way we act, react and judge.

II.

The interesting question is now, of course: How can such a change be realized? And why is it worthwhile to see things differently? Concerning the latter, I think that Wittgenstein is, like Heidegger, inherently modern in the sense that he does not propose any general direction for change. Wittgenstein’s philosophy begins with the fact that we don’t know our way about and thus presupposes that we have a genuine interest in seeing things differently. If there’s no problem, philosophy is of no avail. We do, in fact, misunderstand ourselves, so we should command a clear view of what we really mean; we entangle ourselves in our practices, so we should check what we are really expecting from them.

While Wittgenstein proves, in this respect, to be quite modern, the pivotal idea that philosophy changes the way we see things (and ourselves) turns out to be rather classical. The French historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot, argues that Greek and Hellenistic antiquity was dominated by the

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9 PI, §154.
idea that philosophy has to be more than just dialog or discursive reasoning. For Greek thinking, truth is not something that can be readily attained by just being a human being. Rather, it is to be acquired through forms of practice: meditation, for example, and other forms of spiritual exercises. Michel Foucault picks up on this idea and extends it to the general notion of “technologies of the self”. A spiritual exercise, in Hadot’s sense, is a classical technology of the self: It aims at a transformation of the relation of the self to itself through a continuous bodily and discursive practice. This practice resembles the exercise of an art more than the methodologically controlled pursuit of science, it is a technique, a techné. But Foucault leaves no doubt that technologies of the self extend to a much wider field. Psychoanalysis or the more and more fashionable practice of ‘life coaching’, for example, are other, more recent technologies of the self.

It seems to me that this concept of a technology of the self captures what Wittgenstein’s philosophy is about well. First of all, Wittgenstein’s late philosophy lends itself quite naturally to a practical notion of the self. The self is not some immaterial substance, but the relation we entertain to our own bodily, linguistic and even cognitive reactions; it is a practical form of reflexivity. The interesting point is that with Wittgenstein, this practical self has to be thought of as being something to be practically explored. How should we understand phrases like “we don’t know our way about” otherwise? What surprises us, in philosophy, is some discordance between the way we understand ourselves and the reactions we display.

This discordance is explored in a practice of imagination. Wittgenstein’s writings do not only argue; very often, they ask us to imagine this or that. These imaginary scenarios are tools of self-discovery: We learn, by reflecting about whether we would accept this or that imagined scenario, about the reach and the content of our everyday language and practices. Wittgenstein’s philosophical practice mostly consists in asking us (that is, in asking us to ask ourselves) to what extend this or that expression “fits or fails to fit the objects and situations placed imaginatively before us.” We try to better understand ourselves by probing our possible reactions in con-

\[11\] Cerbone 1994, 165.
frontation with some imagined scenario, thus disclosing what our real necessities are.

I think there is no problem in calling such an inquiry a technique, or technology, of the self. But in doing so, we acquire a wider perspective on this philosophical practice. It allows us to see a striking similarity between the practice of philosophy, as described so far, and the practice of language acquisition in general. Let me list three common points.

The first observation is that, for Wittgenstein, both kinds of practices, language acquisition and the philosophical practice, operate through training. You don’t just understand the meaning of a word; you learn how to use it, with all the well-known problems of rule-following and its contingencies. Understanding, then, and the normativity of rules is something we are able to describe after having gone through this training. There is, in fact, a long discussion about that relation ex post to our own doings in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, using the example of the mathematical proof.\(^{12}\) For Wittgenstein, even the mathematical proof requires a skilled technique whose normativity is established after we have become convinced of the necessity of the proof. That is, first we do something – guided, for example, by some other rules, or by the helping hand of a teacher – and then we establish a new perspective on what we do. Wittgenstein explicitly says about this process that we learn to see our actions differently. So the change effected by a philosophical practice is just an instance of our general possibility to acquire new meanings and understandings through training and regulated use.

The second point is that both the linguistic and the philosophic practice rely on exemplary, paradigmatic practices and persons. Since real understanding comes after the fact, we do not learn by insight only. We have to learn by imitation, by repeating what we are told to do. This is an intrinsic bodily aspect: training requires repetition, not insight, even though we might learn very fast to justify our training by reference to a rule. Here we have a very interesting similarity with Socrates. Lacking the scientific notion of method, Socrates is convinced that his death would be a loss be-

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\(^{12}\) For a good discussion of Wittgenstein’s conception of mathematical proof, see Williams 1999. The “retroactive” effect of rule acquisition – the normativity of a new way of seeing – is the subject of Klaus Puhl (2002).
yond comparison for the polis of Athens. Why? Because he is such an exemplary teacher, important not so much due to the content of what he teaches (his dialogs often end aporetically), but because of its stirring and even destructive effect. Here again, we find in Wittgenstein a systematic basis of the classical idea that philosophy forms the character rather than just informing it, and that this formation is tightly connected with the exemplary lives and sayings of famous philosophers.

The third common point sums up the preceding two. If it is true that both language acquisition and philosophy have to be seen as bodily practices in which we acquire a new understanding by acquiring new skills and uses, and if it is true that, as Wittgenstein claims, our normative understanding of the rule comes after the fact of our initiation into it, then there is no truth-claim involved in this technology of the self. There is, to be sure, a truth-claim on the side of the teacher: she will use truth in order to justify why the novice has to use an expression this way rather than the other. But truth is not the foundation of our necessities; the necessity we experience in our reactions – the necessity of rule-following – is rooted in our being trained this way rather than the other. I should hasten to remark that his does not imply relativism. On the contrary: It is by detaching truth from necessity that it becomes possible to strive for a new perspective in the name of a truth.

III.

I hope to have shown that Wittgenstein’s late philosophy offers many systematic reasons to describe the practice of philosophy as a rather classical technology of the self. It demands an examination of one’s own life; it aims for gaining a new perspective; and this change can, due to the very nature of linguistic normativity, be effected only by way of a non-epistemic, practical training guided by paradigmatic acts and actions.

Before I finish, allow me to discuss some of the consequences of such a reading. When Foucault introduces the notion of a technology of the self, he has a certain question in mind. From the beginning on in his career, Foucault has been grappling with the problem of truth. Coming from a French tradition, which had a rather critical perspective on institutionalized science, he criticized modern individualism for defining a normative truth
of the individual – what is normal, what is pathological; what is reason, what is madness; what is healthy desire, what is deviant perversion. The notion of the technology of a self, then, introduces a significant shift in perspective on this problem. Instead of just asking how society produces truth-standards, he begins to ask how the individual is led to guide herself by some truth. The notion of a technology of the self allows the question to be formalized: Since the practice of the self is, as we have seen, in itself independent from any truth-claim, it can be seen as a distant description of how we attach ourselves to truth. This allows for a genealogy of truth, or rather: a genealogy of truth in relation to the self.13

The unsurprising result of such a formal approach is that there are many different technologies of the self, and not all of them are attached to the philosophical notion of a truth about oneself. Philosophy, seen from this Foucauldian perspective, is just one particular technology of the self among others. (I am not sure whether we should class Wittgenstein’s philosophy as one still being attached to truth.) In any case, Foucault’s genealogical approach offers a completely different approach to helping the fly out of the fly-bottle. Wittgenstein criticizes the solipsistic fantasy of a private language, which is, of course, a variant of the occidental idea that there is some inner, even hidden truth. He offers us tools and concepts to better understand why this subjectivism must be mistaken, and he can show us that we should instead attend to our own public doings and sayings, woven into a many-voiced pattern of life. But Wittgenstein cannot explain, I believe, why the western civilization developed this strong and tempting idea of a private, inner self. He seems to suggest that it is an inevitable, quasi-natural fate that the philosophic fly gets lost in the fly-bottle. But taking into consideration his own statements about the connection of language, will and even emotion to commonly shared practices, it seems more adequate to ask which historical and social formations made it possible, in the first place, that the fly feels attracted to the fly-bottle at all. To cite Foucault’s Nietzschean question: “after all, why truth? Why do we care about truth, and, by the way, more about truth than about ourselves? 

13 Such a “history of truth” is Foucault’s last description of his philosophical enterprise; cf. Foucault 2001, 74.
And why do we care about ourselves only by means of truth?¹⁴ This question, then, requires more than just a better look at ourselves. It calls for an investigation of the institutions and the overarching discursive practices which establish, or better: give form to this occidental “obligation to speak the truth” which Foucault tries to understand. This historical and genealogical approach is more than just an extension of Wittgenstein’s incitation to have a better look at ourselves. It transcends the realm of the ordinary, since it forces us to understand relations of power, subordination and domination. In short, it demands to confront oneself with society as a reality and not just an abstract form of life. Wittgenstein’s philosophy would relapse into some sort of ordinary self-subjectivism if we would not take this step. It is only by a closer look at the reality of social institutions, and not only at our own daily activities, that we might learn to critically understand why certain demands upon us, and certain exigencies, should be accepted, or declined and refused.

¹⁴ Foucault 1994, 723. (my translation)
Literature


Meaning, Use and Understanding
The famous saying: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use”, might have been and I hope was a piece of advice to philosophers, and not to lexicographers or translators. It advised philosophers, I hope, when wrestling with some aporia, to switch their attention from the trouble-giving words in their dormancy as language-pieces or dictionary-items to their utilisation in the actual sayings of things; from their general promises when on the shelf to their particular performances when at work; from their permanent purchasing-power when in the bank to the concrete marketing done yesterday morning with them; in short, from these words quâ units of a Language to live sentences in which they are being actively employed.

Gilbert Ryle 1968, 114

If the connection between “our words” and “what we mean” is a necessary one, this necessity is not established by universals, propositions, or rules, but by the form of life which makes certain stretches of syntactic utterance assertions.

Stanley Cavell 1979, 208

1. Uses of “use”

In the huge literature commenting on, or taking its inspiration from, the philosophy of Wittgenstein, the notion of “meaning as use” or “use theory of meaning” has been understood in a number of different ways. This variety has rarely been noted, in fact there is very little discussion focusing on the concept of use in itself. (An exception to this is William P. Alston 1968. But his overview is limited to normative readings. It is also problematic in its running together of word meanings and sentence meanings.) Use has sometimes been understood along the lines of conformity with a practice or usage, sometimes along the lines of function or role. What is in question may be the use of words, or types of sentence, or a particular uttering of a sentence. Sometimes, the interest in use is descriptive, sometimes normative. The emphasis has been on use as a guide to what an utterance means, or as giving a clue to whether two utterances mean the same or not, or
whether a word has been *rightly used*, or to whether an utterance *has meaning at all* or is nonsense. Sometimes the relation between use and meaning is described in external terms, by saying that use *determines* meaning, at other times the relation is viewed as internal, *meaning consisting in use*.

It is true that this variety is partly due to the fact that Wittgenstein himself may not have had only one thing in mind in talking about use and meaning. Yet some of the readings are actually in conflict with one another, and are linked to widely divergent views of the nature of philosophy. Rather than going through the different readings systematically, I shall do three things. First (Sec. 2), I want to describe the background that has shaped many of these readings, and suggest why that background is misleading. Next (Sec. 3), I want to outline what I think is the central role of appeals to use in Wittgenstein’s thought. After that (Secs. 4-5), I want to argue that a focus on use, if consistently carried through, will lead to the reversal of a widespread view of the relation between word meanings and the meaning of what we say.

2. Meaning is “something”

Philosophers have traditionally taken it for granted that there is a feature, called meaning, that is associated with linguistic expressions and explains how communication is possible, i.e. how speakers learn to use words in communicating with others and to respond to other people’s use of words. For me to be able to use some word in speaking, it is thought, I must either be cognizant of some entity in my mind or in the outside world which constitutes the meaning of the word, or I must have internalized some system in which the word holds a certain position. In the absence of this, it would be a mystery how the complex phenomena of linguistic communication are possible.

It might be thought, then, that philosophers should be able to give an account of what meaning is. Against this background, it has seemed natural to read Wittgenstein as though that was precisely what he was providing. What he is taken to be saying is that while meaning is not constituted by intensions, or extensions, or reference, or truth-conditions, or assertion-conditions, it is constituted by something else: by use. And, when
we are told that meaning is use, we naturally tend to take this to mean that use provides a *relation* between a linguistic expression and its meaning. When the matter is put in that way, however, it immediately gives rise to a host of questions: what are the terms of this relation? Are they words or sentences? Are they tokens or types? And on the other hand: what is the nature of the relation: is it one of conformity or functionality? Is it a normative or a descriptive relation? Is it internal or external? etc.

What I shall be arguing is that there is no room for these types of question in Wittgenstein’s thought. In bringing use to the fore, Wittgenstein is not proposing an account of the relation between expressions and their meanings, but simply suggesting a way of looking at what we do when we speak.

When Wittgenstein has been taken to provide an *account* of meaning, the concept of a language-game and the problem of rule-following have naturally come to occupy centre stage. What we are being offered, it is thought, is a holistic and practical view of meaning: we are encouraged to look at the rules regulating the use of an expression in the context of some larger activity in which that expression has a role. In pointing to the connection between speech and various forms of non-verbal activity, this account draws attention to the different role of words in different contexts, and more widely to cultural or historical variations among human speech forms and activities.

Among the drawbacks of this account, or should we say, of the way it has been understood both by some adherents and some critics, is the fact that it has lent itself to rather facile ways of dismissing philosophical problems, such as responding to a difficulty by saying, “Well, that’s what the language-game is like”, or fitting recalcitrant forms of language into ready-made boxes; it has also encouraged some rather simplified conventional or relativist accounts of meaning and culture (criticized by Cora Diamond in her 1999). One of the most incisive critiques of the language-game view is that of Rush Rhees, who argues that it fails to do justice to the ways in which the various aspects of language hang together, and, on the whole, to the deep significance of language in our lives.

Unquestionably language-games and rule-following are prominent themes in Wittgenstein’s later work. But I would suggest that these notions are best read as metaphors meant to help us get around certain types of phi-
philosophical difficulty, rather than as offering an analysis of “what language essentially is”. Wittgenstein is not trying to advance an account of meaning in competition with those already current, but rather getting us to look at questions of meaning in ways designed to make certain difficulties disappear. Philosophers who read an account of meaning into Wittgenstein’s remarks about use, I would suggest, are like the dog who keeps looking at your finger when you are trying to point at something.

3. Look behind the picture!

When we are baffled by the sense of some expression in the course of philosophical reflection, Wittgenstein is telling us, we should look at the way the expression occurs in human conversation. Here is an example from the Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein 2009):

305. “But you surely can’t deny that, for example, in remembering, an inner process takes place.” – What gives the impression that we want to deny anything? … What we deny is that the picture of an inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word “to remember”. Indeed, we’re saying that this picture, with its ramifications, stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is.

Think about the uses we make of the words “I remember”: we may use them to make a judgment or to correct someone else’s judgment, to explain what I do or why I am in a certain mood, or we may utter them in conversations about a shared experience, or in testing my ability to remember things, etc. Again, in saying that someone else remembered something or other, we may simply mean, for instance, that she succeeded in carrying out some task or answer a question. Whether or not some specific process of remembering occurred in the person said to remember, this has no relevance to the sense of what is said. In fact, there is no distinctive feature or phenomenon that is shared by all the different cases in which the verb “to remember” is being applied to a person. The conviction that there has to be such a feature or phenomenon seems to be grounded in the idea that something must guide our use of the word “remember”; otherwise, how could we know when to use it or understand what others mean by it? This conviction is what keeps us from looking at what is going on in actual cases.
What is it to be responsive to Wittgenstein’s reminders? The problem is that we have subsumed the uses of an expression under a unified picture. The suggestion is not that the picture is the wrong one and we should exchange it for another (some readers of Wittgenstein, I believe, have taken the language-game to be intended precisely as a “better picture”). The problem, rather, is that it is a picture. It gives us the idea that there is no need for looking at particular cases in all their variety: those cases, we assume, have nothing to teach us, since we already have an overview.

A picture is conjured up which seems to fix the sense unambiguously. The actual use, compared with that traced out by the picture, seems like something muddied...

In the actual use of these expressions we, as it were, make detours, go by side-roads. We see the straight highway before us, but of course cannot use it, because it is permanently closed. (*PI* § 426)

### 4. On being held to one’s words

To get clear about the role of appeals to use it is important, I believe, to note the difference between two types of question that may be raised about uses of expressions – or rather, to recognize how deep the difference between them is. The distinction I have in mind has some affinity with that hinted at by Frege in the context principle, but it also finds expression, to some degree, in the writings of Rush Rhees (1998), Stanley Cavell (1979), Cora Diamond (1989), James Conant (1998), and Charles Travis (1999), among others (and in a way too in the later work of Donald Davidson, see his 1996). Those who note this distinction do not always seem to be fully aware of its radical nature, and hence end up with a kind of hybrid view of the problem.

The distinction that needs to be made here is that between the questions that may arise when someone has actually made an utterance by which she means (or is taken to mean) what she says, and those that may arise when a speaker is simply imagined to be saying something, or says something without meaning it (as in a play or in a grammatical exercise).
In the first case, there is a question of the speaker being held to her words and what that entails, in the second case there is no question of being held to anything.

Consider two examples:

1: a teacher sends Stella to find an empty auditorium. She comes back, pointing to a door and telling the teacher, “That room is empty”.

2: in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, we find the following definition of the word “empty”: “containing nothing: devoid of contents: not filled...esp.: lacking typical, expected, or former contents...” (the definition goes on for most of a column).

The dictionary definition is an example of the latter type of claim: it does not use the word “empty” but says what someone would mean or might mean if she were to use the word. What is the relation between the dictionary definition and what Stella can be held to? The received view is that, if true, her words are true in virtue of the fact which is recorded in the dictionary, i.e. in virtue of the fact that the word “empty” means what it does (and similarly for the other words she spoke). What the dictionary is saying, as it were, is: “supposing someone said [sentence containing the word ‘empty’], what her words would mean is [sentence containing other words in place of the word ‘empty’]”. Of course, the dictionary does not list everything anybody ever said and ever will say, but there is no need for it to do so, we think: the dictionary gives a general description that can then be applied in individual cases. It gives the semantics of a word, it will be said.

In this way, it might be thought, a dictionary definition will be sufficient as a guide to usage. However, as a guide it is rather crude. The dictionary speaks of “typical, expected, or former contents”, but in the present case what matters is not what one might expect to find or what one will typically find in a lecture room, nor what used to be there before, but probably whether there is a class there or some other activity that would prevent one from using the room for whatever purpose one had in mind. Its being right for Stella to say that the room is empty is bound up with the teacher’s reason for asking her to check. Are there students lingering there after class? Would that entail that the room was not empty? That would depend on what he needed the room for, and maybe too on the chances of finding an alternative auditorium. On the other hand, if Stella discovered
that all the furniture had been taken out of the room, she probably would not tell the teacher the room was empty, even though it would then fulfil the dictionary definition, in lacking both its typical, expected and former contents.

Here it may be retorted that a dictionary definition may still be sufficient in principle to determine whether it would be correct to apply some word in a given situation. The definition would simply have to be extended to accommodate all the nuances that might possibly bear on its application; however, there is really no need for such a huge dictionary anyway, since we manage quite well without it. The main point, we think, is that the kind of knowledge we need in order to speak and to understand words is of the kind that could, “in principle”, be reproduced in a dictionary. (Consider, in this connection, Wittgenstein’s remarks about describing the use of the word “God” in his 1998, p. 94e.)

However, this idea is mistaken. Suppose there is a disagreement. When the teacher goes to the room he discovers that it is not empty: there is a group of students there engaged in a lively discussion. Stella tells him she thought that did not matter. Who is right? Suppose there were this huge dictionary listing all conceivable situations described (the type of dictionary we supposedly carry with us in our minds), would that settle it? Everything hangs on how they regard the situation. If they did agree on how to define the situation, there would be no disagreement in the first place; since they do not agree, the dictionary is no use.

The dictionary definition does not, as it were, reach “all the way down”: either we must be able to tell whether the definition holds in this case, or alternatively we must be able to decide what else the speaker means; if we cannot, we simply cannot be sure of what she is saying. In a great many everyday situations no problem of understanding arises: our understanding reaches all the way down. The dictionary, then, fails to capture the character of our normal understanding. (This point is analogous to Quine’s argument for the indeterminacy of translation. If all we have to go on is external facts about the behaviour of language users, our understanding of other speakers could never be more than hypothetical. But of course that is not the predicament we are normally in, as members of a language community.)
What Stella can be held to when she says that the room is empty depends on how we understand the activity to which her speaking those words belongs. Her utterance is part of an ongoing interaction: how words enter into it depends on how that interaction is understood. We cannot lay down the correct use of the word “empty” once and for all because we cannot delimit the varieties of human activity once and for all.

5. The rest is psychology

On the received view, a speaker’s utterance is a syntactic and semantic structure which determines the conditions under which it is true or false. Philosophers have often thought about utterances on the model of mathematical expressions, the value of which is uniquely determined by the signs of which they are composed, by their place in the calculus. If somebody tells me I got an equation wrong, my defence must lie in an appeal to the rules for the use of the signs in the formula. However, mathematics leads us astray as a model for speaking. It is sometimes thought that “everyday language” is a crude approximation to the precision of mathematics, words being encumbered by ambiguity, vagueness and shifts in meaning. But this is not the point. The difference between the use of mathematical signs and words is not a difference of degree but of kind: mathematical symbols have a different relation than words to the activity of which they are a part. The context for the use of mathematical symbols is mathematical calculations or proofs (except when they occur in a verbal context, say, in counting objects or giving measurements), roughly in the way the context for a chess move is a chess game and nothing else. This is connected with the point that someone who writes down or reads out a mathematical expression by itself is not saying anything, and so the sense of what he is reading or writing is not dependent on what he is saying. The mathematical expression has a fixed context, one that is given with its being regarded as a mathematical expression, whereas the context of “That room is empty”, if imagined in isolation, is unlimited.

If semantics is what dictionary definitions describe, and if questions of logic are questions about what a speaker can be held to, then what I have been saying is that there are no logical connections between logic and semantics. And furthermore: it is really only with regard to the individual
case that questions of logic can be raised. Semantics, in a sense, belongs to
the realm of psychology: it consists in practical advice, based on observa-
tions of others’ usage or on one’s own sense of meaning. (We should note
that there are two different senses in which questions of meaning can be
(mis)taken for psychological questions. On the one hand, there is what I
believe Frege had in mind: the idea that meaning consists in one’s associat-
ing an expression with some idea or image; what I have been talking about,
on the other hand, are generalizations about linguistic behaviour.)

This means that the standard view of the relation between logic and
psychology needs to be reversed: it has often been held that logic concerns
itself with the general, underlying structure of language, whereas the indi-
vidual case, the question of “speaker’s meanings”, is psychological. What I
have been arguing, on the contrary, is that there is no generality in logic;
the only generality is on the level of psychology.*

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Conant in particular, for an enlightening discussion of this paper.
Literature


How to Make Wittgenstein’s Concept of Meaning Complete?

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A well-known sentence by Wittgenstein says: “The use of the word in practice is its meaning”\(^1\). This insight into the problem of meaning faces three challenges, namely, whether this formula is 1) logically clear; 2) empirically probable; and 3) conceptually complete.

1) In order to understand this thesis we need to know the meanings of the words involved and to be able to operate with this sentence in communication. According to Wittgenstein, we cannot know the isolated meanings of the words. So what remains is to learn how to deal with this language construction without knowing initially what “use”, “practice” and “meaning” are. It is evident that words are used in speech and in language in general. Is this a practice Wittgenstein had in mind? If yes, why does he underline the practical use of the word in particular? What kind of practical use outside language can we imagine? So the expression “use in practice” is basically unclear unless we prescribe a solely emotional content to it, where the word “practice” makes the word “language” sound stronger.

2) We presupposed that use of words is a speech act or any other linguistic activity. Wittgenstein’s idea of meaning then consists in rejecting meaning as a stable mental state and treating it as a process, a change from one state to another. Either meaning is a routine, a circulating activity or a communicative innovation, a mental or behavioral form of psychophysiological activity, and in any way meaning is an activity, and we have to agree with Wittgenstein in this point.

3) So the scheme proposed by Wittgenstein’s formula includes a linguistic agent, his activity and a word which thereby receives meaning. Is it an isolated agent or a participant in a collective language game? Is this game determined by some rules? Are these rules arbitrary or not? How do

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\(^1\) Wittgenstein 1978a, 39.
people master them? Do they understand rules in the same way? Is there anything outside the language game that influences the meaning? All these questions reveal the necessity to go beyond the initial formula proposed by Wittgenstein and problematize the concepts of mind, spirit, naming, meaning, use, language game, and appealing to other concepts as well. What is the key concept which can make Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning complete – this is the major issue of my paper.

I. Can meaning be considered as something mental?

Meaning is apparently not a physical thing which can be perceived though there a number of physical entities that cannot be given in sense perception. Meaning is not physical in a sense that it does not exist outside the world of human beings, the Lebenswelt. But what means to be mental? How does Wittgenstein interpret mind and consciousness? Mental processes appear for us still mysterious in spite of all theories of cognitive sciences and artificial intellect, so mind and consciousness remain forever enigmas of philosophical discourse. And Wittgenstein was courageous enough to believe in this in the times of rapid development of experimental psychology. He sharply expressed his opposition to mentalism and his sympathy to behaviorism stating the physical non-existence of psychic phenomena: “A great many philosophical difficulties are connected with the sense of the expressions ‘to wish’, ‘to think’, etc… These can all be summed up in the question: ‘How can one think what is not the case’?”2.

The case is, according to Wittgenstein, that speaking about those “intentional expressions” we do not denote objects, we do not give and use names but rather perform a strange and mysterious act of combining the physical and the non-physical. So what is naming? What is the relation between name and the thing named? “This is connected with the conception of naming as, so to speak, an occult process. Naming appears as a queer connexion of the word with an object. – And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by starring at an object in front of him and repeating a

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2 Wittgenstein 1978a, 30.
name or even the word ‘this’ innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday."

This wrong functioning of language is responsible for the appearance of an odd and hardly understandable reality of the spiritual: “Where our language suggests a body and there is none; there, we should like to say, is a spirit.” In order to make language work, words should be created and used. A creation of a word is naming – an act looking like an unfolding of a myth. An initial event of naming recalls an existential situation, in which a fragment of reality lacking sense and significance for human beings suddenly receives an image of a semiotic object. And it is further history concentrated in etymology that creates the real content of a name. Wittgenstein himself puts it in the following way: “And here we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object.” The process of naming had initially a deeply sacred character as the name was regarded as an inevitable and essential quality of things, their archetype in a certain sense. Ironically speaking about this “magic of language”, Wittgenstein reveals its roots in the complementarity of language and thought. Speech goes ahead of thought and makes it needless. Thinking in its turn breaks the speech act, for only an immovable word can be an object of thought. Interestingly, simultaneously with Wittgenstein the famous Russian psychologist Leo Vygotsky revealed the same relation of language and thought in the individual psychic development. This idea was much later picked up by Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam in their “causal theory of reference”. The problem of meaning reveals, therefore, a strong connection between the philosophical concept of mind and the religious concept of spirit in Wittgenstein’s work. This mysterious attitude towards operating with signs, naming and denoting spreads over the whole understanding of language and meaning.

An individual mental life is also a puzzle to an external observer, and Wittgenstein underlines the contrast between a reflexive report about

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3 Wittgenstein 1978b, 38.
4 Wittgenstein 1978b, 36.
5 Wittgenstein 1978b, 38.
7 Putnam 1975; Kripke 1980.
the objective results of observation and a spontaneous mental act: “When someone says ‘I hope he’ll come’ – is this a report about his state of mind, or a manifestation of his hope? – I can for example, say it to myself. And surely I am not giving myself a report. It may be a sigh; but it need not. If I tell someone ‘I can’t keep my mind on my work today; I keep on thinking of his coming’ – this will be called a description of my state of mind.”8

I would like to draw your attention to the word “someone”. Addressing a speech to someone makes it a report about my mental state and not an expression of it. And it is communication that gives our words an objective content. But it is unnecessary to speak about mental events underlying the words: “When I think in language, there aren’t meanings going through my mind in addition to verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought.”9 If we consider a pain-behavior accompanied by the alleged sensation of pain, and a pain-behavior without such a sensation we can hardly draw any difference between them because a mental state is not something stable and definite, and can’t be adequately articulated in words. Thus while contemplating on the sense and meaning of what today are called “intentional terms” allegedly expressing the states of consciousness, inner processes, Wittgenstein is sometimes pretty close to modern eliminativists. We used to accept that human beings have consciousness – something unobservable, a vague and poorly investigated entity, which governs behavior. But if we imagine normal people behaving themselves as usual, rushing to their daily affairs with impassionate faces, fulfilling their social roles, they will hardly differ from automata. If we can say nothing in particular about consciousness, it is equivalent to saying everything you like about it. We overcome this problem, suggests Wittgenstein, “if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts.”10

So it can be assumed as highly probable that Wittgenstein treats language and its elements like meaning as non-mental social processes.

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8 Wittgenstein 1978b, 585.
9 Wittgenstein 1978b, 329.
10 Wittgenstein 1978b, 304.
II. Is meaning a kind of activity, its quality or function?

If meaning is the use then we have to analyze our activity to uncover the mystery of meaning. The first step would be to draw the difference between a routine, circulating activity and a communicative innovation, between mental and behavioral forms of psycho-physiological activity, between collective and individual activity, between action, rule and interpretation. The nature of the speech act is elucidated by Wittgenstein with the help of his idea of “rule-following”. One of the most famous places in “Philosophical Investigations” is devoted to it. “To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions)”\(^{11}\). Rule-following is a paradigm of a standard social action, according to Wittgenstein. And at the same time every action has something in itself, which cannot be reduced to genuine obeying of a rule – rule and action differ from each other. “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.”\(^{12}\)

As we see, Wittgenstein intentionally draws a sharp difference between action and rule in order to point out: every rule is a social invention, articulated in form of clear instructions; an action is, on the contrary, a spontaneous and individual expression of a human being determined by a number of factors. Action can obey rules to a certain extent, but there is always a gap, a sphere of human freedom between them. Rule being apparently something concrete is nevertheless an abstract guide to action because it can hardly take into account the whole variety of conditions and prescribe their definite impact. And action which appears seemingly as something definite and descriptive, in fact presupposes a number of versions and consequences, and that is why it can hardly be covered by a rule and even described and identified.

This provides the necessity of further difference, which Wittgenstein makes between action and interpretation. The above mentioned paradox is due to that we propose different interpretations of an action one after

\(^{11}\) Wittgenstein 1978b, 199.

\(^{12}\) Wittgenstein 1978b, 201.
another. Thereby we are inclined to say: every action in accordance with a rule is solely an interpretation. Can it be shown that grasping a rule is not simply an interpretation but a genuine following or conflict with it in concrete cases? Wittgenstein responds positive, as soon as we are able to draw the difference between collective social actions and individual, private forms of behavior. Social actions corresponding to accepted rules belong to the former; such things as interpretation, thinking, and mental states in general belong to the latter. “And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.”\textsuperscript{13}

So using language means performing a social action according to some rules though it is not the whole truth. Using language is also a kind of game. And the game becomes for Wittgenstein a basis for the definition of the whole semiotic reality: “I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’.”\textsuperscript{14} In most case-studies of games Wittgenstein put an accent on their diachronic, dynamic dimensions, and that is why the concept of language-game provided a strong impact on the formation of the social linguistics and the linguistics of discourse.

“Here the term ‘language-game’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life”\textsuperscript{15}. It is worth to point out that the concept of language-game as a whole unites a number of philosophical, ethnographic and linguistic insights. This is, firstly, an idea of culture as game, as game-training and development of consciousness; secondly, it is an image of discourse as universal form of communication either in behaviorist or hermeneutic interpretation; thirdly, it is a statement about the social nature of language, which determines the frames of the world, represents a form of life and in fact exhausts everything which can be prescribed to the social reality as it is; and finally, philosophical analysis of language is a reduction of complex language-games to the simple ones, and this is a way how to solve the oth-

\textsuperscript{13} Wittgenstein 1978b, 202.
\textsuperscript{14} Wittgenstein 1978b, 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Wittgenstein 1978b, 23.
erwise unsolvable problem of meaning. As Wittgenstein puts it, «this general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words”\textsuperscript{16}.

So the meaning of a word is a function of one or many language-games where the word is used. Meanings are not constructions of a reflexive mind; rather they are epiphenomena of social activity. This makes them intersubjective; and at the same time meanings are no more self-evident for the knowing mind; their understanding and mastering demand practical training, that is involvement into certain forms of activity and communication. And hence being taught a language is not to understand and accept explanations of a teacher. It is rather a collective and communicative mastering the human world.

III. Is meaning a kind of communication, its quality or function?

“Culture and Value” — a collection of Wittgenstein’s aphorisms, — contains the following mysterious expression: “In einer Konversation: Einer wirft einen Ball; der Andre weiß nicht: soll er ihn zurückwerfen, oder einem Dritten zuwerfen oder liegenlassen, oder aufheben und in die Tasche stecken, etc.”\textsuperscript{17} This sentence is mysterious because two persons in the majority of normal cases have no problems in interpretation and response to the questions of each other. It might be that Wittgenstein tends to show with the help of this example that people involved in communication often differ in its awareness and try to define at their best what kind of game is being played at the moment, what its rules and purposes, participants and boundaries are.

He clears up on this idea, as it seems to me, in his “Philosophical Investigations”. “We can easily imagine people amusing themselves in a field by playing with a ball so as to start various existing games, but playing many without finishing them and in between throwing the ball aimless

\textsuperscript{16} Wittgenstein 1978b, 5.
\textsuperscript{17} Wittgenstein 1980, 74.
into the air, chasing one another with the ball and bombarding one another for a joke and so on. And now someone says: The whole time they are playing a ball-game and following definite rules at every throw.”\textsuperscript{18} Wittgenstein’s irony serves to underline the following: how the interpretation is performed and the questions and replies are correlated in the game of communication – all this remains mysterious.

If the meaning is a result of an isolated speech act, then it is a part of a private language, which is rejected by Wittgenstein. Therefore the ball-game is evidently a metaphor of communication where agents exchange speech acts and thereby construct meanings. A speaker addressing a listener provides a possibility of meaning, which ought to be justified or negated in a response. It is namely the exchange, the process of circulation of signs, conversation, dialogue, discourse that produces the intersubjective content of a word. Perhaps Wittgenstein would agree with the idea that meaning in itself is a linguistic exchange?

\textbf{IV. Is meaning a kind of surrounding, its quality or function?}

The notion of social rules presupposes that they are understood and accepted by the participants in a communication. But it is essentially insufficient as soon as the basis of this understanding and acceptance remains behind any questioning. And it is exactly the inclusion of every communicative action into a broader context either real or potential that provides it with meaning and imposes upon the participants a commitment to obey the rules they once set and accept. Thereby we come to the concept of communication as not merely isolated interaction but a communicative situation in terms of its surroundings that is the communication which sets social context and performs itself with the help of it. And here we again appeal to Wittgenstein who says: “Describing my state of mind (of fear, say) is something I do in a particular context.”\textsuperscript{19} This context as it may be seen in his various thought experiments in “Philosophical Investigations” consists of the communicative counterparts and their actions. There is also a communicative situation, which takes place in terms of some real or possi-

\textsuperscript{18} Wittgenstein 1978b, 83.
\textsuperscript{19} Wittgenstein 1978b, 188.
ble event and the whole surrounding as well – this is Wittgenstein’s synonym for the social and cultural “context”. “An expectation is imbedded in a situation, from which it arises”\textsuperscript{20} – Wittgenstein points out. And further: “What is happening now has significance – in these surroundings. The surroundings give it its importance. And the word ‘hope’ refers to a phenomenon of human life. (A smiling mouth smiles only in a human face.)”\textsuperscript{21}

And he again and again proposes thought experiments for the understanding of what surroundings are.

Imagine that you are sitting in a room and hoping that NN comes and brings you money. Suppose that a temporal part of this state of mind, say, a minute, can be isolated, cut out of the context. Can it be called “hope”? What are the words you will pronounce within this minute? They will hardly be a part of language. “And in different surroundings the institute of money doesn’t exist either”\textsuperscript{22}, – this conclusion is also true for a procedure like the coronation of a king, pulled out the context. Here gold can appeal as useless metal and a crown – a parody of a respectable hat. And so on.

And he further clears up the context of this sentence, formulating something which will be later called the Duhem-Quine thesis: “To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique.”\textsuperscript{23} It is inscribing into the broader context that Wittgenstein defines (here and now) as understanding. And this is a key for interpreting another mysterious phrase of Wittgenstein: “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria.”\textsuperscript{24} It means that mind and consciousness including such phenomenon as meaning show themselves in communication and activity and can be understood only as the products of the latter. Non-mental and even non-linguistic events in a narrow sense explain meaning through its externalization.

All this is highly relevant for the famous discussion of the “private language”, which reveals that certain problems remained unsolved by Witt-
Today we can hardly limit ourselves by the logical approach to language as a system of signs and meanings but consider language genetically and historically, from the point of view of the origin of the whole culture and every particular text. Wittgenstein’s arguments against private language are in fact a criticism against the possibility to produce a linguistic phenomenon merely with the help of an individual mind. If language represents a system of signs and rules of operating with them, and every system of rules expresses a certain system of human communication, then every semiotic act loses its meaning outside this system. “To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life”\textsuperscript{25} – writes Wittgenstein. He demonstrates the role of activity and communication in the making of meanings but it seems so that he limits himself by certain routine situations, where the existing language system is being merely reproduced. Though he mentions occasionally that the rules of every language game may be broken, but this idea receives no consistent elaboration.

Following the rule and not its making – this mostly attracts Wittgenstein’s attention. A free play of associations, above all in terms of the formation of general notions, is limited, according to Wittgenstein, by some paradigm of non-linguistic activity, which in its turn is considered as a certain stable wholeness. From the point of this approach to language, the most significant moments of it’s onto- and phylogenesis remain unexplainable. Among them are: paralanguage invented by a baby and then completely displaced by the generally accepted natural language; lexical and structural neologisms proposed by a poet and then rejected by a mainstream poetry; magical formula, which can be hardly understood, reproduced and used except but by the magician himself; individual systems of signification used at the initial stage of elaboration of a scientific idea and then disappearing in the collective discussions and publications. Of course a number of individual peculiarities in learning foreign languages should be also mentioned as soon as they don’t fit Wittgenstein’s approach and can be treated only as deviations and anomalies. Taken as a process, meaning appears as a cloud of connotations which are created and chosen by a personality in a concrete speech act. Meaning essentially includes creative

\textsuperscript{25} Wittgenstein 1978b, 8.
action; creative action is a conflict with rules; hence to understand a meaning means to create a new one.

And finally: meaning needs to be interpreted as essentially determined by the linguistic, situational, social and cultural types of context. This idea serves as a valuable root for the so called “British contextualism” usually considered as a school of thought inspired by B. Malinowski and further as a global interdisciplinary and methodological program. Its demerits are another side of its merits. Meaning needs context and meaning also needs transcending the context through creativity. To make Wittgenstein’s concept of meaning complete means to go beyond it.

**Literature**


Recognizing the Ground that Lies before us as Ground: McDowell on How to Read *Philosophical Investigations*

Marie McGinn, York

‘Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—*In* use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—*Or* is the *use* its life?’ (PI 432)

**Introduction**

John McDowell presents a reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks on rule-following which sets out to absolve Wittgenstein from the charge that he puts forward what McDowell sees as an untenable view, namely, that, when it comes to applying a rule in a new case, what counts as correct is somehow determined by the responses that the members of the relevant speech community are inclined to make. McDowell argues that this conception of what counts as correct in a new case is not only revisionary of our commonsense view that the pattern of application of our concepts is independent of our ratification of it, but destroys the very idea that there is any such thing as someone’s meaning something by the words he utters. McDowell further points out that the revisionary aspect of what is known as the communitarian interpretation is at odds with Wittgenstein’s conception of his philosophical method: that one should not try ‘to advance *theses* in philosophy’ (PI 128).

I share McDowell’s dissatisfaction with the communitarian reading, and I am generally sympathetic with his concern to find a reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks which avoids committing him to a communitarian account of what constitutes the correct result of applying a rule in a new case.

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1 McDowell’s criticisms of the communitarian interpretation have been addressed particularly to the views of Crispin Wright, as presented in Wright 1980, 2001a, 2001b.
However, there is a question whether McDowell’s reading simply rein-
states a form of platonism which Wittgenstein’s reflections show to be
problematic. McDowell argues that this objection to his reading reflects an
implicit commitment to the demand for a constructive account of what
meaning and understanding consist in, and leads inevitably to the commu-
nitarian account he claims is untenable. On his reading, Wittgenstein does
not intend to put what he calls our commonsense conception of what it is to
grasp a rule in question; rather Wittgenstein reminds us of our common
conception in an attempt to overcome problems and paradoxes that arise
from a certain mistaken idea of what it is to go by a rule.

Thus, the dispute between McDowell and the communitarian has
the following form: McDowell asserts that Wittgenstein defends the cor-
rectness of our commonsense view and the communitarian claims that he
shows it to be untenable and in need of revision. Although it is true that, on
McDowell’s reading, Wittgenstein does not offer a constructive theory of
what rule-following consists in, he is nevertheless seen as putting forward
an argument to show that our commonsense conception must be correct, if
we are not, unintelligibly, to deny that there is such a thing as meaning at
all. Thus, the dispute between McDowell and the communitarian matches
Wittgenstein’s characterization of the dispute between Idealists, Solipsists
and Realists:

The one party attack the normal form of expression as if they were attacking a
statement; the others defend it, as if they were stating facts recognized by
every reasonable human being. (PI 402)

To this extent, there is good reason to think that McDowell’s reading
misses Wittgenstein’s philosophical aims. I want to argue that one of the
problems with McDowell’s reading is that it entirely neglects Wittgen-
stein’s idea that we need to undertake what he calls a ‘grammatical’ inves-
tigation, that problems are solved by our coming to ‘command a clear view
of the use of our words’ (PI 122).

McDowell’s Interpretation

McDowell characterizes our commonsense conception of what it is to fol-
low a rule as follows:
… to learn the meaning of a word is to acquire an understanding that obliges us subsequently—if we have occasion to deploy the concept in question—to judge and speak in certain determinate ways on pain of failure to obey the dictates of the meaning we have grasped. (McDowell 1998, 221, my italics)

In the same way, he holds that our commonsense conception of objectivity commits us to ‘the notion of how the pattern of application that we grasp, when we come to understand [a] concept ..., extends, independently of the actual outcome of any investigation, in the relevant case’ (McDowell 1998, 222, my italics). McDowell’s central claim against a communitarian reading is that ‘Wittgenstein’s target is not the very idea that a present state of understanding embodies commitments with respect to the future [i.e. our commonsense conception], but rather a certain seductive misconception of this idea’ (McDowell 1998, 223).

McDowell identifies the seductive misconception as follows: it is ‘the mistaken idea that grasping a rule is always an interpretation’ (McDowell 1998, 238). This mistaken idea, once it takes hold, presents us with a dilemma. On the one hand, the observation that any interpretation of a rule can itself be interpreted, and so cannot determinately fix what counts as a correct application in the future, leads to the conclusion that there is nothing that constitutes my understanding a word in a determinate way. This puts our commonsense conception of meaning and understanding under threat: it suggests that there is no such thing as grasp of a meaning which obliges us to judge and speak in certain determinate ways. On the other hand, the impossibility of accepting that there is no such thing as meaning something determinate by a word may lead us to try to put a stop to the regress by insisting that, although a sign can be interpreted, the meaning of a sign cannot be interpreted, and it is in the light of the meaning of a sign that future performances are sorted into those which are correct (i.e. in accordance with its meaning) and those which are not.

It is crucial for McDowell’s reading that the second horn of this dilemma—the idea of meaning as a set of rails which determine what is correct independently of our ratification—is distinct from what he calls our commonsense conception. Part of his case for a distinction turns on his view of the structure of Wittgenstein’s reflections. Thus, he argues that the problematic conception of meaning is one that only comes into view as a
response to the apparent consequences of accepting that understanding is equivalent to an act of interpretation. He makes the point as follows:

No doubt in some contexts it is correct to say that the meaning of an expression of a rule...does not need interpretation. But here the point of saying that is to make it safe to suppose, say, that a sign-post points the way only under an interpretation. The meaning is construed as an interpretation, but one immune to what dashes the hope that a regular interpretation will bridge the gap—the realization that we have merely shifted our attention to something that, on the principles that required the shift, could itself tell us which way to go only under an interpretation. (McDowell 2009a, 106)

Thus, the seductive misconception is seen as arising independently of, and as being in effect the source of, the platonism which Wittgenstein exposes as problematic. Rejecting this form of platonism does not, as McDowell sees it, threaten the commonsense conception which is our innocuous and philosophically uncontentious starting point, even though, as he seems to concede above, the two views may sound remarkably similar. The suggestion seems to be that there are two ways of taking the words 'the meaning of an expression of a rule...does not need an interpretation', one of them problematic, the other 'correct and innocuous' (McDowell 2009b, 83). The cogency of McDowell’s interpretation, as well as its satisfactoriness as a conception of rule-following, depends upon his ability to sustain this distinction between what he calls our commonsense view and the form of platonism that Wittgenstein tries to show is a mythological picture of what it is to follow a rule.

The distinction is also central to McDowell’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s response to the dilemma that arises once we accept the assumption that understanding is an act of interpretation. First of all, we need to ask what makes this assumption so compelling. McDowell suggests it is because we are easily seduced into accepting that any expression of a rule—a formula, or a sign-post, say—is, in itself, a mere piece of notation, an object which is incapable of sorting performances as being in accord or failing to be in accord with it. Under these circumstances, it is natural to think that what sorts behaviour is not the sign-post or the formula, but the sign-post or the formula under an interpretation. However, once we start thinking like this, then we will be faced with the choice that the dilemma
above presents: a regress of interpretations or a mythological conception of meaning as rails.

On the communitarian reading of Wittgenstein’s response, McDowell argues, the assumptions that lead to this dilemma are not put in question. Rather, Wittgenstein is held to accept that what puts a stop to the regress of interpretations, in any particular case, is a brute disposition to apply a rule in a particular way in a new case, without any guidance from a rule. At the level of an individual’s disposition to respond in new cases, no idea of acting in accord with a rule applies. The claim is that it is only when we consider the individual’s brute response in relation to the brute responses of other members of the community that we can begin to assess it for correctness or incorrectness: the correct response is the one that coincides with the one that most of the members of the relevant speech community are inclined to give.

This is just the untenable view of what constitutes correctness that McDowell believes obliterates the very idea of norms. It figures in Wittgenstein’s thought, he suggests, not as the conclusion of his reflections, but as a reductio of the assumptions that appear to present it as the only alternative to a problematic form platonism. On McDowell’s reading, the communitarian conception of what constitutes correctness shows that the consequences of accepting the assumption which leads to the dilemma is disastrous, for it means the end of any genuine normativity, and thus the end of all meaning and understanding. Wittgenstein’s response to the dilemma is, he argues, not to accept this disastrous consequence, but to reject the assumption that leads to it. What we learn from the regress of interpretations is that it is fatal to accept the idea that there is always a gap between the expression of a rule and what counts as a correct application of it, which needs to be filled by an interpretation. Thus, the conclusion Wittgenstein is held to draw is this:

We must not acquiesce in the idea that an expression of a rule, considered in itself, does not sort behaviour into performances that follow the rule and performances that do not. (McDowell 2009a, 100f.)

On McDowell’s reading, this is to be seen as a call to recover our commonsense conception of meaning and understanding, by reminding ourselves of ‘obvious facts’ about, e.g., what we do with sign-posts. Thus, a
great deal hangs on McDowell’s ability to persuade us that what he is calling our commonsense conception, which he claims Wittgenstein retrieves by means of a series of reminders of obvious facts, is distinguishable from the form of platonism that Wittgenstein characterizes as a mythology. For, on McDowell’s reading of him, Wittgenstein argues that this commonsense conception must be correct, if we are not, unintelligibly, to deny that there is any such things as meaning and understanding. He sums up the argument as follows:

If we conceive, say, sign-posts as in themselves normatively inert, so that only under an interpretation could a sign-post tell anyone which way to go, we lose our hold on the very idea that sign-posts can be understood and followed. To avoid this, we need to retrieve a bit of common-sense: that people who are party to the relevant practice are told what direction to go in by sign-posts themselves, not by sign-posts under an interpretation. If there is more work to be done, it is to loosen the grip of the conception according to which an expression of a rule, for instance a sign-post, is, in itself, normatively inert. To do that, we need to administer what Wittgenstein calls “reminders” (PI 127), not put forward philosophical hypotheses. (McDowell, 2009a, 104)

Distinguishing our commonsense conception from platonism

There are at least two ideas that McDowell calls on in the attempt to clarify the distinction between our commonsense conception and a problematic form of platonism. First of all, he distinguishes two forms of realism. The platonist mythology takes meaning to be ‘wholly autonomous’ (McDowell, 1998, p.255). This seems to be the idea of something like an expression of a rule which intimates to anyone who is presented with it, independently of whether they have undergone training with the relevant expression, what counts as acting in accord with its demands. This is ‘the supposition that meaning takes care of itself’ in an extreme form, one on which the idea of a customary practice of using signs plays no role, and the idea of initiation into such a practice is not seen as a condition of the capacity to understand or follow a rule. It is, McDowell claims, this extreme form of realism about meaning—the idea of meaning as a self-interpreting rule—that Wittgenstein’s reflections undermine.

However, McDowell argues, this leaves quite untouched the idea that, given a practice of employing expressions, those expressions possess
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a meaning which, for anyone who grasps it, sorts future performances into those which accord and those which fail to accord with it. Thus, the constraints imposed by, say, a sign-post do not have the platonist autonomy of the super-realist picture. Rather, a sign-post becomes a meaningful item only if there is a customary use of sign-posts, and ‘to be capable of being told what to do by a sign-post, one needs to have been initiated into an appropriate practice’ (McDowell 2009a, 101). However, given that one has been thus initiated, McDowell argues, ‘the subject is such that the sign-post itself, not the sign-post under an interpretation, tells her which way to go’ (McDowell 2009a, 101).

The first question one wants to ask is whether McDowell’s way of making the distinction enables us to see why it is that the platonist mythology is undermined by Wittgenstein’s reflections and McDowell’s more modest form of realism escapes them. Is the switch, from the idea of a rule’s exerting an absolutely autonomous constraint on its application to the idea that its ability to constrain what counts as a correct application comes into being only as a result of the existence of a practice of employing it, enough to purge the idea of a rule’s determining what constitutes a correct application of it—of a ‘logical fit’ between a rule and its application—of its mystery? Let’s take Wittgenstein’s example of hearing and understanding the word ‘cube’. Let’s agree that what comes before my mind when I understand the word is a drawing of a cube. McDowell’s thought is that, considered in itself, independently of its employment in our practice, the drawing does not introduce any constraints on its application, but is interpretable, and thus applicable, in indefinitely many ways. However, once we have been trained in our ordinary practice of employing the picture, then the picture which comes before my mind does determine what counts as a correct application of it. Wittgenstein’s rejection of the first idea, McDowell claims, is not to be confused with a rejection of the second;

2 There is, of course, no suggestion in McDowell that a picture, or an explicit statement of a rule, must come before my mind when I hear and understand a word. The word ‘cube’ itself can, through the existence of practice into which I am initiated, become a ‘meaningful item’ which sorts future performances into those that accord and those that fail to accord with its meaning. However, Wittgenstein’s example provides a case in which it is possible to explore in more detail what this idea amounts to.
the claim is that Wittgenstein accepts the second and denies that the idea of
the picture’s imposing a constraint, understood in this sense, is an illusion.

Compare this with what Wittgenstein actually says, first at the end of PI 139:

The picture of the cube did indeed suggest a certain use to us, but it was possible for me to use it differently (aber ich konnte es auch anders verwenden).

If McDowell’s reading is correct, shouldn’t he have said that it is possible for the picture to be used differently, rather than that I was able to use it differently, for, on McDowell’s reading, the result of my training is that the picture itself acquires a normative force. And when Wittgenstein asks, in PI 140, ‘Is there such a thing as a picture, or something like a picture, that forces a particular application on us; so that my confusion lay in confusing one picture with another?’, shouldn’t the answer, on McDowell’s reading be ‘Yes’? For his suggestion is that there are two kinds of picture, or at any rate two ways for a subject to apprehend a picture: as a mere piece of notation, interpretable in indefinitely many ways, and as a ‘meaningful item’ which, in virtue of the subject’s mastery of a practice of employing the picture, ‘in itself’ possesses the capacity to sort behaviour into what accords with it and what does not. What is needed for a picture to have the status of a meaningful item with normative implications is that it has a customary use and the subject has been trained in that use. Yet this is not what Wittgenstein says. Rather, he remarks:

…our ‘belief that the picture forced a particular application upon us’ consisted in the fact that only one case and no other occurred to us ….

What is essential is to see is that the same thing can come before our minds when we hear the word and the application still be different. Has it the same meaning both times? I think we shall say not. (PI 140)

There is, then, nothing in the discussion of PI 139ff to suggest that Wittgenstein is anxious to distinguish a noxious and an innocent version of the idea that a picture which comes before my mind when I hear and understand a word ‘in itself’ determines what counts as accord with it. It is true that in PI 141 Wittgenstein responds to the interlocutor’s question, ‘but … can’t an application [of the schema] come before my mind?’, by saying ‘It can’. However, it is crucial that he follows this up by saying ‘only we need to get clearer about our application of this expression’. This is a call for the
grammatical enquiry which, I want to argue, McDowell neglects. McDowell takes it that in responding, ‘It can’, Wittgenstein is accepting that there is, after all, a determinate state of understanding a picture or a sign-post, in which what counts as a correct application of it is determinately fixed. I want to argue that this is to assume the very misconception of the grammar of the expression ‘the application comes before my mind’ that Wittgenstein’s investigation aims to diagnose.

Thus, McDowell is assuming that in saying, ‘It can’, Wittgenstein is reverting to some version of the idea that he has just rejected—the idea that the picture that comes before my mind when I understand the word ‘in itself’ determines its correct application—but there is, I want to claim, nothing to support this idea. The only idea of “constraint” in connection with the picture which comes before our minds that Wittgenstein appears to acknowledge is this: although there are different things that we should be prepared to call an application of the picture, ‘only the one case and no other occurred to us’. Asked whether there can be a collision between the picture and its application, Wittgenstein responds: ‘There can, inasmuch as the picture makes us expect a different use, because people in general apply this picture like this’ (PI 141). Thus, he points to clash between a particular application and the regular use of the picture, rather than between an application and what the picture which comes before my mind, in virtue of my training in its use, ‘in itself’ requires.

McDowell’s second way of approaching the distinction he needs to draw is to argue that the platonist mythology imports the idea of ‘following a rule as the operation of a super-rigid yet (or perhaps we should say ‘hence’) ethereal machine’ (McDowell 1998, 230), whereas our commonsense conception is innocent of this idea. As McDowell sees it, the platonist mythology leads to a conception of the mind as ‘a queer kind of medium’, ‘the mysterious seat or origin of meaningfulness’; ‘breathing life into otherwise dead signs is pictured as an occult feat of which only something as special as the mind could be capable’ (McDowell 2009b, 85). In the same way, a platonist conceives ‘successive performances in the course of, say, extending a number series [to] reflect a quasi-magical efficacy exerted by a configuration in [a] mysterious medium’ (McDowell 2009b, 85). This is to picture the mind ‘as the locus of configurations from which performances that manifest understanding flow, in a way that is like the way
events flow from states of regular mechanisms or bits of apparatus except that this machinery is mysteriously capable of placing its output in the normative light constituted by the output’s being correct or incorrect in the light of the configuration from which it flows’ (McDowell 2009b, 85).

The question we need to ask is whether what McDowell calls our commonsense conception is not equally committed to the problematic idea “… that what I do now (in grasping a sense) determines the future use [not] causally and as a matter of experience, but that in a queer way, the use itself is in some sense present” (PI 195). It is, on the face of it, hard to see how else we are to understand McDowell’s characterization of what our commonsense conception amounts to. For he holds that it is part of our commonsense conception that understanding is a ‘definite state that we come to be in when we come to understand the principle of a series’, that this is ‘a state that sets in in its entirety at the relevant moment’ [when we come to understand the series], and that ‘in the light of [it] it is completely settled what numbers it is correct to write when one reaches a certain point in extending the series’ (McDowell 2009b, 95). What is this but the idea that ‘the use itself is in some sense present’ in my act of understanding, so that my future performances are ‘in a queer way’ already anticipated in that act; their shadow is there and sets the standard for whether what I actually do is correct or incorrect?

In claiming that there is a distinction to be made here, McDowell is inclined to draw comfort from the way PI 195 continues:

But of course [the use is present], ‘in some sense’! Really the only thing wrong with what you say is the expression “in a queer way”. The rest is all right; and the sentence only seems queer when one imagines a different language-game for it from the one in which we actually use it.

McDowell sees this as a licence to assert that Wittgenstein does not completely reject the idea that there is a state which ‘sets in in its entirety’, and which ‘completely settles’ what behaviour counts as accord in the future. Rather, he thinks that this idea only needs to be purged of its ‘queerness’, and this, McDowell suggests, is done by disconnecting the idea that the use is already present in the act of understanding from the picture of the mind as an occult medium or ethereal machine. And, for McDowell, this means recognizing the role of a practice, and initiation into a practice, in giving
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whatever comes before the mind its normative force. But the question that arises is what Wittgenstein means when he says that ‘the sentence only seems queer when one imagines a different language-game from the one in which we actually use it’. For McDowell this does not mean recognizing that it is not a language-game in which we attribute a determinate state which anticipates the future, but merely recognizing that someone can be in the determinate state which constitutes mastery of a rule only if he has been initiated into a practice of using it. However, it is also possible to take it that Wittgenstein’s point here is that the use of the words, ‘the use itself is in some sense present’, is quite other than the picture of a determinate state which anticipates what counts as a correct application of the picture suggests.

That this is how we should understand Wittgenstein is supported by the conclusion he draws in *PI* 196:

In our failure to understand the use of a word we take it as the expression of a queer *process*.

This suggests that Wittgenstein sees the villain of the piece as the idea that ‘the use itself is in some sense present’ requires the idea of a *process*, something which takes place *when* we understand, that is, the very idea to which McDowell believes he remains committed. The point is that if we look at the use of the word, we will see that no such process is in question. This seems to be confirmed by what Wittgenstein goes on to say in *PI* 197:

“It is as if we could grasp the whole use of a word in a flash.”—And that is just what we say we do. That is to say: we sometimes describe what we do in these words. But there is nothing astonishing, nothing queer, about what happens. It becomes queer when we are led to think that the future development must in some way already be present in the act of grasping the use and yet isn’t present.—For we say that there isn’t any doubt that we understand the word, and on the other hand its meaning lies in its use.

It is very hard to see how McDowell’s commonsense conception gets us beyond this ‘queer idea’: that, insofar as the meaning of a word lies in its use, the use of the word must be in some way already present in the act of understanding. There is just no reason to believe that Wittgenstein distinguishes between a noxious and an innocent version of this idea. Rather, he wants to persuade us that the idea that the future use must be in some way
already present in the act of understanding is based on a misconception of how the words ‘understand’, ‘I suddenly understood’, ‘I already meant it at the time’, ‘This application does not fit with the word as I meant it’, etc. are actually used: the language-game that is played with these words is quite other than we think. If this is correct, then McDowell’s mistake is to suppose that in acknowledging that these things are just what we do say, Wittgenstein is thereby committing himself to a certain conception of something. All he is acknowledging is that these words are used, or one might say, correctly used on certain occasions; the question of how they are used, however, is something which awaits clarification through the grammatical investigation that Wittgenstein wants us to undertake.

If this is right, then it suggests that we should see what McDowell calls ‘our commonsense conception’ of what meaning and understanding consist in, or of what constitutes accord, or of what the objectivity of our judgements requires, not as something which Wittgenstein’s reflections are intended to reinstate, but as things which we are ‘inclined to say’ about meaning and understanding, and which call for philosophical treatment. On this view, what McDowell calls our commonsense conception is just a picture which we find very natural; it has the same status as what a mathematician is inclined to say about the objectivity and reality of mathematical facts.

Wittgenstein expressed his attitude towards the conceptions or pictures we find natural at PI 254: “What we ‘are tempted to say’ in such a case is, of course, not philosophy; but its raw material”; it is ‘something for philosophical treatment’. There is clearly no sense here that what the mathematician is inclined to say is something that passes for innocent common sense, that Wittgenstein distinguishes it from what might be called philosophical platonism, or that his objective is to show that it is nothing more than statements of obvious facts. It is simply a picture, one which we find natural, but one which, as it turns out, gives rise to what Wittgenstein tries to show is a misconception of the grammar of mathematical propositions: the picture leads us to imagine a language-game for mathematical sentences which is quite other than the one that is actually played with them. In the same way, McDowell’s commonsense conception of the act of understanding is a picture which we find natural, but which for all that gives rise to a misconception of the language-game which we
Frege somewhere says that the straight line which connects any two points is really already there before we draw it; and it is the same when we say that the transition, say in the series +2, have already been made before we make them orally or in writing—as it were tracing them.

One might reply to someone who said this: Here you are using a picture….

[I]f…the transitions which someone is to make on the order ‘add 2’ are so determined by the training that we can predict with certainty how he will go, even when he has never up to now taken this step—then it may be natural to us to use this as a picture of the situation: the steps are already taken and he is just writing them down. (RFM, I, 21-22)³

If this is right, then the picture that McDowell calls our commonsense conception is the starting point for Wittgenstein’s reflections: it provides his investigation with ‘its raw materials’. And this fits the order which is discernible in Wittgenstein’s remarks on rule-following much better than McDowell’s account of it, in which Wittgenstein is held to start from the idea that understanding is an act of interpretation. For the question that marks the opening of Wittgenstein’s discussion is not, as McDowell’s reading suggests it should be, ‘How does a mere sign acquire its capacity to determine what counts as in accord with it?’ Rather, it is the following question:

When someone says the word “cube” to me…I know what it means. But can the whole use of the word come before my mind, when I understand it in this way? …Can what we grasp in a flash accord with a use, fit or fail to fit it? And how can what is present to us in an instant, what comes before our mind in an instant, fit a use? (PI 139)

It seems very natural to suppose that what Wittgenstein is invoking here is precisely our commonsense picture of meaning and understanding, which he then subjects to ‘philosophical treatment’. What the treatment shows is that the application which we are inclined to make of this picture is empty. The regress of interpretations shows us that there is nothing that can do the

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³ I don’t want to suggest that Wittgenstein believes that the pictures we find natural are false. The question is: what is their application. What does the idea that ‘the steps are already taken’ amount to? We get onto difficulty when we think the application of the picture is more straightforward than it is.
work that this picture tries to assign to the meaning of a word. It is not, on this reading, that Wittgenstein intends to use this as the basis for suggesting that there is something problematic or incorrect about, for example, our use of the words ‘But I already knew, at the time when I gave the order, that he ought to write 1002 after 1000’. The point is only that what McDowell calls our commonsense conception—the picture of meaning as dictating how an expression is to be applied—does not understand this use, but puts a false interpretation on these words, and then draws the queerest conclusions from it.

**McDowell’s reading of PI 201 and PI 198**

This brings us to McDowell’s interpretation of *PI* 201. McDowell points out, quite correctly, that the opening words of the second paragraph—‘It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here’—indicate that Wittgenstein does not accept the paradox with which the remark begins. However, McDowell then interprets what follows these opening words as a simple restatement of the paradox of paragraph one:

What could constitute my understanding, say, the “plus” sign in a way with which only certain answers to given addition problems would accord? Confronted with such questions, we tend to be enticed into looking for a fact that would constitute my having put an appropriate *interpretation* on what I was told and shown when I was instructed in arithmetic. Anything we hit on as satisfying that specification contents us only “for a moment”; then it occurs to us that whatever we have hit on would itself be capable of interpretation in such a way that acting in conformity with it would require something quite different. So we look for something that would constitute my having interpreted the first item in the right way. Anything we come up with satisfying that specification will in turn content us “only for a moment”; and so on: “any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support” (*PI* 198). (McDowell 1998, 229)

The difficulty with this is that, if the opening of the second paragraph simply repeats the paradox of the first paragraph, how can it also be the ‘fact’ which shows us that the paradox of the first paragraph rests on ‘a misunderstanding’? At the end of the first paragraph, we are left feeling that, if the rule itself does not determine what counts as accord with it, then our use of a rule is completely unconstrained: ‘there would be neither accord
nor conflict here’. Wittgenstein’s response in the second paragraph is to suggest that we can see that this is a misunderstanding ‘from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contended us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it.’ The thought seems to be that we can see that the paradox arises out of a misunderstanding simply by observing that in the course of our discussion we have continually come up with pictures and rules that do seem to us to require or compel a particular use, i.e. which seem to us to meet our demand for a ‘superlative link’ between a rule and its application. It is only when someone points out to us that we would be prepared to acknowledge a different use as an application of the rule or picture that we even become aware of the possibility of using it differently. Normally, the possibility of these other applications doesn’t even occur to us; we simply apply the picture or rule in the way we have been trained—in the way that accords with our practice of using it—and nothing occurs to worry us.

Clearly, McDowell does not want to read the opening sentence of the second paragraph of *PI* 201 this way, for that is to accept that Wittgenstein points to our natural way of responding to the rule as the way out of the paradox created by the regress of interpretations. For McDowell, Wittgenstein’s way out of the paradox comes only in the second sentence of the second paragraph:

The right response to the paradox, Wittgenstein in effect tells us, is not to accept it but to correct the misunderstanding on which it depends: that is, to realize “that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation”.

(McDowell 1998, 229)

And McDowell takes this as equivalent to an invocation of our commonsense conception: that, for anyone who has undergone the appropriate training, the rule itself determines what counts as accord with it, without need of an interpretation.

However, this is to ignore the second half of the sentence, in which Wittgenstein invokes, not the commonsense picture of the rule itself imposing a constraint, but our ordinary criteria for settling whether a rule has been obeyed or not. The whole sentence reads:
What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases. (final italics mine)

I take the ‘this’, in ‘What this shews’, to refer to the fact—pointed to in the previous sentence and held to show that the paradox rests on a misunderstanding—that, when we are first confronted by a familiar expression of a rule, we respond to it immediately, without formulating or selecting among hypotheses about how it is to be applied. As McDowell emphasises, our life with signs, such as the plus sign, or a sign-post, is such that the question of interpretation does not normally arise: we simply respond in the way we have been trained, in a way that has become second nature to us. This is the way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation: it is an immediate response. However, what the remainder of the sentence clearly indicates is that this immediate response counts as a case of ‘obeying a rule’ or ‘going against it’ in virtue of the existence of a practice in which what we do is *called* ‘obeying the rule’ or ‘going against it’. There is no sense that Wittgenstein is appealing to the normative properties of the ‘rule itself’, or of the mental state that a subject who grasps a rule is in, as the place to look for what makes his future performances in accord with the rule. If we want to understand what makes his response a case of obeying the rule, then we need to look at the criteria by which his performances are assessed—‘what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases’—and not for a mythological link, a kind of ‘logical fit’—between the item that comes before his mind and what he goes on to do.

A similar objection arises in connection with McDowell’s reading of *PI* 198:

“Then can whatever I do be brought into accord with the rule?”—Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule—say a sign-post—got to do with my actions? What sort of connexion is there here?—Well, perhaps this one: I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react.

“But that is only to give a causal connexion: to tell how it has come about that we go by the sign-post; not what this going-by-the-sign really consists in.”—On the contrary; I have further indicated that a person goes by a sign-post only insofar as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom.

What Wittgenstein points to at the end of this remark is the practice which supplies the background to the action which he performs in responding to a
sign-post in the way he’s been trained. There is a practice of using sign-posts, and in the context of this practice, in certain circumstances, including his having been trained in the use of sign-posts, doing this, is a criterion of following it.

Compare this with McDowell’s reading:

When I follow a sign-post, the connection between it and my action is not mediated by an interpretation of sign-posts that I acquired when I was trained in their use. I simply act as I have been trained to. This prompts an objection, which might be paraphrased on these lines: “Nothing in what you have said shows that what you have described is a case of following a rule; you have only told us how to give a causal explanation of a certain bit of (what might as well be for all that you have said) mere behaviour.” The reply…is that the training in question is initiation into a custom. If it were not that, then the account of the connection between sign-post and action would indeed look like an account of nothing more than brute movement and its causal explanation; our picture would not contain the materials to entitle us to speak of following (going by) a sign-post. (McDowell 1998, 239)

Here there is the sense of an emergence of a new kind of connection between the sign-post and my action, one that ‘in itself’ makes my action accord or fail to accord with what the sign-post in-itself requires, and which therefore entitles us to speak of my performance as a case of going by a rule. But we still have no idea of what this new kind of connection is, and so we seem to be back with the mythological idea that ‘the rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space’ (PI 219).

**Recognizing the ground that lies before us as ground**

McDowell invokes the following in support of his interpretation of Wittgenstein on rule-following:

The difficulty here is not, to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as ground. (RFM VI, 31)

McDowell interprets this remark as follows:

By Wittgenstein’s lights, it is a mistake to think we can dig to a level at which we no longer have application for normative notions (like “following according to the rule”). (McDowell 1998, 242)
On McDowell’s reading, digging below this level is thinking that an understanding of what following a rule amounts to must start from a base level at which all that is in view is mere dispositions to respond: something that can be characterized without normative notions like “following according to the rule”. Once this step is taken, McDowell argues, we are left trying to reconstruct the notions of meaning and understanding from this non-normative base, but what we achieve is, at best, a mere matching of regularities, with nothing genuinely normative in view. If, on the other hand, ‘we refuse to countenance sub-“bedrock” (meaning-free) characterizations of what meaning something by one’s words consists in’ (McDowell 1998, 252), then we can give substance to the notion of meaning as something which can be grasped by the mind and with which future performances can be in accord, while avoiding ‘the fantastic mythology of the super-rigid machine’. Then all we need to do is to note that what brings the above-“bedrock” (normative) characterizations of what meaning something by one’s words consists in into the picture is the existence of a custom, a practice, an institution. Thus, if there exists a practice of using sign-posts, the sign-post ceases to be normatively inert and has the capacity, in itself, to sort performances into those which accord and those which do not. From the above-“bedrock” perspective, the connection between the picture which comes before the mind and the subject’s application of it, is not merely causal: the subject is such that the picture itself, not the picture under an interpretation, tells her how it is to be applied.

Thus, on McDowell’s reading recognizing ‘the ground that lies before us as ground’ does not mean attending to our actual use of the words ‘Now I understand’, etc, but insisting that what is grasped in an act of understanding, say, the principle of a series is something that is not in itself normatively inert, and which therefore allows us to make sense of the idea that it imposes a normative constraint on what the subject goes on to do. It means, in other words, not abandoning the idea that, once I am initiated into the practice, ‘the rule itself’ intimates the way I am to go, but rather insisting that this is how we must characterize the object that comes before my mind when I either see or imagine the rule. I have already argued that it is quite unclear whether McDowell succeeds in distinguishing this idea from the idea of a ‘queer’ connection between the rule, or the act of understanding it, and the use I go on to make of a word. I now want to suggest
that there is another way to understand what the idea of recognizing ‘the
ground that lies before us as ground’ amounts to. I think that this will also
begin to indicate why it is a mistake to suppose that rejecting McDowell’s
reading leaves us with only a communitarian reading as an alternative.

The reading of Wittgenstein I want to recommend is one that starts
from the idea that the concept of a perspicuous representation is central to
a proper understanding of his thought. This is closely connected with the
idea that the investigation he undertakes is properly called a ‘grammatical’
one. It is impossible to sum up Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigation of
our use of the words ‘Now I understand’, ‘He has grasped the principle of
the series’, ‘I already meant at the time…’, ‘The steps are determined by
the formula’, and so on. However, it is important to note that his investiga-
tion of how these words are used starts from the fact that calculating, giv-
ing and obeying orders, measuring, reporting, describing, and so on are
part of human natural history. All of these activities involve the idea that
only certain performances count as correct: as working out the result of an
addition sum, as carrying out an order, as measuring the length of the table,
and so on. Our all getting the same results is, Wittgenstein suggests, essen-
tial to what we call calculating, measuring, reporting, describing, etc, but
this does not mean that to give the result of, say, a calculation or a meas-
urement is equivalent to saying, ‘The majority of human beings, asked to
do this, will get this as a result’. The latter statement is an anthropological
statement about the majority of human beings, and it is tested, like all em-
pirical statements, by experience. The result of a calculation, by contrast, is
a mathematical proposition—‘25x25=625’—which is justified, if the ques-
tion of justification arises, by reference to the rules of calculation which
function as paradigms in our practice; the result of a measurement is a
statement of length—‘The table is 3 metres long’—which is justified, if the
question of justification arises, by reference to procedures which function
as norms in our practice; and so on. This is simply a description of what we
do.

The mistake, Wittgenstein believes, is to think that anything more
than the accumulation of painstaking descriptions of what we do—of dif-
fferences between language-games—is needed to remove the philosophical
problems that a certain natural picture of what is involved in going by a
rule gives rise to. He does not, I believe, attempt to justify this view of the role of a description of our use words by appeal to a philosophical view such as idealism, or to the idea that our ordinary ways of talking determine what kinds of thing exists. Rather, he tries to show that simply by carrying out the kind of grammatical investigation he recommends, the problems which arise as the result of our commitment to a particular picture of what must be the case, although we cannot see how it is the case, completely disappear. It is, however, the temptation to ‘say something more’, something that would justify or ground the distinctions our ordinary use of words reveals—for example, the distinction between ‘Everyone asked to multiply 25 by itself gets 625 as a result’ and ‘25x25=625’—which Wittgenstein believes we must, at all costs, resist.

My suggestion is that McDowell can be seen to succumb to this temptation insofar as he believes that there is real work to be done to show that our ordinary ways of talking—our saying, for example, ‘If you multiply 25 by itself, then you will get 625 as the result’, not as a prediction, but as a statement of what counts as carrying out the multiplication—are intelligible. In this way, a ‘remarkable act of mind’ (PI 38) is introduced which, it seems, must exist if our ordinary ways of speaking are to make sense. I’ve tried to show that this misrepresents Wittgenstein’s philosophical aims and falls into the precisely the difficulties which the remarks on rule-following set out to overcome: when we try to identify this remarkable act of mind, nothing that we come up with satisfies us.

All this suggests a different way of understanding the remark from the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics quoted earlier:

The difficulty here is not, to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as ground. (RFM VI, 31)

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4 This amounts to “quietism” only if one assumes that there is a substantial philosophical question which calls for an account of what following a rule consists in. Part of Wittgenstein’s philosophical purpose, I want to argue, is to persuade the reader that the question we’re asking is a conceptual one, and that what it calls for is a grammatical investigation in which we come to command a clear view of our use of words, and of the differences between language-games. He doesn’t provide a philosophical justification for this approach, but by undertaking the investigation he believes our question calls for, he sets out to show that the paradoxes which arise when we try to provide an account completely disappear.
The idea is that the ground that lies before us is our ordinary use of words and the difficulty is to recognize this as the ground, that is, as what our investigation needs to focus on. The difficulty lies, not in reaching this ground, but in resisting the temptation to go further, to ‘say something more’: to try to justify, or explain, or make intelligible what lies before us, by giving it a ground in the nature of things, or in what must be the case. McDowell’s attempt to make a real distinction between acting on an understanding and a mere disposition to respond, which justifies, or makes intelligible, our describing a particular performance as a case of following according to a rule, is, on this reading, an attempt to dig below the ground. Not digging below the ground is, by contrast, merely a matter of noting that ‘this language-game is played’: in these circumstances this is a criterion of grasping the principle of the series, meaning addition by ‘+’, going by a sign-post, and so on. Thus:

Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’. That is, where we ought to have said: this language-game is played.

The question is not one of explaining a language-game …, but of noting a language-game. (PI 654-5)
Literature


‘Resolution’ – an Illusion of Sense?

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An ever-widening rift divides the world of Wittgenstein studies. Located on one side of the debate are the self-declared ‘resolute readers’\(^1\) who cleave to some version of what James Conant (2007) calls ‘Mono-Wittgensteiniansim’ – the idea that, roughly speaking, early and later Wittgenstein were up to the same thing: namely, offering a therapy that will cure us of the illusion of meaning something where we really mean nothing. Located on the other side are what the resolute like to call the ‘standard readers’\(^2\), who believe, first, that although there is some continuity in places, there is significant discontinuity between early Wittgenstein and his later self, and, second, that later Wittgenstein aimed at more than mere therapy.

‘Resolute readings’ initially started life as a radical new approach to Wittgenstein’s early work: first presented by Cora Diamond and James Conant\(^3\), they gained currency as an attempt to save the *Tractatus* from ending in self-contradiction. But the debate has not remained *Tractatus*-centred. As Conant points out in a recent paper: ‘issues parallel to those which arise in the interpretation of the *Tractatus* arise in connection with the interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later work as well’ (2004, 168). Stephen Mulhall, in his latest book, *Wittgenstein’s Private Language*, concurs – taking his cue from the aforementioned paper by Conant, Mulhall (2007) offers the first sustained attempt at providing a ‘resolute’ reading of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*\(^4\).

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\(^1\) The term ‘resolute reading’ was coined by Warren Goldfarb (1997).

\(^2\) Hutchinson (2007, 693) calls them ‘elucidatory’ readers.


\(^4\) Others sympathetic to, or actively endorsing, resolute readings include Stanley Cavell, Alice Crary, Burton Dreben, David Finkelstein, Juliet Floyd, Phil Hutchinson, Oskari Kuusela, Matthew Ostrow, Rupert Read, Martin Stone and Edward Witherspoon.
Mulhall identifies two features necessary for a reading to count as ‘resolute’: commitment to nonsense monism – the contention that from the point of view of logic there is only one kind of nonsense, i.e. plain gibberish (2007, 2) – and rejection of the idea that there is something we ‘cannot do’ in philosophy (2007, 8). While I agree with resolute readers that the limits of sense are not limitations fencing us off from anything in particular, I contest their claim that acceptance of this fact requires endorsement of nonsense monism on pain of falling prey to an alternative conception of ‘substantial’ nonsense – i.e. the notion of pseudo-propositions that are ‘determinately unintelligible’, or that specify ‘a thought that we cannot think’ (2007, 8). Such a conception is, indeed, incoherent, only nonsense monism doesn’t follow from a rejection of it. More than the two interpretative options offered by resolute readers – ‘resolution’ or some kind of commitment to ‘substantial’ nonsense – are available here: as the present paper will show, neither a ‘resolute’, nor a ‘substantial’ reading, can in fact do justice to the complexities of Wittgenstein’s text. I will argue, contra Mulhall and Conant, that the author of the Investigations does allow for more than one kind of nonsense, and, furthermore, that recognition of this fact does not, of itself, push one into ‘substantiality’. Given that Mulhall has, to date, developed the most comprehensive account of a ‘resolute’ later Wittgenstein, his interpretation will be the focal point of my discussion, but much of my critique will also be aimed at Conant and, to a lesser extent, at Hutchinson (2007).

I

The interpretative challenge of Wittgenstein’s Private Language is to motivate the idea that in the Investigations, too, and not just in the Tractatus, it is possible to distinguish between ‘substantial’ and ‘resolute’ readings. Prima facie this is not an easy task, as the later Wittgenstein does not present his reader with a Tractatus-type exegetical conundrum: the Investigations does not declare itself, like the Tractatus, to be nonsensical. But if not, what are the merits of reading Wittgenstein’s later work in ‘resolute’ fashion?

Mulhall takes his interpretative cues for promoting a ‘resolute reading’ of the Investigations from §374 – ‘The great difficulty here is not to
represent the matter as if there were something one couldn’t do.’ – and §500 – ‘When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation’ (2007, 9). If we don’t heed Wittgenstein’s warnings here, Mulhall argues, while at the same time regarding his notion of ‘grammar’ as a ‘way of recalling us to the distinction between sense and nonsense’ (2007, 9), then we might be tempted to give this a ‘substantial’ spin; we might end up regarding grammar, like logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, as prohibitive and as preventing us from articulating something that is, nevertheless, in some sense, perfectly intelligible. So we might be seduced into thinking that we can get intimations of what lies beyond the limits that grammar has demarcated.

But this problem may well strike one as spurious: it clearly betrays a misunderstanding to confuse the limits of sense with *limitations* or exclusion from a specifiable domain – one might just as well regard grammar in the ordinary (linguistic) sense as imposing limitations on one’s expressive capacities! Neither does Mulhall make it clear why a realization of the fact that there is indeed nothing – no *thing* – that lies beyond these limits should be incompatible with appreciating grammar’s ‘prohibitive’ role. For the rules of chess, for example, precisely in virtue of allowing certain moves, prohibit others. But it would be confused to gloss this as, say, the rules of chess limiting my ability to play chess, since without the rules, there would be no such thing as ‘chess’ in the first place.

Perhaps it is Mulhall’s ‘resolute’ conception of nonsense that is preventing him from appreciating this point. For, according to resolute readers, nonsense is not the result of violating established criteria for the use of words; rather, nonsense occurs because we have not yet established criteria for the use of the offending expression. But if so, then it would seem to follow that grammar can’t rule anything out, since that would allegedly involve ruling out *something in particular*, and this is not possible, given that, according to resolute readers, no sense has yet been assigned to the string in question. Mulhall (2007, 3-4) uses the following example to illustrate this idea:

Michael Dummett has offered ‘Chairman Mao is rare’ as a piece of substantial nonsense, because he claims it attempts to conjoin a proper name (which can take only first-level functions as arguments) with a second-level function
(which can take only first-level functions as arguments). But if it is essential to a symbol’s being a proper name that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat ‘Chairman Mao’ as a proper name in this context only if we treat ‘is rare’ as a first-level function rather than a second-level function (say, as meaning ‘tender’ or ‘sensitive’). And by the same token, if it is essential to a symbol’s being a second-level function that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat ‘is rare’ as a second-level function in this context only if we treat ‘Chairman Mao’ as a first-level function rather than a proper name (perhaps on the model of ‘a brutal politician’). Either way of parsing the signs is perfectly feasible – we need only to determine a suitable meaning for the complementary component in each case; but each way presupposes an interpretation of the string as a whole which excludes the other. So treating it as substantial nonsense involves hovering between two feasible but incompatible ways of treating the string, without ever settling on either.5

This argument relies on a counter-intuitive suppressed premise: the thought that it is only possible to identify the meaning of a sub-propositional expression if this occurs within a sentence that has a sense. Not only is this principle extremely implausible in its own right, there is also no evidence at all that the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*6 would have accepted it. Consider, for example, the following passage:

What does it mean to say that the ‘is’ in ‘The rose is red’ has a different meaning from the ‘is’ in ‘twice two is four’? If it is answered that it means that different rules are valid for these two words, we can say that we have only one word here. – And if I am now attending to the grammatical rules, then these just do allow the use of the word ‘is’ in both connexions. – But the rule which shows that the word ‘is’ has different meanings in these sentences is the one allowing us to replace the word ‘is’ in the second sentence by the sign of equality and prohibiting this substitution in the first sentence (1992, §558 translation emended).

This section makes it quite clear that Wittgenstein thinks that there are grammatical rules which determine the correct and the incorrect applications of words. That is to say, Wittgenstein thinks that grammar prohibits the formation of the construction ‘the rose equals (or is equivalent to) red’. This contradicts Mulhall’s contention that nonsense cannot be the result of

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5 For similar arguments see Conant (2005), Diamond (2005) and Witherspoon (2000).

6 Henceforth PI.
We can combine intelligible words in unintelligible ways, but the result of this won’t be a proposition that is ‘determinately unintelligible’, since there is no such thing, but a meaningless string of words.

But from the fact that there is no such thing as a ‘determinately unintelligible’ proposition, it does not follow, as resolute readers suppose, that we cannot identify the words that make up the meaningless string. We can see, for instance, that in the phrase ‘the rose equals red’, the word ‘equals’ is being misused, just as we can see that in Dummett’s example ‘Chairman Mao’ and the expression ‘is rare’ are being misused, without having to attribute a meaning – some sort of ‘nonsensical sense’ – to the expression as a whole (since it has none). All that is required for identification to occur is to know the meanings – the uses of – these expressions in ordinary contexts. Once I have mastered the rules for the uses of these expressions, I can tell straight away that ‘Chairman Mao is rare’ makes no sense, just as I can see straight off, if I have mastered chess, that moving the rook diagonally across the board is not, cheating aside, a possible move in this game.

In other words, once the rules for the use of the expressions ‘Chairman Mao’ and ‘is rare’ are in place, it follows that the combination ‘Chairman Mao is rare’ can make no sense. That is to say, it is precisely because of the kinds of meanings (uses) that ‘Chairman Mao’ and ‘is rare’ have in other, ‘normal’, contexts, that the construction ‘Chairman Mao is rare’ is nonsensical. Hence, pace Mulhall, the grammatical rules constitute ‘a given, impersonal source of authority’ (2007, 66), as once they are in place, certain formations will be ruled out as inadmissible in advance on pain of unintelligibility.

Hutchinson (2007) runs an even more radical line than Mulhall: not only does a word not have a meaning outside a particular context of use,

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7 See also Hacker (2003); Glock (2004); Schönbaumsfeld (2007).
8 And it is important to note here, as Hacker (2003, 19-20) says ‘that if one were to assign to a significant word or phrase a meaning in contexts from which it is excluded’ – as in assign ‘is rare’ in ‘Chairman Mao is rare’, as Mulhall suggests, the meaning of ‘tender’ or ‘sensitive’ – ‘then one would have changed its meaning. So one would, as Wittgenstein noted, be talking of something else’. 
‘it’ (whatever ‘it’ is) doesn’t even qualify as a word unless it is used. Hutchison claims:

There is no such thing as a word outside some particular use…For a word to be is for a word to be used. Language does not exist external to its use by us in the world … [it] cannot, in McDowell’s phrase, be viewed ‘from sideways on,’ in the sense in which we cannot stand outside language in order that we might talk about language. (2007, 706)

This is very confused. We cannot, indeed, use language to get ‘outside’ language tout court, in the sense, perhaps, in which, if we are not resolute readers, Wittgenstein himself attempted to ‘get outside language’ in the Tractatus, and which is also the sense McDowell (who is being misused by Hutchinson here) has in mind, i.e. by trying to adopt some sort of ‘transcendental perspective’ on language and the world. But this does not imply, as Hutchinson mistakenly seems to assume, that we cannot use language to say something about how language functions. That is to say, it is an error to believe, as Hutchinson does, that if we reject such a transcendental perspective, then it just follows that ‘there is no such thing as a word outside some particular use’. For to think that there is such a thing as a word outside particular contexts of use is not in the least the same as thinking there is such a thing as a word outside all contexts of use, and only the latter would qualify as adopting an ‘external’ perspective on language. Hence, at best, all that Hutchinson has shown is that there is no such thing as a word outside language – outside all contexts of use – but no reader of Wittgenstein, ‘resolute’ or otherwise, would disagree with that.

II

Whatever the merits of attributing a resolute conception of nonsense to the Tractatus⁹, nowhere, in the PI, does Wittgenstein say that he believes that there is no difference between philosophical nonsense and plain gibberish¹⁰.

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⁹ This is a question I shall not be addressing in this paper. For a critique of the view see, for example, Hacker (2000), Proops (2001), Williams (2001) and Schönbaumsfeld (2007).

¹⁰ Even the resolute readers’ oft-quoted remark – ‘My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense’ (PI
It is consequently not surprising that Conant (2004, 186), for example, has to cite as evidence a passage from an unpublished 1935 ‘Lecture on Personal Experience’:

*Different kinds of nonsense.* Though it is nonsense to say ‘I feel his pain’, this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word, say ‘abracadabra’…and from saying a string of nonsense words. Every word in this sentence is English, and we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if we discard from our language ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ that is quite different. The second seems nonsense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about the nature of things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain. – The task will be to show that there is in fact no difference between these two cases of nonsense, though there is a psychological distinction, in that we are inclined to say the one and be puzzled by it and not the other. We constantly hover between regarding it as sense and regarding it as nonsense, and hence the trouble arises.

Conant takes this passage as unambiguously supporting his case, and relates it to his reading of the ‘private language’ sections of the PI in the following way. The standard interpretation of these remarks, Conant claims, is ‘to show that the very idea of a private language is the idea of something which we can rule out because of the kind of sense that the locution ‘private language’ has antecedently been given. It takes it that there is something determinate which the philosopher wants to mean by the locution “private language” and that *that* is nonsense’ (2004, 187). But Wittgenstein’s point, according to Conant, is to show that such a conception makes no sense, and, hence, that what we took to be an instance of ‘substantial nonsense’ – a particular something that cannot be – collapses into mere nonsense (plain gibberish).

If we apply these insights to the 1935 passage, the following picture emerges. Wittgenstein wants to disabuse the philosopher of the view that the locution ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ has a sense – there is something determinate the philosopher wants to mean by it – and it is this ‘sense’ which

§464) – is inconclusive, as ‘patent nonsense’ need not necessarily be the same as plain gibberish.
turns out to be nonsense. But, according to Conant’s reading of Wittgenstein, there is at best a psychological distinction between ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ and ‘abracadabra’.

It is not so clear, however, that the remarks in question really do support Conant’s reading. For the point of Wittgenstein’s comments is not to show that what the philosopher took to be substantial nonsense is really plain nonsense – the trouble arises, Wittgenstein says, because we constantly hover between taking the locution in question as sense or regarding it as nonsense, not, pace Conant, between regarding it as substantial nonsense or plain gibberish – rather, what he wants to get the philosopher to see is that we exclude from the language ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ for conceptual or grammatical reasons, and not, as the philosopher imagines, for metaphysical ones. In other words, it is not, as Wittgenstein says, ‘because of some truth about the nature of things or the nature of the world’ that the expression ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ is nonsense – say, because we have discovered ‘that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain.’ The point, therefore, of saying there is no difference between saying ‘abracadabra’ and ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ is not to show that the second string contains nonsense words, as Conant thinks, but rather to prevent the philosopher from supposing that the reason why we discard the latter from the language is to exclude an ‘impossible’ possibility – namely, the ‘possible’ state of affairs of my feeling Smith’s toothache. The very idea of my feeling his toothache is senseless, however, for, if I could, as it were, feel it, then this would eo ipso make it my toothache, not Smith’s (and to say this is to make a grammatical remark). Consequently, the significance of this passage consists in weaning the philosopher away from the idea that a rule of grammar functions like a metaphysical prohibition.

Naturally, once the philosopher has been brought to realize that ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ is nonsense, i.e. that it can be discarded from the language because it is not a move in the game, the same thing follows from it as from ‘abracadabra’ – to wit, nothing11. In this respect, there is indeed no difference between the two strings. But this does not imply, as resolute

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11 Except if we are magicians and are signalling that the conjuring trick has taken place.
readers seem to maintain, that therefore the two strings are the same in *every other way too*. For nothing follows from a tautology such as ‘p or not p’ either, but this fact does not turn it into gibberish (it is, at best, and, as the author of the *Tractatus* thought, senseless, that is to say, it asserts nothing).

In other words, the reason why Wittgenstein says ‘that there is in fact no difference between these two cases of nonsense’, is in order to emphasize that nothing follows from ‘my not being able to feel Smith’s toothache’ – a form of words is withdrawn from circulation, that is all – and this, precisely, in order to head off the ‘metaphysical reading’ which is tempted to construe a string’s being nonsense as a kind of ‘super-falsehood’: something’s being impossible ‘because of some truth about the nature of things’. And if one were to construe nonsense thus, then something *would* follow from an expression’s being nonsensical – namely, the necessary truth of its negation. But it is one of the later Wittgenstein’s achievements to have shown that if ‘p’ is nonsense, then ‘not p’ is nonsense too. It is this that Wittgenstein’s remarks are supposed to alert the reader to, and not, *contra* Conant, that ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ and ‘abracadabra’ are logically indistinguishable – something already signalled by the fact that Wittgenstein italicizes ‘*different kinds of nonsense*’ at the beginning of the passage and says, ‘though it is nonsense to say “I feel his pain”, this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word.’

Of course Conant would continue to maintain that ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ differs only *psychologically* from ‘abracadabra’. But here one may legitimately wonder what this ‘distinctive psychological kind of nonsense’ (Mulhall 2007, 5) is supposed to be that resolute readers appeal to. Given that, as Mulhall warns, ‘it is vital to note that what makes it [the nonsense] illuminating is not anything about the nonsense itself – nothing intrinsic to it, as it were – since logically speaking it has no intrinsic structure’ (2007, 5), it remains mysterious how, exactly, the string manages to bring it about that one is philosophically tempted by it.

It is at this point in the discussion that resolute readers tend to start speaking of ‘imaginatively inhabiting the interlocutor’s perspective’ (2007, 82). But this just raises the same question again in different guise: what, if not content, is it that constrains our imaginative acts of identification? If it is true, as resolute readers seem to suppose, that one cannot even *identify*
the meaning of a word unless it occurs within the context of a sentence that has a sense, then no constraints at all seem available here. And if so, then even wheeling in a Tractarian sign/symbol distinction will not help, for if all I am taken in by is mere signs (not symbols) – signs not parsed in any particular way – then I can conceivably take them to mean anything I please, and hence, it will again be down to pure chance whether what I take them to mean bears any relation to the confusion Wittgenstein wants to dispel.

Even if we grant resolute readers that what we are taken in by is the fact that the nonsensical string ‘jingles like’ or ‘superficially resembles’ a genuine sentence, the question arises, what, precisely, it is that makes the nonsensical string look or sound like a meaningful one in the first place. Can a resolute reader really help himself to a notion of resemblance without having to grant, at the same time, that the relevant string is actually composed of *words*, words that generally have a meaning (even if in this particular context they have none)? For in order for a notion of resemblance to get off the ground, the nonsensical string must have something in common with a genuine sentence. And what might this be, if not the fact that the string is composed of words we can recognize?

‘Piggle wiggle’ does not resemble any kind of sensical linguistic construction and therefore we can’t operate with it. But nonsensical strings of the relevant kind cannot be like that if we are, as resolute readers must maintain, to be ‘taken in’ by them. So the nonsensical string must dupe us by sounding and looking like real words in a grammatically well-formed sentence. But if ‘the words’ in the meaningless string sound and look like real words – and are not just plain gibberish like piggle wiggle – then what is to stop us from saying they *are* real words employed in ways contrary to the rules for their correct use? After all, one might say, if something waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it most probably *is* a duck. And if the only thing preventing resolute readers from granting this is the fact that the string as a whole is nonsense, then this is simply to beg the question.
In the light of all these objections, perhaps the only imaginable selling-point of a resolute reading is the fact that it is difficult to understand the role that reductio-type arguments play in the PI. Anthony Kenny (2004, 180), for example, believes that because Wittgenstein is committed to the view that the ‘philosopher’s dogma is not a genuine proposition from which other things might follow, but only a piece of nonsense in disguise’ (2004, 175), therefore there can be no room for argumentation within Wittgenstein’s philosophical method, since it is ‘impossible to make a piece of nonsense a premise in an argument’ (2004, 175). Consequently, Kenny contends, Hacker, for example, must be wrong to ascribe arguments to Wittgenstein, for, if something is in fact nonsense, it cannot follow from an argument by deductive inference. But if so, we may, Kenny says, ‘well be puzzled about what kind of following’ (2004, 175) Hacker is talking about when he says, for instance, that it follows from the private language argument that solipsism and idealism are misguided philosophies (2004, 175). That said, Kenny immediately goes on to attach a proviso to this claim (2004, 175):

The therapeutic procedure is not, however, a mere incantation. It must obey the laws of logic. What ‘follows from’ the pseudo-proposition must be what would really follow from it if it were a genuine proposition.

But now it seems that Kenny is hoist on his own petard. For he previously castigated Hacker for helping himself, when attributing arguments to Wittgenstein, to a non-deductive notion of ‘following’, while himself appealing, in this passage, to what sounds suspiciously like the resolute readers’ idea of ‘apparent logical relations’ – ‘relations’ that would obtain if only the pseudo-proposition were a genuine proposition. And if something is wrong, as Kenny seems to think, with Hacker’s conception of ‘following’, then, surely, his own invocation of ‘pseudo-following’ – what would ‘really follow’ from [a proposition] if it were a genuine proposition – cannot fare any better. For how, if we allegedly cannot make sense of the idea of ‘non-deductive following’, are we to understand the ‘logical relations’ supposedly at work in ‘pseudo-following’? So, if Kenny is right about Hacker, then his own account can hardly be thought to be immune to similar criticism.
Kenny’s reading therefore seems to parallel the dilemma faced by resolute readers in the previous section: on the one hand Wittgenstein’s therapeutic procedure must not end up collapsing into mere incantation; on the other, it seems impossible to avoid this consequence if nonsense cannot figure in an argument, or is literally plain gibberish. To avoid the first horn, resolute readers appeal to a ‘psychological conception’ of nonsense, while Kenny invokes the notion of ‘pseudo-following’, but neither of these options is, for the reasons given in this paper, very promising.

Interestingly, Wittgenstein in the PI doesn’t actually speak very often of a construction’s being nonsensical. He tends, rather, to speak of a picture lacking a clear application. This might help us get a better sense of what Wittgenstein is up to when he tries to show why we should withdraw a combination of words from circulation, or why a form of words has no clear use. For it is this that ‘reductio arguments’, within the context of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, really come down to. Consider, for example, the following remark which occurs within the context of whether it makes sense to ascribe pains to a stove:

> Here it happens that our thinking plays us a queer trick. We want, that is, to quote the law of excluded middle and to say ‘Either such an image is in his mind, or it is not [either the stove has a pain or it does not]; there is no third possibility. – We encounter this queer argument also in other regions of philosophy. ‘In the decimal expansion of $\pi$ either the group “777” occurs, or it does not – there is no third possibility.’ That is to say: ‘God sees – but we don’t know.’ But what does that mean? – We use a picture; the picture of a visible series which one person sees the whole of and another not. The law of excluded middle says here: It must either look like this, or like that. So it really – and this is a truism – says nothing at all, but gives us a picture. And the problem ought now to be: does reality accord with the picture or not? And this picture *seems* to determine what we have to do, what to look for, and how – but it does not do so, just because we do not know how it is to be applied. (PI §352)

I would like to suggest that to say ‘this combination of words makes no sense’ is analogous to saying ‘this picture has no application’. But a picture, even if senseless, obviously isn’t gibberish. For it suggests, as Wittgenstein says, a particular application to us – and it can only do this if it is *not* mere gobbledygook – but then, when we actually try to apply the picture in this way, this turns out not to be possible. So, for example, one might think that
in order to understand the question whether a stove has pains, it is sufficient simply to imagine that the stove ‘has’ what I ‘have’ when I am in pain (‘either the stove has a pain or it does not’). Wittgenstein might then invite his interlocutor to specify what ‘having’ amounts to in this context, and it would quickly emerge that the philosopher construes the grammar of ‘having a pain’ as functioning like the grammar of being in possession of some kind of object, say, a beetle, albeit it one intrinsically inaccessible to anyone else. And so it perhaps makes sense to stipulate that the same ‘private object’ is forever locked away inside the stove as it is locked away inside me. Thus the latent nonsense gradually becomes ever more patent (PI §464), and Wittgenstein has loosened the grip of the ‘picture that held us captive’ (PI §115) (in this case the ‘inner object’ picture of pain). This process of transformation could be characterized as the attempt, as it were, to model something from the picture, in order to make us see that this can’t be done.

If this account is correct, then Kenny and the resolute readers have, for different reasons, got Wittgenstein wrong. For it is only if we want to reserve the word ‘argument’ for showing a claim to be either true or false that we need balk, like Kenny, at the idea that Wittgenstein uses arguments to show how a particular combination of words does not make sense\(^\text{12}\). Naturally, I cannot ‘deductively prove’ that something is nonsense, as this is a patently incoherent idea – and, in this much, I can, indeed, not make a piece of nonsense a premise in an argument. What I can do, however, is seek to make the nonsense patent by arguing against the philosophical preconceptions (false pictures) that attract the philosopher to the nonsensical sentence in the first place. Once these are undermined, the philosopher will himself be brought to see that his words only seemed to add up to a genuine claim.

\(^{12}\) Even if this means having to modify, as Glock (2004a, 243) says, the standard assumption that everything that stands in logical relations with something meaningful is itself meaningful. See also Denis McManus (2006, 137). If this upsets our philosophical intuitions, it is perhaps high time they were upset.
Literature


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From the synoptic view to the album

When Wittgenstein ruminated on the *Tractatus* in 1933, he told his students that a book on philosophy with a beginning and an end was really “a sort of contradiction.” (YB, 43) The *Tractatus* had, of course, had both: a decisive first sentence and an equally decisive last one. But such a book could be justified, he held now, only if one had a comprehensive, “synoptic” view of things. Clearly he did not think that he was in possession of such a view, when he said this, or that he had ever had an appropriate synoptic vision at the time of writing the *Tractatus*.

The search for such a synoptic view had occupied Wittgenstein, however, from his first notes for the *Tractatus* onwards. “Yesterday I worked a lot but not very hopefully since I lacked the right overview (Überblick),” he wrote on September 21, 1914 in the first of his war time notebooks.¹ And four days later: “I am still lacking an overview and for that reason the problem appears unsurveyable (unübersehbar).” (GT, 25) And another four days on: “I still do not see clearly and have no overview. I see details without knowing how they will fit into the whole.” (Ibid.) And once more two months later: “Again no clarity of vision (Sehen) although I am obviously standing in front of the solution of the deepest problems so that I almost bump my nose in it!!! My mind is simply blind for this right now. I feel that I am standing right at the gate but cannot see it clearly enough to be able to open it.” (GT, 43) These frustrations were not to stop him, however, from completing his book. As he put the *Tractatus* together he must have felt – at least for a moment – that he had found the previously missing synoptic view and that he could deal now with “the (!) problems of philosophy,” as the preface said, in the certainty that they “have in essentials been solved once and for all.”

¹ GT, 24.
With his return to philosophy in 1929 he found himself forced to reconsider the possibility of attaining such a view. The issue arose for him now from his new conception of philosophy as dealing with “particular errors or ‘troubles in our thought’ … due to false analogies suggested by our actual use of expressions.”\(^2\) The focus on particular errors and specific uses of expressions suggested a novel concern with the details of thought and language rather than with a grand overview. If there was anything synoptic in this approach it would involve, in Wittgenstein’s words, “a ‘synopsis’ of many trivialities.”\(^3\) Was there then no comprehensive philosophical overview to be attained? He still thought that our philosophical discomfort “is not removed until we have a synopsis of all the various trivialities. If one item necessary for the synopsis is lacking, we still feel that something is wrong.”\(^4\) There remained, in other words, the feeling, as he said in the *Blue Book*, that “no philosophical problem can be solved until all philosophical problems are solved; which means that as long as they aren’t all solved every new difficulty renders all previous results questionable.” (BB, 4) But the *Blue Book* also indicated that we might have to content ourselves with something less. The work of philosophy, Wittgenstein said now, might, in fact, have to be compared to the arranging of books in a library. Even though our ultimate goal may be to create a complete ordering, we may succeed, in fact, only in “taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more being final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side.” Some of the greatest achievements in philosophy, he added, were just like that. In the face of our hankering after a synoptic view, the difficulty in philosophy was “to say no more than we know.” (BB, 44-45)

In 1914 he had blamed his failure to achieve the appropriate synoptic view on his own personal limitations. Now he thought that the problem was intrinsic to philosophy itself. He told his students: “We encounter the kind of difficulty we should have with the geography of a country for which we had no map, or else a map of isolated bits.” (YB, 43) This forced one to travel repeatedly over the territory in order to discover how things

\(^3\) Ibid., 323.
\(^4\) King / Lee 1980, 34.
are related to each other. “So I suggest repetition as a means of surveying the connections.” (Ibid.) And using the comparison of philosophy with an uncharted country again in the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* he wrote that his reflections on “the concepts of meaning, of understanding, of a proposition, of logic, the foundations of mathematics, states of consciousness, and other things” had forced him “to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction.” Along the way he had come up with a number of passable “sketches of landscapes” but had been unable to give his thoughts “a single direction against their natural inclination.” And this, he added “was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation.” Ruefully he conceded now that, unlike the *Tractatus*, his new book was in consequence “really only an album.” (PI, ix)

“I don’t know my way about.”

In the early 1930’s Wittgenstein had occasionally called his method of examining particular uses of language by the name of “phenomenology.” With this term he meant to distance his work from both the empirical sciences with their explanatory and predictive theories and from the logical purism of the *Tractatus*. Much the same conception of his undertaking is still evident in the *Philosophical Investigations* where we read: “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.” (PI, 126) And: “We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place.” (PI, 109) But by then Wittgenstein had come to avoid the loaded term phenomenology. He characterized philosophy, instead, now simply as supplying “remarks concerning the natural history of human beings.” (PI, 415) Drawing on an older sense of the word “*Naturgeschichte*” in which a description of the night sky can be called “A Natural History of the Starry Heavens”, he was, in other words, characterizing philosophy once more as a descriptive undertaking. But he also wanted to make sure now that no one took him to be supplying a comprehensive phenomenology. Instead, he spoke of philosophy as consisting only of “remarks” on natural history. And even this characterization he modified in the subsequent warning that “we can also invent fictitious

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5 E.g., Gruithuisen 1836.
natural history for our purposes.” (PI, 230) The kind of philosophy he was after was not meant to be dedicated specifically to the description of “our actual use of expressions” but may extend to the description of invented, i.e., fictitious but possible, situations (such as the imagined language game of PI, 2)

The stated purpose of such descriptions had been from the thirties onwards to resolve “muddles” in our speaking and thinking by making language and thought transparent. Behind this project lay the assumption that philosophical problems are generated by our inability to get a clear view of what is at stake in them. They are, in other words, problems of confusion rather than problems of ignorance. There are for Wittgenstein many things that stand in the way of looking at our philosophical problems clearly. One of them is that an “ideal in our thinking” may have become “immovably stuck.” “The idea sits, so to say, as a pair of glasses on our nose and whatever we look at, we see through them. We never have the thought to take them off.” (PI, 103) Two apparently similar forms of expression may induce us to make misleading analogies. Also: “A metaphor that has been incorporated into the forms of our language generates a false appearance; that disquiets us. ‘But this isn’t how it is! – we say. ‘Yet, it must be such.’” (PI, 112) Or we are like a fly in a trap. It doesn’t occur to us that the way out is to retrace our steps rather than to forge ahead. The result is disorientation. Most generally we can say: “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about.’” (PI, 123)

The problem of grammar

Wittgenstein’s crucial difficulty was that “our grammar lacks surveyability.” (PI, 122) In order to appreciate that thought we must understand that “grammar” is meant to be in this context not merely a system of abstract grammatical rules but the organized pattern of linguistic uses and practices. Wittgenstein’s claim is that the actual structure or order of our language game proves to be unsurveyable. He is thinking, in fact, not only about language in the narrow sense. It is the “grammar” of the human form of life, which includes society, culture, and history, that lacks surveyability. Wittgenstein draws our attention, in fact, to this broad phenomenon when he writes in section 122 of the Philosophical Investigations (in my transla-
Our grammar lacks surveyability.” Since he considers language central to the entire human form of life, it follows that our form of life must also be unsurveyable. No wonder then that unsurveyable wholes raise for him issues “of fundamental importance.” That we do not survey the use of our words, our grammar, language, and form of life he declares to be, indeed, “a main source of our lack of understanding.” He goes on to suggest in PI 122 that we need “a surveyable representation” that can generate “the comprehension that consists in ‘seeing connections’.” The concept of a surveyable representation, he adds, “signifies our form of representation, how we see things.” And he closes the section with the somewhat puzzling question: “Is this a ‘worldview’?”

There is much to puzzle about in this passage. That is one reason why it proves difficult to translate. The Anscombe version is certainly unsatisfactory and I have, therefore, found it necessary to modify it in various respects. But even in its original German, the text confronts us with difficulties. For one thing, Wittgenstein never explains what he means by “übersichtlich.” Though section 122 marks clearly a nodal point in his thinking, he appears to use the word “übersichtlich” in a casual fashion. It and its cognates occur, moreover, only seven times in the entire Philosophical Investigations and four of these are to be found in section 122. That the term is nonetheless of great importance is shown by its reappearance in various other places in Wittgenstein’s work. It belongs, moreover, to the visual vocabulary that marks Wittgenstein’s prose from the Tractatus to his last notes. Like the rest of this vocabulary Wittgenstein employs the term “übersichtlich” almost always in a metaphorical fashion. Only occasionally does he use it literally as when he speaks of the color-octahedron as being “a surveyable representation of the grammatical rules” of color concepts. (PR, 52) Similarly, when he writes in the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics that “a mathematical proof must be surveyable”. (RFM, 143) Then he appears to have the kind of proof in mind that can be laid out diagrammatically on a sheet of paper. Not every mathematical proof is, of course, of this kind. So when he claims that every mathematical proof must be surveyable, he must be using the term “surveyable” once again in a metaphorical fashion. That metaphorical use is evident also in the assertion that our grammar lacks surveyability. The grammar of our language is
never a visual object. Wittgenstein seems to be saying that our grammar is not organized in a fashion that we can fully grasp or that is easily or intuitively accessible to us.

Here is what Wittgenstein himself says about the matter when talking about the contradictions in Frege’s and Russell’s logic. He writes (PI, 125) that “it is not the business of philosophy to solve the contradiction by means of a mathematical, logico-mathematical discovery. But to make the state of mathematics that troubles us surveyable, the state before the solution of the contradiction.” His words imply that Frege and Russell did not to begin with have a clear view of the mathematics that generated the contradiction. And so the contradiction came to them as a surprise. They laid down rules of their deductive game but when they applied them, things did not turn out as they had anticipated. Wittgenstein suggests that we need to understand this peculiar situation of being entangled in one’s own rules. The context makes evident that he does not mean that we can literally come to see our entanglement in those rules at a single glance; he means rather that we can make the nature of that entanglement apparent.

But why should anyone ever have thought that the grammar of a language could ever be surveyable like a well-ordered library? Anyone who has struggled to acquire a second language will know how opaque, how arbitrary, how unfathomably complex a grammar can be. Did Wittgenstein not learn this when he learned English? What is surprising and philosophically interesting in the observation that our grammar lacks surveyability? The answer may be simply that the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* had once thought that the logic of our language was intuitively evident and in this sense surveyable. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had written that the logic of our language shows itself and that there can therefore never be surprises in logic. (Tr., 6.1251) His subsequent observation that our grammar lacks surveyability may thus have been directed first and foremost against the *Tractatus* conception of language.

What then follows from the discovery that our grammar is unsurveyable? Early on, in section 5 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes that “the general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision (*das klare Sehen*) impossible. It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can survey the aim and func-
tioning of the words.” To show us such primitive applications is the function of the simple language-games Wittgenstein constructs in the course of the *Investigations*. We can illustrate the point with a remark from Wittgenstein’s notebook from 1914. He had written there: “In the proposition a world is as it were put together experimentally. (As when in the law-court in Paris a motor-car accident is represented by means of dolls, etc.)” (N, 7)

The physical model of the accident in the court room serves here as a representation of the actual happening which is no longer directly accessible to us and as such not surveyable. The model, on the other hand, is surveyable in the straightforward sense that we can look at it from above and see it at once in its entirety. The model displays in an immediately visible fashion the items (cars, people, houses, etc.) that are presumed to have been involved in the incident and it spatially represents their supposed relations. The model is, moreover, permanent and can be studied from different angles whereas the accident itself was a single happening that would have been perceived by different people from different points of view. The model focuses our attention, finally, on what is essential in the accident by not depicting what is irrelevant. It thus provides a fully surveyable representation of an inherently unsurveyable situation.

I have chosen this particular illustration because it brings out a distinction that we need to make explicit, if we are to understand what Wittgenstein is after in section 122 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is the distinction between saying (a) that something is either surveyable or not and (b) that we possess or do not possess a surveyable representation of it. In the case of the car accident, it is clear that the court-room model provides a surveyable representation but the event remains nonetheless unsurveyable in that it cannot be retrieved from the past and was, in any case, never fully surveyable even as it happened. When Wittgenstein writes in section 122 that our grammar lacks surveyability he does not mean then, that our grammar lacks a surveyable representation. And when he adds that we need a surveyable representation, he does not mean to say that this would make the grammar itself surveyable. The surveyable representation is needed, rather, because our grammar is and remains unsurveyable. Just as we need the surveyable court-room model because the accident itself is and remains unsurveyable. Surveyable representations may, in other words, serve various functions. They may, in the simplest case, provide a repre-
sentation of a totality that is itself surveyable. In the second, philosophically most important instance a surveyable representation may serve as a tool for dealing with wholes that are (and remain) intrinsically unsurveyable. Finally, a surveyable representation can also be sometimes used as a blueprint for remodeling a totality and making thus surveyable.

The court-room model also draws our attention to the danger inherent in the methodology of constructing surveyable representations for unsurveyable wholes. For our model may actually misrepresent the relevant features of the accident; it may oversimplify and thereby distort the actual situation; it may represent features that do not bear on the question of responsibility and omit others that are essential. Our means for dealing with the unsurveyability of grammar is, thus, at the same time a potential means for misunderstanding grammar. For when we have constructed a surveyable model, there is always the danger that the model does not capture the significant characteristics of the unsurveyable whole. Thus, the Tractatus had once sought to make the working of language transparent but it had considered, in fact, only a narrow use of language. In the Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein could therefore write that the Tractatus had treated the formula “This is how things are” as if it were the general form of the proposition. (PI, 114) This “surveyable representation” had produced, however, a seriously distorted picture of language and meaning.

In order to avoid such misapprehensions we must understand how surveyable representations can help us to deal with our unsurveyable grammar. These models provide in each case only particular and “primitive” applications of words. That is why they may prove to be illuminating but also misleading. The method of constructing “surveyable representations” is thus not to be fully trusted. Only if we understand this, will we achieve a proper reading of the second half of section 122 of the Investigations. At first sight the passage seems to be saying that we might actually be able to construct a complete surveyable representation of our grammar. But when Wittgenstein writes that the concept of surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us and that it designates our form of representation, the way we look at things,” we should not assume automatically that he means to include himself in the “for us” and the “our.” He is saying, rather, that in our contemporary culture, for us moderns, it is evident that we can represent everything in a surveyable fashion. That as-
sumption is fundamental to how we have come to look at the world. That same assumption was also made by the author of the *Tractatus*. It may, indeed, express a distinctively modern world-view. Hence, the concluding question of section 122: “Is this a ‘Weltanschauung’?”

The mock quotations around the word “Weltanschauung” should alert us to the possibility that Wittgenstein intends to distance himself from this particular world view. That this is so is confirmed by an earlier version of section 122 from 1931. In his “Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough” Wittgenstein already notes the importance that the concept of surveyable representation has “for us” but he concludes the passage at the time with the straightforwardly dismissive sentence: “A similar kind of ‘Weltanschauung’ is apparently typical of our time.” (RFGB, 69) The remark revises, in turn, a still earlier indictment against “our civilization” as obsessed with the ideas of progress and construction. In contrast to the great stream of European and American civilization, Wittgenstein had written in 1930, he himself was concerned only with “clarity, transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*).” (CV, 7) Soon after that he must have concluded that universal transparency was a treacherous ideal. Section 122 of the *Investigations* must be read accordingly.

If the method of constructing surveyable representations is both useful and dangerous, the question is how we are to make the best use of it. The answer suggested by the practice of the *Philosophical Investigations* is that for each unsurveyable totality we must generate a variety of different surveyable representations, not just a single one, as the *Tractatus* had tried to do. We must look at various “primitive kinds of application” and various “primitive forms of language.” (Note the plural in both phrases.) Referring to the numerous “clear and simple language-games” he had described in the early sections of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes also that they “are not preparatory studies for a future regularization of language – as it were first approximations, ignoring friction and air-resistance. The language games are rather objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities.” (PI, 130) The “essence of language,” is to be found in these varying relations between language and our surveyable representations.
Essential complexity

We can generally take a situation in at a glance and thus survey it, when it is sufficiently simple. If there are just three people in a room, I may be able to take that situation in at a single glance. If the room is crowded, however, with dozens of people, I may not be able to see immediately what is going on. But even when there are only three people present, I may find the situation opaque. Assume that I have interrupted the three in a heated argument or that there is an awkward silence in the room, as I enter. I may then be rightly puzzled by what is going on. Finally, I can’t take a situation in at a glance if it is too volatile, if, let us say, people stream incessantly in and out of the room.

When Wittgenstein says that our grammar lacks surveyability, he seems to have these three characteristics in mind. That may be concluded from two sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In section 23 he asks famously “how many different kinds of sentence are there?” And to this he answers: “There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “word”, “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten.” And in section 18 he offers a metaphorical illustration of more or less the same point: “Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions of various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight, regular streets and uniform houses.”

Wittgenstein provides in this way three reasons for speaking of grammar or, generally, of language as unsurveyable. The first is that our language contains “countless” kinds of sentence and use, a “maze” of little streets and squares, and a “multitude” of new boroughs. One of the characteristics of unsurveyable wholes is then that they typically contain a large number of items. But this is not a sufficient condition. Highly totalities may be large and still be surveyable. A second characteristic of an unsurveyable totality is then that the items in it are likely to be of different kinds and are related to each other in multiple ways. This certainly fits the case of our language. To this Wittgenstein adds finally that our language is un-
surveyable also because it is not a closed totality. New types of language and new uses of language are constantly coming into existence while old ones fall by the wayside. We thus end up with three characteristics of unsurveyable totalities. (1) They typically contain large numbers of items. (2) These are typically of many different kinds that are related to each other in many different ways. And (3) they are not closed but constantly in transition. None of the three characteristics is, however, necessary. A totality may consist of only a few items but if these are linked by an exceedingly complex web of relations, the totality may still be unsurveyable. Thus a soccer game may prove unsurveyable even though there are only eleven players on each side. And even if there are only a few items that make up the totality and these are related in relatively simple ways, the totality may still be unsurveyable, if it is sufficiently unstable in its composition. Chaotic events are typically unsurveyable. On the other hand even a closed totality may prove to be unsurveyable as long as the items in it are sufficiently large in number or there are sufficiently many different kinds of relations between them. That is why the grammar of a dead language may be just as unsurveyable as that of a living one.

I will call totalities that possess these three characteristics “essentially complex” or just “complex.” This allows me to distinguish between the epistemic condition of a whole being unsurveyable and the factual characteristics that make it so – two things which Wittgenstein does not explicitly keep apart. We may say then also that the fact of complexity explains the epistemic situation of unsurveyability. I am aware, of course, that the word “complex” has no sharply defined meaning in ordinary usage and that no theorist of complexity has ever offered a precise characterization of its meaning. How large does a totality have to be, how many kinds of items does it have to contain, how diverse must the relations between the items be, how open-ended must the totality be in order to make it essentially complex? We must presumably distinguish degrees as well as types of complexity. The physical universe, for instance, is very large but we may still be able to construct a surveyable representation of a certain coherent set of its properties. That is why we can formulate laws of physics that have both explanatory and a predictive power. The human world, on the other hand, while being only a part of the physical universe, is still unsurveyable. In this case we are concerned with a vast array of diverse rela-
tionships that presents to us as a highly variable totality. We find ourselves thus unable to come up with historical, social, or anthropological laws. Biology seems to fall somewhere between these two cases. The facts of biochemistry may be fully surveyable, but the actual course of biological evolution may be not.

The practice of language

The question arises how we can cope with the grammar of our language, if it lacks surveyability. Don’t we have to possess some kind of grasp of our grammar if our language is to be fluent? And how are we to orient ourselves in our society, in our culture, and most generally in the human form of life, if they, too, lack surveyability?

There are two answers available at this point on how we may get a grasp on a totality that lacks surveyability. The first is that we might be able to organize the totality so that it becomes surveyable. But language (and, more generally, the human form of life) presents us with a different problem. We may, of course, consider the possibility of reforming language in order to make it surveyable. And it is true that such reforms have been tried. But for good reasons we retain, in the end, always our essentially complex, unsurveyable language. I emphasize this because some of Wittgenstein’s words might be misunderstood. In section 92 of the Investigations he speaks, as if we could make our unsurveyable language surveyable. He speaks there of the mistaken view that “the essence of language” is something “that lies beneath the surface;” this view, he adds, “does not see the essence as something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable through ordering (durch Ordnen).” (My translation) Does he mean to say that we can make language surveyable by reorganizing it? This is, surely, not what he can be after, for he also maintains that “philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language.” (PI, 124). The task of the philosopher is certainly not, according to Wittgenstein, to reform or reorganize language in the name of an ideal surveyability.

The suggestion that we might replace the language we speak by another one with a surveyable grammar (English, for instance, with Esperanto or with a logical notation) faces, in any case, two potential obstacles.
The first – commonly cited by Wittgenstein’s interpreters – is that we would have to explain the new surveyable language in the one we already know and since the latter is, by assumption, unsurveyable it is not clear that the new one could be anything else. I am not sure, however, of the force of this argument. Isn’t it true that we have invented various surveyable systems of notation (in mathematics, logic, science, technology, and business) and that we routinely explain their use by means of our ordinary an unsurveyable language? Can’t we create order out of chaos, transparency out of obscurity, and hence, the surveyable out of the unsurveyable? We surely can but we must recognize that the new notation will then not provide a literal translation from the old one. It will not make the unsurveyability of our original language disappear. And so our old problem remains how we can come to grasp that original and unsurveyable language. But why, one might ask, should this bother us, if the new surveyable notation can perform all the tasks of the original language? The question is only whether any such new notation can actually do that job. And there are many reasons to doubt that.

This gets me to the second and more serious objection to the idea that we could replace our unsurveyable language with a surveyable one. We can certainly invent a language with a simpler and more transparent syntax than that of English; but when Wittgenstein says that the grammar of our language is unsurveyable, he does not mean that its syntax is so. He uses the word “grammar,” instead, as I have already said, for the system of use we make of our words. And similarly when he employs the word language, he does not mean simply a system of notation with its precise rules but the entire activity of using signs. And it is far from obvious that we could invent a language that can serve all the uses of language in this broad sense and still have a surveyable grammar. This should dispose of the objection of those linguists who have argued that behind the irregular surface structure of our language lies a precise and completely regular syntax and that this syntactic deep structure may even be innate to the human mind. Wittgenstein’s considerations bypass this entire objection. It may or may not be the case that our language has a surveyable deep syntax, Wittgenstein’s point remains that such a syntax will not uniquely determine the use we make of it in the activity of speaking. Wittgenstein must be right in saying that this system of use of our language is unsurveyable.
What then exactly is achieved by constructing a series of models or surveyable representations to represent an unsurveyable totality? What is the relation between these models and the totality? Two very different answers suggest themselves which Wittgenstein does not explicitly separate. The first is that each of the many surveyable models will represent a part of the totality we are dealing with. On this account the unsurveyable totality is made up of surveyable parts and each of those can be captured in a surveyable representation. The totality is unsurveyable only in the sense that it requires an unsurveyable series of representations to represent it completely. The second possibility is that each surveyable representation will give us only an approximate picture of the totality and we can get an understanding of that totality only by having a number of more or less adequate pictures of the whole. We can call the first the part-whole view of unsurveyability and the second the approximation view. The reason why Wittgenstein does not distinguish them may be that he considers language to be unsurveyable in both ways. If we think of “language” as comprehending both the language of everyday life and the logical notations of the propositional calculus and other precise notations, it may turn out that some parts of language can be represented precisely and others only approximately. Our misunderstanding of language may then rest on the false idea that the parts of language which can be represented only approximately are like those which can be represented precisely. We are, in other words, victims of a part-whole fallacy. It may be true of totalities, though, that they can be represented only with the help of approximations. If we assume that any such approximation gives us, in fact, a full and precise representation we are misled by a false understanding of the idea of representation. That was, indeed, the fallacy of the Tractatus, the belief that in order for an A to represent a B, A and B must have precisely the same structure. That view is certainly incompatible with Wittgenstein’s realization in the Philosophical Investigations that one and the same picture can represent completely different things: “here a glass cube, there an inverted open box, there a wire frame of that shape, there three boards forming a solid angle.” (PI, 193)

Two things follow from this. The first is that our capacity for using words, the command we have of our grammar, and our ability to participate in the human form of life cannot be due to our possession of a survey-
able representation of the use of our words, of our grammar, or of our form of life. There are no such representations to be had. We acquire our linguistic capacities and our ability to participate in human life rather by imitation and habituation, by drill and practice. In section 5 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes that when we teach children the first, primitive forms of language, “the teaching of language is not explanation, but *Abrichten.*” Our translator has piously rendered the last word as “training,” but Wittgenstein is speaking, in fact, of a kind of conditioning to which we commonly subject circus animals. By means of punishments and rewards we manage to get them to perform all kinds of maneuvers. One easily thinks here of the harsh methods that the school teacher Ludwig Wittgenstein used to get his children to learn. An important part of such conditioning, Wittgenstein writes in the *Investigations* “consist[s] in the teacher’s pointing to the objects, directing the child’s attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word … This kind of teaching by indication can be said to establish an associative connection between the word and the thing.” (PI, 6) Similarly, the teacher may show the students a table with words and pictures and the student “learns to look the picture up in the table through conditioning and part of this conditioning consists perhaps in the student learning to pass with his finger horizontally from the left to the right in the table.” (PI, 86) We get a grasp of the grammar of our language through such simple things as learning to direct our attention, practicing the voicing of sounds so that uttering them becomes easy, establishing associations between words and objects, memory training, learning to use our fingers and to co-ordinate finger and eye movements, etc. In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein adds that “language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.” (OC, 475) He proposes to look at man, instead, as an animal “a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination.” When a child first learns words like “book” or “arm chair” it does not learn that there are such things books and chairs but it learns to get the book or to sit in the arm chair. The human language game is thus based not on theoretical, verbalized knowledge but on practice. “The child, I should like to say, learns to react in such-and-such a way; and in so reacting it doesn’t so far know anything. Knowledge only begins at a later level.” (OC, 538)

We acquire a grasp of our grammar thus as a practical capacity, not by being having a surveyable representation of that grammar. And this
practical capacity is itself essentially complex and hence unsurveyable. Eventually we learn, of course, to reflect on our practical capacities, our grammar and at this point we learn to understand, use, and even construct surveyable representations of them. But these will be inevitably partial or approximating representations since our practical capacity to use our language is and remains essentially complex and hence unsurveyable. Surveyable representations of our grammar may nevertheless serve a number of purposes. They may prove helpful at times in teaching a language. We all know that from learning a second language as adults. But we also know that the grammatical rules we are taught in such contexts have typically many exceptions and are never sufficient for establishing a fluent capacity to use the language. Surveyable representations of grammar may also serve as tools for normalizing and regularizing our linguistic practices. National academies, like the French Academy, often engage in such normalizing activity. Surveyable representations may finally help us also to overcome grammatical confusions. Wittgenstein is convinced that these confusions are the source of our philosophical dilemmas. In order to resolve what troubles us philosophically, we will therefore find ourselves engaged in constructing various surveyable representations of our grammar. But we must always remain alert to the fact that such constructions can give rise to new philosophical confusions.

**Hyper-complexity**

Wittgenstein’s interest in the use and the limitations of the method of surveyable representation went beyond his concern with language. That is evident from his “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” and his comments on Spengler’s *Decline of the West* in the 1930’s. In criticism of Frazer’s attempt to explain magical and religious practices in evolutionary terms, Wittgenstein suggested at the time that these phenomena can be adequately understood only through the applying method of surveyable representation. The representations of individual magic and religious practices and more broadly of individual primitive cultures will make their specific “logic” or “grammar” apparent. Those representations will reveal to us also family resemblances between various magical and religious practices and cultures. They will establish finally the existence of a gulf between those practices
and cultures and our own scientific civilization. The method of surveyable representation can make explicit that magic and religion have their own characteristic grammar and that their language games differ “grammatically” from those generated in our scientific and technological civilization. To reach those conclusions does not require that we should be able to give total representations of either magic, religion, or science. Wittgenstein certainly does not assume that we could give a synoptic representation of them. His message is, on the contrary, that we cannot expect to be able to construct an adequate synoptic representation of the human form of life.

In his comments on Spengler, Wittgenstein objects in a similar fashion to the idea of a single surveyable “morphology of world history.” Spengler had, of course, argued that individual cultures are incommensurable organic wholes and that we can understand them only in terms of their own internal logic. He had maintained, nevertheless, at the same time that we can establish a common morphology of culture. At the heart of Spengler’s book we find, accordingly, a tabulation of the great world-cultures. This overview is intended to show us that all cultures follow inevitably the same course of internal development and pass through strictly corresponding historical stages. Spengler’s table provides us with a paradigm of a surveyable representation – but as such it fails in Wittgenstein’s eyes. While Wittgenstein’s notes express some sympathy for Spengler’s approach, he is strictly critical of the idea that human cultures can be understood in terms of a single model of organic development. Contrasting Spengler’s view to his own, he writes in 1937 that one can prevent general assertions (about language, culture, the human form of life) from being empty or unjustified only by looking at the ideal, i.e., the surveyable representation, as “an object of comparison – so to say as a measuring-rod – instead as a preconceived idea to which everything must conform. For in this lies the dogmatism into which philosophy slips so easily.” The words anticipate section 131 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. They go a little further, however, by adding: “The ideal loses nothing of its dignity, if it is put forward as principle of the form of representation. A good measurability.” (CV, 26-27)

Once we expand the idea of unsurveyability from grammar and language to history, culture, society, we must pay attention, however, to the different kinds of complexity and hence to the different sorts of unsurvey-
ability that these totalities exhibit. The totalities in question are, of course, all essentially complex in the sense I have already specified in that they all consist of large numbers of items of a number of kinds, that these items stand in a large number of diverse relations, and that they are open-ended. They differ nevertheless in their type of complexity because of the nature of their constituent elements. While we can say roughly that grammar and language consist of words and sentences and such like, history, culture and society involve human beings not just as bodies or as biological organisms, but as agents who have views about themselves, about their surrounding, and indeed about their history, culture, and society. It is characteristic of this latter sort of totality that views of the agents within them help to define those totalities. From this results a new type of complexity.

If I were to give an account, for instance, of politics in the United States I would have to talk, first of all, of a large array of material facts: the state of the economy, budgets and deficits, climate, landscape, and resources, industrial and military hardware, populations, poverty and wealth, and so on. It should be clear from this short list that the material aspect of the political culture of the US is essentially complex and thus, in principle, unsurveyable. But in order to give a full account of American politics I would also have to talk about the views of Republicans and Democrats, about the peculiar beliefs of certain fundamentalists, about the aggressive nationalism of some neo-conservatives, and about the mildly ineffective liberalism and humanism of many other Americans. The political culture of America is defined not only by certain material facts but also by certain views of these facts. This adds a whole new layer of complexity to a totality such as a political system. Each of the varying viewpoints that constitutes in part such a system concerns, moreover, not about the material aspects of the system but also the views that others within the system, in turn, have of it. Thus, Republicans have political views not only about the state of the economy but also about the views of their Democratic opponents. And Democrats have views not only about the military-industrial complex but also about the views of Republicans concerning that complex. It is easy to see that each of these political views will, in fact, be unsurveyable. This does not mean, of course, that these views are inaccessible to us. Wittgenstein has shown how absurd that conclusion would be. If it were in principle impossible for me to say anything about the views of others, then I
would have no reasons for ascribing any such views to them. Nonetheless, it is true that, in practice, I cannot construct an adequate synoptic representation of political viewpoints. My representation will be, rather, always only a partial account of such a view or a loose approximation to it and most likely both.

But if every individual view of American politics is unsurveyable, it will follow a fortiori that the totality of such viewpoints will be unsurveyable. And if that totality is unsurveyable then the system of American politics is also unsurveyable and this not only because the material facts are unsurveyable. We have thus, a cascade of levels of unsurveyability. The same can be said for totalities such as a human society, a human culture or civilization, and, of course, the human form of life as a whole. They all exemplify a type of complexity that goes substantially beyond the complexity of grammar and language. I will for that reason speak of totalities such as societies, cultures, or political systems as hyper-complex.

Essentially complex totalities present us with distinctive epistemic challenges since we can’t ever comprehend them in the way in which we can comprehend surveyable wholes. Wittgenstein recognized, of course, the important function of partial and approximating representations of our grammar and our language. He was, in fact, convinced that we could resolve some of our more persistent philosophical problems by constructing such representations for grammar and language. At the same time he cautioned against the wish to have a complete, synoptic representation of our grammar, our language. That wish, he thought, might actually lead us into philosophical confusions and misunderstandings. The same kinds of issues arise with respect to hyper-complex totalities – but in an intensified form.

When it comes to dealing with society, culture, politics, history, and the human form of life as a whole we need to handle the method of representation with even more caution. It is not only that such totalities are substantially more complex than grammar and language and hence also unsurveyable in a new and more extreme sense. They also present us with new kinds of philosophical difficulties. These are generated by the fact that such totalities are self-reflective in character. Views of the nature of these totalities are constitutive components of them. These views have, moreover, a peculiar characteristic. In order for agents to operate in these hyper-complex totalities they require synoptic views of that totality. In order to
act politically, for instance, agents require a comprehensive view of the political system in which they are acting. Similarly, in order to engage in a culture, agents need to have an overall view of that culture. These synoptic views may, of course, be quite schematic; they nevertheless need to be views of the whole. This is quite different from the case of grammar and language. In order to speak a language grammatically we do not need an overall view of that language. Representations of grammar are certainly useful for our mastery of language. But they need to be synoptic. Partial and approximating representations will do. This is not sufficient for our operating in hyper-complex formations. At the same time, it should be clear that in these domains our representations will always fall radically short. The practical need for a synoptic view runs here head-on into the impossibility of ever achieving one that is adequate.

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Wissende und Zweifelnde – Wittgensteins „Doppelangriff“

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Was Skeptizismus und Idealismus betrifft, stellt Wittgenstein vor allem die Sinnhaftigkeit (aber auch die Vorstellbarkeit) gewisser Zweifel in Frage und versucht darüber hinaus aufzuzeigen, dass ein umfassender Zweifel nicht möglich ist, da auch Skeptiker wie Idealisten gewisse Voraussetzungen nicht vermeiden können.

1 Wenn Wittgenstein in den von mir zitierten Bemerkungen überhaupt eine der beiden Positionen beim Namen nennt, dann stets nur den Idealismus (vermutlich Berkeleyscher Prägung). Meines Erachtens konzentriert er sich aber in allen diesen Bemerkungen auf den Aspekt des versuchten umfassenden, sprachspielübergreifenden Zweifels. Die Frage hingegen, ob man entweder etwa daran zweifelt, ob wir zu einem Wissen über die Existenz materieller Gegenstände gelangen können, oder aber daran, ob die materiellen Gegenstände geistunabhängig existieren, scheint mir für ihn eine untergeordnete Rolle zu spielen. Und auf ihre je sehr verschiedene Weise melden die Vertreter beider Positionen Zweifel an der Existenz materieller Gegenstände an („wenn man es nicht wissen kann, kann es auch sein, dass sie nicht existieren“ versus „da wir keinen geistunabhängigen, direkten Zugang zu den materiellen Gegenständen haben, kann es auch sein, dass sie nicht existieren“).
Ich werde im Folgenden von den vielen Bemerkungen über Moore einerseits und Skeptizismus bzw. Idealismus andererseits einige jener Paragraphen näher betrachten, in denen Wittgenstein nicht die eine oder die andere Position angreift, sondern sich gegen beide Konzeptionen richtet.

1. Unklare Aussagen

Der erste Schritt dieser Doppelstrategie wird gleich zu Beginn des Buches unternommen, in den §§2 bis 4: „Daß es mir – oder Allen – so scheint, daraus folgt nicht, daß es so ist. Wohl aber läßt sich fragen, ob man dies sinnvoll bezweifeln kann.“ (ÜG §2) Im ersten Satz wird der Zweifelnde gegen Moore verteidigt: Denn dass beispielsweise Moore und seine Zuhörer überzeugt sind, Moores Hände zu sehen, widerlegt nicht die Ansicht, dass möglicherweise alle gemeinsam einer Sinnestäuschung unterliegen. „Ich (wir) sehe(n) sie“ bzw. „ich weiß, dass sie existieren“ sind keine adäquaten oder gar befriedigenden Antworten auf den geäußerten Zweifel, ob wir nicht anhaltenden und umfassenden Sinnestäuschungen unterliegen, und sie vertreiben auch den bemühten Dämon nicht.


Rückbezogen auf die in §2 gestellte Frage kann man aus dieser Bemerkung herauslesen, dass man im Fall eines sinnvollen Zweifels auch über „Möglichkeit[en] des Sichüberzeugens“ verfügt, also Kriterien der Überprüfung kennt, mit deren Hilfe man feststellen kann, ob z.B. ein Gegenstand existiert oder nicht.

Eine erste Voraussetzung hierfür ist, dass man versteht, was mit dem Wissensanspruch bzw. der Zweifelsbekundung gemeint ist. Dieses Thema wird nun in §4 näher behandelt: „Ich weiß, daß ich ein Mensch
Um zu sehen, wie unklar der Sinn des Satzes ist, betrachte seine Negation.“ (ÜG §4) Sehen wir uns den Gebrauch von „ich weiß, dass ich ein Mensch bin“ bzw. „ich weiß nicht, ob ich ein Mensch bin“ näher an. Außerhalb des philosophischen Diskurses fällt zunächst auf, dass wir in beiden Fällen über die entsprechende Äußerung irritiert wären – also sowohl dann, wenn es jemand für nötig hält uns mitzuteilen, er wisse, dass er ein Mensch sei (und hierbei nicht nur z.B. auf ethisch relevante Aspekte des Menschseins abzielt), als auch dann, wenn jemand es für wichtig erachtet, Zweifel in Bezug auf sein Menschsein zu artikulieren (und hierbei ebenfalls nicht nur ethisch relevante Aspekte wie etwa ein verwerfliches Verhalten gegenüber einem Mitmenschen anspricht). In beiden Fällen müssten wir bei unserem Gesprächspartner nachfragen, was er uns mitteilen will, da sich uns der Sinn solcher Sätze ohne nähere Bestimmung nicht erschließt. Ein Wissensanspruch erscheint hier ebenso unklar wie der durch die Negation artikulierte Zweifel.

Um aber wieder zu Wittgensteins Bemerkung zurückzukommen und damit zu der Frage, wieso es hilfreich sein soll, die Negation des Satzes zu betrachten, ist auf einen Unterschied in unseren Reaktionen hinzuweisen: Angenommen, jemand teilt mir mit, er wisse, dass er ein Mensch sei; dann werde ich mich wundern, warum er die Aussage für nötig hält (mir fehlt der Mitteilungswert) und ich werde über die Formulierung irritiert sein, aber dem, was er zu wissen behauptet, werde ich nicht widersprechen wollen. Ich werde ihn also weder zu weiteren Überlegungen oder zur Suche nach Beweisen für sein Menschsein auffordern noch werde ich versuchen, ihn vom „Gegenteil“ zu überzeugen. Die Aussage, dass der Andere ein Mensch ist, fordert mich nicht zum Widerspruch heraus.


² Das heißt nicht, dass ich mir nicht – so wie beispielsweise Descartes – Situationen ausmalen kann, in denen sich meine Überzeugung als falsch herausstellt. So könnte ich den Zweifel etwa in den fiktiven Kontext einbetten, dass eine friedliche Be-

2. Mangel an Beweisen für oder gegen die Existenz materieller Gegenstände

Die nächsten beiden hier relevanten Bemerkungen (§§23 und 24) beginnen mit der Beschreibung einer Situation, in der ebenfalls jemand behauptet, er wisse, dass seine Hände existieren. Nehmen wir also an, ein Mensch wurde vor kurzem operiert und vor der Operation war nicht sicher, ob seine Hände gerettet werden können oder nicht etwa doch amputiert werden müssen. Ich besuche diesen Menschen und sehe am Ende seiner Arme dicke Verbände. Wenn er nun einen Zweifel daran äußerte, ob seine Hände noch existieren, würde mich das nicht erstaunen – denn schließlich hat dieser Mensch eine riskante Operation genau dieser Hände hinter sich; eventuell hat die Chirurgin noch nicht mit ihm gesprochen (oder sie hat es getan, der Operierte war aber nach der Narkose noch nicht bei vollem Bewusstsein). In diesem Fall bräuchte ich keine weitere Erläuterung, um zu verstehen, was dieser Zweifel bedeuten soll. Der Grund seines Zweifels ist für mich nachvollziehbar, mir ist klar, worauf er sich bezieht und ich sehe auch Möglichkeiten, diesen Zweifel auszuräumen.
Ebensowenig würde mich ein von ihm geäußterer Wissensanspruch in dieser Situation irritieren – etwa als Antwort auf einen von mir geäußerten Zweifel. Denn 1. war, wie gesagt, vor der Operation nicht abzusehen, ob seine Hände nicht eventuell amputiert werden müssten; und 2. gehe ich davon aus, dass er die Möglichkeit hatte (und diese auch genutzt hat), sich von dem Vorhandensein der beiden Hände zu überzeugen, indem er z.B. die Verbände abgenommen oder die Ärztin gefragt hat.


In diesem Fall ist es dann nicht mehr weit zu der Frage, die zu Beginn des §24 thematisiert wird: „Mit welchem Recht zweifle ich nicht an der Existenz meiner Hände?“ Das Pikante an dieser Frage ist natürlich vor allem, dass durch sie die Beweislast an jene übergeben wird, die von der Existenz materieller Gegenstände überzeugt sind. Und Moore ist ja auf diese Herausforderung eingegangen und hat versucht, einen solchen Beweis zu erbringen – der aber nach Wittgenstein nicht nur missglückt ist...

Wittgensteins Antwort auf die Zweifel von Skeptikern und Idealisten lautet hingegen sehr verschieden von jener Moores (und anderer Philosophen, die sich um Beweise für die Existenz materieller Gegenstände bemüht haben): „Wer aber so fragt, der übersieht, dass der Zweifel an einer Existenz nur in einem Sprachspiel wirkt. Dass man also erst einmal fragen müsse: Wie sähe so ein Zweifel aus? und es nicht so ohne weiteres versteht.“ (ÜG §24)

Dieser Punkt wurde auch in §3 bis zu einem gewissen Grad schon angedeutet. Üblicherweise zweifeln wir an der Existenz von konkreten Gegenständen und in konkreten Situationen – etwa, ob ein bestimmtes Buch noch existiert (nachdem wir mehrfach die gesamte Wohnung durchsucht und es nicht gefunden haben, uns aber noch daran erinnern, es zuletzt in der Nähe des Mülleimers gesehen zu haben). In solchen Fällen haben wir einen konkreten Anlass für unseren Zweifel, der überdies auf einen konkreten Gegenstand gerichtet ist: Wir finden trotz wiederholter Suche das Buch nicht. Wir verstehen also, wie es zu einem solchen Zweifel kommt, und wir haben auch eine klare Vorstellung von ihm. (Und vor allem bezweifeln wir die Existenz eines einzelnen Gegenstands vor dem Hintergrund der unhinterfragten Voraussetzung, dass es andere Gegenstände gibt.) Ganz anders aber stellt sich die Situation dar, wenn wir uns überlegen, was wir uns unter einem Zweifel an der Existenz materieller Gegenstände vorzustellen haben: Woran sollen wir denn da genau zweifeln? Können wir z.B. auf irgendwelche Erfahrungen rekurrieren, um einen solchen Zweifel verständlich erscheinen zu lassen? Denn selbst wenn es geschehen sollte, dass wir das eine gesuchte Buch nie wieder finden, dann wäre das in keiner Weise etwa mit dem Zweifel vergleichbar, ob nicht alle unsere Sinneswahrnehmungen eine Täuschung darstellen. Und deshalb wird Wittgensteins Gegenfrage hier durchaus zu Recht gestellt: Wie man sich einen derartigen sprachspielübergreifenden Zweifel vorzustellen habe, ob man überhaupt wisse, was ein solcher universaler Zweifel bedeute? Skeptiker und Idealisten müssten uns also z.B. erklären, wie man es sich vorzustellen hat, dass sich alle Sprachspiele, in denen es um Existenz geht,
als „falsch gespielt“ herausstellen (vgl. ÜG §496). Vor allem aber müssten sie uns eine Frage beantworten können: Wie sollte in diesem Fall die Entdeckung eines Irrtums aussehen? (Vgl. ÜG §32)

Zusammengefasst: Der Skeptiker geht davon aus, dass wir nicht wissen können, ob es materielle Gegenstände gibt, der Idealist bezweifelt die Existenz der materiellen Gegenstände. Wittgensteins „Antwort“ auf diese Herausforderung besteht im Wesentlichen in der Formulierung von Gegenfragen: Mit welchem Recht zweifelst du an der Existenz materieller Gegenstände bzw. ziehst du einen solchen Zweifel überhaupt in Betracht (hast du überzeugende Gründe für diesen Zweifel)? Kannst du mir erklären, was dieser Zweifel bedeuten soll? (Und darauf kann die Antwort nicht lauten: „Ich bin mir eben nicht sicher, ob sie existieren“ oder „Ich glaube eben nicht, dass sie existieren“.) Wie soll ich mir hier die Entdeckung eines Irrtums vorstellen? (Wie finde ich beispielsweise heraus, dass mein Leben ein Traum ist?) Solange diese Fragen nicht beantwortet sind, bleibt nicht nur unklar, was mit der Artikulation solcher Zweifel gemeint ist, sondern erscheinen sie vor allem müßig (vgl. ÜG §117), sie „wirken“ nicht.

Analogen Fragen muss sich aber natürlich auch derjenige stellen, der behauptet, er wisse, dass materielle Gegenstände existieren.

3. Grammatische Verwirrungen


Interessant ist hierbei vor allem die Formulierung „und doch“, mit der Wittgenstein die Ähnlichkeit des Status von Sätzen wie „es gibt physikalische Gegenstände“ und „ich weiß nicht, ob es physikalische Gegenstände gibt“ kennzeichnet. Denn auf die Frage, ob ein Zweifel an der Existenz materieller Gegenstände nicht eventuell doch vorstellbar sei, folgt die Antwort, dass es dennoch unsinnig sei, ihre Existenz zu behaupten, wo-
durch die Verbindung zwischen diesen doch sehr verschiedenen Aussagen hergestellt ist.

Hier fühlt man sich zunächst an einige der zuvor behandelten Paragraphen erinnert, in denen Wittgenstein auf die Unklarheit der Mooreschen Sätze wie auch jene von Skeptikern und Idealisten hinweist; mit dem Stichwort des „Erfahrungssatzes“ ordnet er seine Überlegungen nun aber in den meines Erachtens für ihn zentralen Kontext ein – jenen der Unterscheidung zwischen empirischen Sätzen einerseits und grammatischen Sätzen andererseits.

Grammatische Sätze zeichnen sich im Gegensatz zu empirischen Sätzen für Wittgenstein dadurch aus, dass wir sie 1. infolge der Abrichtung üblicherweise nicht auf ihre Wahrheit hin überprüfen, sondern un hinterfragt als wahr annehmen (ihrer also unhinterfragt und zweifellos gewiss sind), und dass wir 2. keine Vorstellung vom Gegenteil haben, denn es handelt sich bei grammatischen Sätzen um Begriffsbestimmungen. Die Schwierigkeiten, sich das Gegenteil vorzustellen (bzw. sich vorzustellen, dass es sich anders verhält), resultieren daraus, dass wir mit solchen Sätzen keine zu überprüfenden empirischen Sachverhalte artikulieren, sondern in der Regel unhinterfragte Maßstäbe, Paradigmen. Und vor diesem Hintergrund stellt er nun implizit wieder die gleichen Fragen: Wenn wir in Zweifel ziehen wollen, ob es materielle Gegenstände gibt – was sollen wir uns unter einem solchen Zweifel vorstellen? Können wir uns hiervon ein (wie immer geartetes) Bild machen? (Vgl. hierzu PU §251) Wenn wir hingegen zu wissen behaupten, dass es materielle Gegenstände gibt – welche überzeugenden Beweise können wir für ihre Existenz anführen? Gestehen wir eine Irrtumsmöglichkeit zu?

Wissende und Zweifelnde – Wittgensteins „Doppelangriff“

Wortgebrauch machen (und nicht einen empirisch verwendeten Satz über die Existenz physikalischer Gegenstände formulieren).


4. Philosophische Redensarten – Zusammenfassung

Die größte Leistung des „Doppelangriffs“ auf die philosophische Streitfrage um die Existenz materieller Gegenstände besteht meines Erachtens im Aufzeigen der Verwandtschaft des Gebrauchs der Wörter „wissen“ und „zweifeln“. Da im Fall eines Wissensanspruchs die Angabe von Gründen verlangt werden kann, ist auch die Möglichkeit eines Irrtums eröffnet, einem Zweifel an dem vermeintlich oder tatsächlich Gewussten der Weg gegeben – ein Aspekt, den Moore übersieht. Umgekehrt kann aber ebenso im Fall einer Zweifelsbekundung eine Begründung verlangt werden, wenn wir selbst etwa diesen Zweifel nicht haben, vielleicht nicht einmal verstehen, was er bedeuten soll – ein Aspekt, den Skeptiker wie Idealisten übersehen.

Vor diesem Hintergrund kann dann der nächste Schritt erfolgen: Anhand verschiedener Beispiele arbeitet Wittgenstein heraus, dass die Sprachspiele im Zusammenhang mit „wissen“ und „zweifeln“ üblicherweise nur im Kontext konkreter Situationen verwendet werden, in denen überdies Prüfmethoden bekannt sind, deren Anwendung entweder das zu wissen Behauptete beweist (bzw. als Irrtum herausgestellt) oder aber den Zweifel behebt.

Rückbezogen auf die philosophischen Konzeptionen bedeutet dies Folgendes: Moores Wissensanspruch erweist sich u. a. deshalb als ungerechtfertigt, da er einen möglichen Irrtum explizit ausschließt. Der Zweifel des Skeptikers bzw. des Idealisten hingegen harrt insofern einer Rechtfertigung, als erst Möglichkeiten genannt werden müssten, diesen Zweifel zu bestärken oder zu entkräften (die Beweislast wird also wieder an die Vertreter dieser Positionen zurückgegeben); Skeptiker bzw. Idealisten müssten uns z.B. eine Vorstellung davon geben können, wie die Entdeckung eines Irrtums bezüglich der Existenz materieller Gegenstände aussehen könnte – und damit eine Möglichkeit zur Prüfung der Stichhaltigkeit ihres Zweifels anbieten.

Kurz: Wenn wir in Bezug auf eine Aussage nicht wissen, wie sie sich als Irrtum herausstellen könnte, dann sind weder Wissensansprüche noch Zweifelsbekundungen gerechtfertigt, bzw., vorsichtiger formuliert: dann erscheint beides zunächst äußerst unklar.

Mit Hilfe der Unterscheidung zwischen Wissen und Gewissheit wiederum, ebenfalls anhand vieler Beispiele und mit der Betrachtung des Spracherwerbs als Abrichtung belegt, zeigt Wittgenstein darüber hinaus auf, dass sowohl jene, die in Bezug auf Gewissheiten einen Wissensanspruch stellen, als auch jene, die hier einen Mangel an Gründen für die Überzeugung beklagen, als auch jene, die hier einen Mangel an Gründen für die Überzeugung beklagen, insofern einer Täuschung unterliegen, als sie davon ausgehen, es mit Hypothesen zu tun zu haben, wohingegen Wittgenstein aufzuzeigen versucht, dass wir es bei Sätzen wie „es gibt physikalische Gegenstände“ oder „es gibt (vielleicht) keine physikalischen Gegenstände“ nicht mit empirisch verwendeten Sätzen zu tun haben, sondern mit Sätzen, in denen logische Begriffe verwendet werden, also Sätzen, die un­hinterfragte Voraussetzungen unserer Sprachspiele zum Ausdruck bringen, die Regeln unserer Sprachspiele artikulieren.


Daher kann man mit Wittgenstein auf philosophischer Ebene zum einen Moore vorhalten „›Du weißt gar nichts!‹“ (ÜG §407) und zum anderen Skeptikern wie Idealisten entgegnen, dass sie nicht mehr tun als „gewisse Redensarten“ (Ms 136, 140a) zu pflegen.

\(^4\) Auf diesen Aspekt hat mich Klaus Puhl aufmerksam gemacht.
Literatur


Language and Forms of Life
Wittgenstein’s Non-Explanatory ‘Craving’, ‘Discomforts’ and ‘Satisfactions’

Frank Cioffi, Kent

What is disastrous in the scientific way of thinking (which today rules the whole world) is that it wants to respond to every discomfort by giving an explanation. (Wittgenstein, TS 219,8)

Wittgenstein questions the pertinence of empirical enquiry to a wide range of problems. Among these are the problems Freud addressed; the problems Frazer addressed; the problems Darwin addressed in the ‘Expression of Emotions’; the problems aesthetics addresses; the problems experimental psychology addresses; some of the problems of colour that Goethe addressed; an indeterminate number of the problems science in general addresses; the creation of the world; the situation of someone troubled by love; the teachings of Jesus.

What these cases in which Wittgenstein denies the pertinence of empirical enquiry have in common is not that he holds the phenomenon necessarily inexplicable but rather that empirical explicable is not what is wanted. What is wanted varies from an a priori overview of the phenomena to a better grasp of the impression they make on us, and – where this is appropriate – a less troubled one.

Wittgenstein sometimes anticipates an acknowledgement from others that in proffering explanations they had failed to grasp the conceptual character of the question they addressed he also suggests that, even where this is not the case, they will, on consideration, acknowledge that explanation is not what that they really wanted. Wittgenstein’s anti-explanatory remarks are often really an incitement to us to know our own minds better.

How one can best convey the distinctive nature of the search for those ‘feeling and thoughts’ which confer ‘depth’ on a phenomenon or explain why, for example, it strikes us as ‘sinister’, ‘tragic’, ‘terrible’ etc.
Dilthey makes clear the a priori character of such an enterprise when having asked ‘What happens when an experience becomes the object of my reflections’ he replies ‘I bring this situation to discriminating consciousness. I abstract the structural connections and isolate them. All that I thus abstract is contained in the experience itself and is only being illuminated’ (Dilthey 1961, 102). Wittgenstein puts Dilthey’s account more colloquially in his remark on Freud’s joke analyses: ‘All we can say is that if it is presented to you, you say yes, that’s what happened’ (Wittgenstein 1970, 17).

Georg Simmel gives an account of the epistemic nature of this non-explanatory, non-empirical direction of interest and the matters it might deal with.

Emotional reactions are associated with our ideas even though they are conceived purely from the standpoint of their qualitative content and without regard to the question of their reality. We associate the mere idea of a very noble or very abhorrent deed, a uniquely complex personality, or a remarkable turn of fate with certain feelings. These feelings are independent of our knowledge that those men and events really existed, persisting even if we discover that they did not exist. (Simmel 1977, 160)

Or as it has also been put: ‘Feelings attached to pure contents constitute a domain in themselves.’

The domain Wittgenstein attempts to articulate in his remarks on Frazer is that of the feelings attached to human sacrifice. There have been many attempted characterizations of this general phenomenon of turning our attention on our experience itself and away from that of which it is the experience. In his book on nests Bachelard writes ‘It is not the task of a philosophical phenomenology to describe the nests met with in nature’ but rather ‘to elucidate the interest with which we look through an album containing reproductions of nests.’ (Bachelard 1969, 93) Wittgenstein in his remarks on Frazer was proposing to ‘elucidate the interest’ with which we contemplate the phenomenon of human sacrifice and of ritual in general. He was giving an analysis of the impression they produce and contesting the analysis which he imputes to Frazer. (Moore 1966, 307)

The most general characterisation of the enterprise of analyzing impressions (which William James calls ‘the most incessantly performed of all our mental processes’ (James 1950, 502)) I found in the entry on apper-
ception in a psychological dictionary: ‘the process of bringing any mental content to clear comprehension’. Such empirically intransitive transactions with our experiences are not themselves unfamiliar. What is puzzling is how Wittgenstein’s charge, that they have been mistakenly eschewed in favour of empirical enquiry can arise. Here is an example of how it might.

A holocaust victim, Chaim Kaplan recorded in his diary seeing an old peddler whipped to death by a Nazi in the Warsaw ghetto. Kaplan comments, “It is hard to comprehend this sadistic phenomenon... How is it possible to attack a stranger to me, a man of flesh and blood like myself, to wound him and trample upon him... without my reason? How is it possible?” (Steiner 1967, 37) Although Kaplan’s outburst may have been an indictment disguised as a question many empirically minded enquirers have taken such questions at their face value and insisted they are resolvable by empirical investigation and should be so resolved. Why should we not treat the sadistic Nazi like one of Skinner’s pigeons and trace the reinforcement history that led to his sadistic behaviour? But Peter Winch and others have maintained that this mode of response betrays a profound misunderstanding of the problem such behaviour poses.

Winch says with specific reference to the holocaust that the bewilderment provoked ‘is not to be removed by any sort of explanation.’ (Winch 1989, 155) This same misgiving has been provoked by Frazer’s dealings with human sacrifice. Paul Redding writes of Wittgenstein’s view of Frazer’s account of human Frazer: ‘Frazer’s question “Why does this happen?” is treated as a type of exclamatory outburst which gives expression to and reveals his real but misperceived needs.’ (Redding 1987, 263). What are these ‘misperceived’ needs? Wittgenstein thought that Frazer purported to tell us why we are disturbed by rituals like the Beltane fire festival and that Frazer’s account in terms of an original rite in which a man was really burned is mistaken (‘like a backward looking Clever Else’). (Wittgenstein 1979, 76) (Clever Else, the eponymous heroine of one of Grimm’s fairy tales, became profoundly upset on the fatuously inadequate ground that her unborn child might one day be killed in a freak accident.)

How does the non-empirical direction of interest fare in the case of the problems addressed by Frazer or of ritual sacrifice in general?

I will attempt to show that it involves abandoning the original hermeneutic question – ‘Why did they do what they did?’ for another – ‘Why
does it trouble us as it does? ’ But I will first give some examples of the non-empirical direction of interest in general.

**The Two Directions: Animal Life**

The philosopher of science, Gaston Bachelard, spoke of ‘the double perspective that might be attached to all problems connected with the knowledge of any particular reality.’ (Bachelard 1964, 3)

This is strikingly true of our relation to non-human creatures. This doubleness pulls us in the direction of learning more about them, of the kind of fact that naturalists could inform us – and which as children many of us were obsessed with, and at the same time of wanting to better evince our distinctive relation to their being – what one might call ‘phenomenological zoology’. That this distinction is sometimes obscured is illustrated by some remarks of Rilke who wrote in a letter: ‘Can you imagine … how glorious it is, for example, to see into a dog … to ease oneself into the dog exactly at the centre, the place out of which he exists as a dog.’ (Rilke 1987, 77) Empirical studies of canine life might plausibly claim to reconstitute the Umwelt of a dog but this does not seem to be the kind of thing Rilke had in mind.

A remark belonging unequivocally to the second non-empirical perspective is exemplified in Freud’s observation that the charm of certain animals ‘which seem not to concern themselves with us’ such as cats and large beasts of prey ‘lies in their narcissism, self-sufficiency and inaccessibility.’ (Freud 1914, 89) Santayana captures still another ‘internal’ aspect of our response to felines: ‘Who as he watched the cat basking in the sun has not passed into that vigilant eye, felt all the leaps potential in that luxurious torpor’. (Santayana 1962, 93) On the other hand the myth of the big cat as ‘a solitary and ruthless killer proud and aloof who lives in isolation, caring for none but himself.’ evinces graphically our misconceptions of the life of a big cat that only naturalistic observation could correct.

Our feelings towards the animate but strikingly non-human are evinced in Adrien Leverkuhn’s reflections on his diving bell experience (in Thomas Mann’s *Dr. Faustus*) when he speaks of the ‘frantic otherness’ of the extravagant living creatures’ which ‘… went whisking past the windows in a blur of motion; frantic caricatures of organic life; predatory
mouths opening and shutting; obscene jaws; telescopic eyes’ (Mann 1968, 258). This is more than just informative, empirical description; it is an attempt at evocation.

Here is a jokey attempt at conveying the sense of extravagant otherness:

Tell me O Octopus I begs/Is those things arms or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus/If I were thou; I’d call me “us”. (Ogden Nash, The Octopus)

Though, as Wittgenstein says, if a lion spoke we would not understand it, if an octopus spoke we might not even know it was talking.

Remarks which raise the question of the two directions – Bachelard’s ‘double perspective’ – occur in the notebooks Wittgenstein kept while he was writing the *Tractatus*: ‘As I can infer my spirit (character, will) from my physiognomy, so I can infer the spirit (will) of each thing from its physiognomy.’ He then adds ‘Only remember that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is your spirit for it is only from yourself that you are acquainted with spirit at all… The same with the elephant, with the fly, with the wasp.’ (Wittgenstein 1969, 85) Subsequent remarks don’t make this any clearer. All that is clear is that whatever the problem raised by Wittgenstein as to our relation to the non-human animate world it was not such as to be resolved by further empirical enquiry.

**What an Overview can and cannot accomplish**

Wittgenstein’s counsel to confine ourselves to the perspicuous arrangement of what we already know has generated much enthusiastic comment but elucidation is exiguous and disabled by a determination to be appreciative.

Rudich and Stassen in the first published commentary on Wittgenstein’s Frazer remarks do not even notice the theses later commentators so emphatically commend. Rudich and Stassen treat Wittgenstein as addressing the hermeneutic question, e.g., why must the Nemi priest be killed, exclusively, and giving bad advice on how to resolve it. (Rudich, Norman and Manfred Stassen 1971, 84) Later commentators place great value – rightly in my view – on Wittgenstein’s incitement to reflect on our relation to the phenomena productive of perplexity and awe, but they are insuffi-
ciently candid as to its comparative worthlessness as a solution to the hermeneutic problem – e.g., why were human beings sacrificed?

Nor was I myself behindhand in my undiscriminating enthusiasm. In retrospect I can see that I wasn’t pertinacious enough in pressing the relevant questions. How could the arrangement of what we already know resolve the puzzles explicitly raised by Frazer such as why the Nemi priest must be killed by his successor? I might have been forewarned by the sour and disputatious tone of several of Wittgenstein’s comments that doing justice to Frazer’s explanatory preoccupations was not uppermost in his mind. He claims that ‘Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages.’ and compares Frazer’s spirituality to ‘the stupidity and dullness of an English parson’ (1979, 65). You don’t have to entertain any special tenderness for the Church of England to find this gratuitous. And yet I failed to take in the damaging implications of such remarks. Why?

There were two features of Wittgenstein’s counsel to eschew explanation for a putting into order the already known whose emancipatory appeal numbed my critical sense. One was its legitimation of the synoptic craving I had long been subliminally aware of; the other was Wittgenstein’s insistence on our recognition that not all the problems and perplexities, which trouble us can be resolved by enlarging our fund of information, and that we are often deluded as to this (‘the stupid superstition of our time.’) (Wittgenstein 1979, 67)

Wittgenstein offers several alternatives to empirical explanation as a response to the problems raised by Frazer. That which seemed to hold most promise is the putting into order what is already known, i.e. dissipating perplexity via an overview of ritual practices rather than by hermeneutic speculation as to their rationale. By contrast consider Fontenrose’s criticism of Frazer’s account of Nemi. Fontenrose amasses evidence for an alternative account not connected with kingship or attempts to guarantee the fertility of the soil. (Fontenrose, 1971). If our interest is in the veridicality of Frazer’s explanations then such a procedure seems much more appropriate than any putting into order of what we already knew.

Peter Hacker makes a case for Wittgenstein’s overview method, which depends, however, on eliding what Wittgenstein claims for it.

Professor Cioffi contends that I err in claiming that the inner nature of a practice is accessible to us only in so far as the practice relates directly or indi-
rectly to our own experience. But he objects how can its accessibility to us determine its inner character? It is, he rightly observes, one thing to express dissatisfaction with an account that does not leave us feeling that we understand it and quite another to insist that an account can be true only if we do understand it. … But my claim was not that accessibility is a criterion of truth, but rather that it is a condition of hermeneutic intelligibility. The appeal to a tendency in ourselves is a condition of our finding the symbolism of the ritual intelligible… (Hacker 2001, 96)

This is cogent but it is not Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein wrote not only ‘And Frazer’s explanations would be no explanations at all if finally they did not appeal to an inclination in ourselves.’ But also, ‘we have only to put together in the right way what we know without adding anything, and the satisfaction we are trying to get from the explanation comes of itself.’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 63)

What is the nature of the satisfaction that Wittgenstein says is normally attendant on explanation but can be provided by putting into order what we already know? Does it come with the realisation produced by the accumulation of examples that ‘Human life is like that?’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 63)\(^1\) Wittgenstein seems to think so when he argues that puzzlement about the Beltane festival is not diminished by learning that it developed from a real burning but is by finding other similar festivals’ since these will make it seem ‘natural’ (Moore 1966, 309).

This is epistemically reminiscent of the solution to the riddle of why a dog licks its balls – ‘Because it can.’ The epistemic moral of this riddle is that perplexity may be dissipated by changing the point of view from which a phenomenon is contemplated, conferring on it the status of an Ur-phenomen, rather than by learning more concerning it.

What would over-view-produced understanding amount to in the case of the ritual burning or mutilation of images? When these are ranged

\(^1\) In the case of the love troubled one we might, in lieu of attempting to bring him ‘peace’ via an explanation of his condition, produce an enumeration of others in similar straits such as Troilus, Dora Carrington, Ophelia, Charles Swann, the Chevalier des Grieux etc. – thus inciting him to the peace-conferring thought, ‘If King Kong’s infatuation could get him killed on top of the Empire State building, what am I complaining about? Human life is like that.’
along phenomena like kissing the picture of a loved one, what is it that we understand that we have not previously understood? A plausible answer is that the more comprehensive overview produced a shaper awareness that an expressive rationale for magic is as eligible as the instrumental one which Frazer favours. But this cannot in itself resolve the question of whether the rationale of the practices itemised by Frazer was instrumental or expressive.

Here is an example of the kind of contribution a comprehensive overview of our ritual inclinations, which comprises the expressive as well as the instrumental, can make to the dissipation of perplexity. I was visiting my wife in hospital. On my way to her bed I passed two women, one peacefully sleeping, the other in the adjacent bed sobbing. When I arrived at my wife’s bedside I asked her why no one was seeing to the woman who was sobbing. My wife explained that the woman’s sobbing was the aftermath of her distress that the woman now peacefully sleeping had been in great agony only moments before when a doctor had arrived to administer an opiate. On my next visit they were both dead.

It was then that instead of a conventional and inane expression of regret – ‘What a shame; so they won’t be going home then’, – for the first time in several decades, I crossed myself. Why?

At one time the gesture of crossing myself on such an occasion would have been transparently doctrinal. I would have been commending their souls to their maker or something of the kind. But what was I doing decades after such convictions had left me? Was it just thoughtlessly anachronistic? The overview of ritual practices with its documentation of the many instances where belief is redundant made my crossing less puzzling. The crossing was a gesture which seemed an appropriate expression of my acknowledgement of an aspect of human life which the deaths of these women forced on me and which my secularism left me no way of coping with – a feeble attempt to compensate for ‘the immense indifference of things’.

But why the sign of the cross in particular? In the remarks on Frazer Wittgenstein says that if he, who does not believe that there are superhuman beings can nevertheless speak of his fearing ‘the wrath of the gods’ ‘then this shows that with these words I can mean something or express a feeling that need not be connected with that belief.’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 68)
My non-doctrinal crossing of myself is akin to Wittgenstein’s speaking of the wrath of the gods. On learning of the death of these two women I rummaged about among the detritus of my early religious upbringing and came up with the most ubiquitous – the sign of the cross. But of course I could make a non-doctrinal use of this only because it had an earlier, doctrinal use. Just as Wittgenstein – though he seems to overlook it – could only speak figuratively of the wrath of God because those who originally used the expression believed in its literality.

This example illustrates both the benefits of overviews and their limitations. The question of whether the Nemi priest was killed (or effigies burned) to guarantee the fertility of the land remains unresolved by an overview. Nevertheless putting into order the already known was not without issue. What my non-doctrinal crossing seems to expose to view is the presence of a primal expressive need; in this case, for a gesture which takes account of the untowardness of the fates, which may overtake our fellow creatures while yet only momentarily interrupting our wholesome obliviousness. (‘Man shall give death no dominion over his thoughts.’) (Mann 1960, 497)

**When Is it Inappropriate to Ask for a Causal Explanation?**

Wittgenstein says that we sometimes ask for causal explanation when it makes no sense to do so. But the situation may really be one in which our desire to have certain matters explained, though coherent, competes with our need to have our ‘thoughts and feelings’ concerning them clarified or to express more adequately the experience undergone.

Moore reports Wittgenstein as arguing that ‘to give a causal explanation in answer to the question ‘Why is the smell of a rose pleasant?’’ would not remove our “aesthetic puzzlement”. Is this because a causal explanation is conceptually ineligible (as optics is said to be to be to colour qualia), or for another reason, that its causal conditions are not the feature of the experience, which is of interest to us. There is no more reason to deny that we can speak intelligibly of the physical cause of a rose’s scent than of a toothache but the experiences have different interests for us.

Sometimes the interest of an experience is what it permits us to infer as to its causal structure or its causal basis. There is a pathological ol-
factory state in which everything smells vile. The problem this would set us is the causal-explanatory one rather than that of evincing more adequately what is vile about the smell. Although ‘the act of pointing determines the place of pain’, as Wittgenstein observes in the *Blue Book*, this is no guarantee that the wrong tooth won’t be pulled.

Though it may be the case that a rose’s scent is pleasant because it evolved to attract insects to pollinate it this speculation takes us in a different direction from the character of the fragrance, which is the focus of our interest. What we may want with respect to our delight in the fragrance – if we want anything at all – is not a causal explanation but rather what Baudelaire attempts to do for the scent he alludes to in his poem ‘Correspondances’, when he describes it as ‘mellow as oboes, green as fields’. We want a felicitous evocation of our experience in another modality, rather than its explanation.

**Action at a Distance: From the Totem Feast to the Communion Rail**

It has been denied that a state of affairs temporally remote from the ritual practice it purports to explain can do so. ‘No action at a distance’ as Peter Hacker neatly puts it. But is this so?

Holy Communion is paradigmatic of a practice subjected to genealogical accounts, which are felt by participants to be alien to its spirit. In his book *Myth and Guilt* Theodore Reik writes, “Even to this day cannibalistic acts are performed in the Masses of our Churches.” (Reik 1958, 13) A Catholic reviewer expressed indignation at this claim. (Times Literary Supplement, Jan 16, 1969) Nevertheless it is the case that some apostates have described communing in cannibalistic idioms. One wrote ‘I could never take part in Holy Communion for the very thought of eating bits of Christ’s dead flesh and drinking cups of his blood made me sick…’

This account is unrecognizable by those who have ever regularly taken communion. They feel like saying of the cannibalistic accounts by former celebrants that though they have remembered the words they have forgotten the tune.

It is not the concept of cannibalism in the abstract but its ludicrous associations, which make the cannibalistic analogy alien to the experience of a communicant. The term cannibalism conjures images of dark-skinned
men with bones through their noses putting light-skinned men kitted in tropical gear into cauldrons of boiling water and this is incongruous with the spirit of the practice.

When those who take the cannibalistic view are assured by ordinary communicants that nothing like ‘eating bits of Christ’s dead flesh and blood’ goes through their heads could they help themselves out by citing Freud’s derivation of the Eucharistic sacrament from the totem meal? Not on this particular issue where Hacker’s ‘no action at a distance’ thesis applies, since the practice ‘has its own complex of feelings’ and eating bits of dead flesh is not among them.

But this does not entirely preclude the influence of a tradition of homeopathic cannibalism on the practice of ingesting the host. Some special significance seems to have been placed on the ingestion of the host (See the opening of John Updike’s story ‘The Music School’ 1966) and it is this aspect that confers on Freud’s explanation of genesis from homeopathic cannibalism its pertinence.

Of course the goings on at a totem feast are remote from Gerard Manly Hopkins’ description of communion as ‘our sweet reprieve and ransom’ for ‘the strengthening and refreshing of our souls’, and from the spirit expressed in the panis angelicus lines ‘What wonder! A poor and humble servant consumes the Lord.’ But is there no feature that the derivation from homeopathic cannibalism could shed light on? Perhaps in consulting my own experience of communicating in search of some feature analogous to cannibalism I have been looking in the wrong place. Even if eating bits of Christ’s dead flesh is remote from anything that goes through a celebrant’s head there is still the symbolic ingestion to be accounted for and Freud’s claim that the Eucharistic sacrament stands in a line of descent from the practice of homeopathic cannibalism could bear on this issue. Freud holds that the primitive belief that the attributes of ingested animals are incorporated as part of the character of those who eat them persists ‘through the series of usages of the totem meal down to Holy Communion’ (Freud 1923, 29 n2). It could be objected that Freud’s analogy is too schematic. Though the communicants may feel exalted or elated after communicating they do not feel that they are better able to make the lame walk or the blind see, as Freud’s homeopathic rationale would imply.
I recall that striding homeward unbreakfasted after taking commun-
on on a brisk sunny day I experienced a rare sense of spiritual and physi-
ical well-being. For if I were to be hit by a truck and killed before I got
home my soul would go straight to heaven and if I made it, there would be
pancakes and syrup waiting.\(^2\) Where does cannibalism come in?

And yet this very reminiscence can be invoked to support the perti-
nence of a homeopathic rationale. For why did the euphoric certainty of
salvation not supervene on the walk back from confession on the day pre-
vious? Why did it have to wait on the aftermath of communicating?
Doesn’t this show that there is something far from inert, but essential in the
notion of ingesting the host; something, which requires explaining, and
which the influence of the tradition of homeopathic cannibalism might ex-
plain?\(^3\)

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\(^2\) (That my intermingling of spiritual elevation with mundane enjoyments can-
not be completely idiosyncratic is suggested by a passage in Joyce’s *Portrait
of the Artist*. ‘He sat by the fire in the kitchen not daring to speak for hap-
iness. Till that moment he had not known how beautiful and peaceful life
could be. … breakfast in the morning after the communion in the college
chapel. White pudding and eggs and sausages and cups of tea.’ (Joyce 1960,
146)

\(^3\) There is also a less arduous procedure than putting what we know into order
in which Wittgenstein takes satisfaction. It is that which we employ, when in
attempting to understand better an aesthetic experience we find ‘the word
that sums it up’. (Wittgenstein places the question why the Beltane festival
impresses us among aesthetic questions in the lectures of which Moore gives
an account (Moore 1958, 166-167). (In the case of Nemi, ‘the word that
sums it up’ for Wittgenstein, is the phrase ‘the majesty of death’. This is
careless. It is incompatible with the account Frazer gives us of a terrified
priest taking every precaution not to be surprised. A terrified man is antici-
pating a mortal assault by a desperate one. Where is the majesty in that?)
guise themselves as explanatory enterprises or at least as prelusive to such, is be found in the work of Erving Goffman. (Cioffi 2000, 108-123) It struck me that the kind of satisfaction readers take in Goffman is akin to the satisfaction Wittgenstein took in the non-explanatory bits of Darwin – ‘putting facts into a system helping us to make a synopsis of them’. This thesis has been denied by among others, e.g. George Smith (2006, 111). I will attempt to explain why the dispute is not readily resolvable.

Let us take as an example Goffman’s monograph on stigma – ‘abominations of the body … blemishes of individual character … the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion…’ (Goffman, 1963, 4)

One of the things about stigma, which we all know but of which Goffman reminds us, is that a stigma can be manifest or hidden. If manifest the stigmatic’s predicament is one of how to create a relaxed atmosphere, perhaps by jocular allusions to his status or condition, (‘managing tension’). If his stigma is a hidden one then his predicament is that of deciding if, when, and how to declare it. If it is to be kept hidden then acquaintances must be segregated into those that know and those that don’t and kept from communicating (‘controlling information’). If the decision is made to declare the stigma then judgment must be exercised as whether it is safe to delay until one is sufficiently established for the revelation to be least disruptive or whether there is then too great a risk of the stigma coming to light of itself and thus of one’s being exposed as devious as well as deviant. These are not matters of which readers of Goffman could be ignorant.

In a critical review of a volume of Goffman’s papers the objection was raised that merely specifying ‘paths of potential action’, as Goffman does, without explaining why one path is taken rather than another is not acceptable social science (Strodtbeck 1968). Goffman’s defenders intermittently concede Goffman’s failure to produce novel data or explanations. Burns’ book on Goffman, for example acknowledges that Goffman did not ‘bring to light new facts or reveal information that was previously unknown’. (Burns 1992, 6) and goes on to characterize him in terms evocative of Wittgenstein’s ‘putting into order what we already know’ (Burns 1992, 112). Another of Goffman’s champions, Philip Manning speaks of Goffman as providing a ‘new way of reordering familiar facts’. (Manning 1992, 169)
As an example of a recapitulation of the known which nevertheless led to explanatory achievements consider Frank Gilbreth’s systemization of the movements made by an industrial worker for the purpose of measuring standard performance times: search, find, select, grasp, transport loaded, position, assemble, use, disassemble, etc, etc. Gilbreth named these movements ‘therbligs’ – an anagram of his name. The discursive deployment of therbligs could be used to explain why one worker is more productive than another.

Someone might argue against my overview for its own sake characterization of Goffman’s taxonomy for stigma that the constituents of his overviews, for example, ‘controlling information’ and ‘managing tension’ are interactional ‘therbligs’ and could expedite advances in a similar fashion.

There is another analogy which might be used to justify an instrumental, beyond ‘clarity for it own sake’, rationale for overviews. Imagine a community with telephones but no telephone books so that knowledge of telephone numbers is dispersed in the heads of those who are personally known to the subscribers. In what terms shall we describe the transition to publicly accessible telephone books? What was diffuse has become centralized. And what of the transition from telephone books in which the subscribers numbers though correctly assigned are arranged higgledy-piggledy, to one in which they are arranged alphabetically? Shall we say that although accessibility is enormously increased, since nothing previously unknown is therefore known, we should not speak of the telephone book as having advanced our knowledge or shall we say that centralization and enhanced accessibility itself constitutes an advance in knowledge?

Whichever we say it seems to me that the telephone book and therbligs analogy could not preclude the characterization of Goffman as a provider of Wittgensteinian overviews for their own sake. Goffman’s grateful and appreciative readers do not frequent him in the spirit in which they consult telephone books or the classification of industrial movements. What makes the arrangement of what we already know a Wittgensteinian overview rather than an agenda of unexplained social phenomena for further investigation need be nothing intrinsic to it but the use we make of it.

Behind the apparently conceptual issue as to whether Goffman’s overviews are bona fide social science may lurk another issue, one as to the
relative priority to be afforded to different kinds of discourse. Might there be circumstances under which someone might reasonably prefer a treatment of stigma which explained what determined the waning or tenacity of discriminatory practices to the astute and gratifying, though vaguely familiar, taxonomising which Goffman gives us in his monograph on the subject?

Consider the following exchange:

‘An overview of the known features of stigma suggests that in time having African features will be as little remarked as speaking with a regional accent now is.’

‘That’s nice to know but couldn’t social scientists dealing with stigma find some way of hurrying things up a bit?’

Is it unreasonable to hold that research on stigma should contribute something to expediting the disappearance, or at least attenuation, of physiognomic racism? And to object to being fobbed off with taxonomic felicities like those introduced by Goffman in his discussion of passing, say? No. But this does not preclude Goffmanian overviews having provided many with the same mode of non-explanatory satisfaction as Wittgenstein took in Darwin’s ‘expression of the emotions’, ‘putting the facts into a system, making a synopsis of them’ (Moore, 1966).

**What Manner of Thesis Was Wittgenstein Advancing?**

When Wittgenstein tells us that ‘what is satisfactory in Darwin’ is not the hypotheses he advances but ‘his putting the facts into a system, helping us to make a synopsis of them.’ or that ‘what is valuable in Freud is the large number of psychic facts that he arranges.’(Moore 1966, 309) he is giving Übersicht an epistemic priority, which many would not concede it. Is he then straightforwardly mistaken? Not if what he says is nevertheless true of those for whom or to whom he takes himself to be speaking.

These would include Hacker and Baker (1980, 540) who claim in connection with human sacrifice that Übersicht can resolve perplexity in a way in which a developmental hypothesis cannot. On the other hand, Avishai Margalit finds Wittgenstein’s synoptic alternative to explanation – ‘its significance with respect to our own tendencies’ – ‘extremely odd’,
since it is ‘irrelevant to the question of the significance of the ritual for the participants’. (Margalit 1992, 303)

How much does it matter that an overview of the significance of the ritual ‘with respect to our own tendencies’ is irrelevant to its significance for the participants?

Consider one of Wittgenstein’s examples. He tells us that in reading accounts of exotic survivals like the mimic burning of men at Beltane we think we are responding to conjectures as to the probability of their origin in rites in which men were really burnt, but we are mistaken. Such a response to the sacrificial origin of Beltane would make us as foolish as ‘clever Else’ because our worry about Beltane ‘is not that kind of worry’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 76) We are really responding to our pre-existing suspicion of ‘the overwhelming probability of the idea’ (Wittgenstein 1979, 79) that humans are man-burning creatures.

What would show that Wittgenstein was right and those who take the empirical, historical route wrong about ‘the kind of worry involved’? Only that they came to agree that it was. (‘An entirely new account of correct explanation. You have to give the explanation that is accepted.’ (Wittgenstein 1970, 18)

Wittgenstein’s answer to his question why we are impressed by human sacrifice is analogous to one of Freud’s joke reductions. Wittgenstein takes us from one end of the account of fire festivals to another in hopes that at some point we will agree of our experience, ‘yes that’s what happened.’

What could those who are so sure that Frazer’s explanatory ambitions were misconceived say to those who deny this? They could say that though they themselves may have once felt that the issue raised by Frazer was one calling for historical reconstruction, they had come to realize, perhaps under Wittgenstein’s prompting, that explanation would not relieve the perplexity these phenomena aroused in them.

The issue is not one of conceptual propriety but is akin rather to that raised by the famous one-sentence dismissal of a work on penguins: ‘This book tells me more about penguins than I want to know.’ Although there are those for whom Frazer says more about the history and prehistory of human sacrifice then they want to know these must acknowledge that there are also those for whom Wittgenstein says more as to their feelings and
thoughts apropos human sacrifice than they want to know. Ought we worry about what we, and the people we pass in the street, are capable of, as Wittgenstein suggests? (‘the strangeness of what I see in myself and in others’). Would not the irrelevance of this equally expose us to the reproach of being as fatuous as ‘clever Else.’?

The genre of Wittgenstein’s remarks is one that we all engage in from time to time. We implicitly assume the role of spokesman for some indeterminate ‘we’. Ray Monk for example tells us that ‘We naturally think that dreams mean something’ (Monk 1990, 448). I don’t doubt that this is a fact but what kind of fact is it? Is it the same kind of fact as that lilac is a pinkish blue or that stars twinkle but planets don’t? From whence do such facts derive their authority? I think of them as communitarian – the community in question being of indeterminate scope and identified intuitively and contextually.

When Wittgenstein says that our attitude to inflicted suffering differs from our attitude to natural suffering he does not strike us as presumptuous in speaking for us all. But when Hacker and Baker say that what ‘is most deeply perplexing and disturbing’ about human sacrifice ‘is not to be resolved’ by empirical enquiry they evince a notion of what is called for by the phenomenon of human sacrifice (and as to where empirical questions in general stand in the hierarchy of what is ‘deeply perplexing and disturbing’) that many would make it a point of honor not to share. There are those who find nothing more deeply disturbing about human sacrifice then the question why it was done, and even when they do suffer a residual non-explanatory disturbance they think it lacking in public spirit to pursue their thoughts in that direction. If someone on reading accounts of the Aztecs dismembering thousands of sacrificial victims in the course of a year found himself compelled to ask why they did so rather than why he felt about it as he did would this make him ‘like a backward-looking clever Else’? And if he wondered which of the explanations advanced, the nutritional, the political or the psychodynamic, was correct how would putting into order what he already knew help him?

In their assumption that they are speaking for the epistemic community at large both the advocates of explanation and the advocate of overviews, could be mistaken. There may be no representative sensibility to express. Shall we say, rather, that two forms of life confront each other?
Consider a comparable case where two forms of life do confront each other. Suppose that in the course of a discussion provoked by a large scale human disaster such as flood or famine someone objects to the theodicy issue having been raised because theodicy discussion should be confined to inevitable evils and not usurp the place of policy discussion on how best to deal with avoidable ones. It could be argued that had Manby – the inventor of the breeches buoy – responded to his dismay at seeing a ship founder and its passengers drowning by devoting himself to the theological problem of reconciling such horrors with the goodness of God rather than to the practical problem of how rescue could be effected under such circumstances he would not have invented the breeches buoy.

And yet there is other than the empirical-ameliorative direction that our thoughts might ‘naturally’ take – that which provokes D H Lawrence’s observation on the folly of a generalized concern for the welfare of humanity. (1936, 541) You can’t save everyone so wouldn’t you do well to devote some thought as to how you are to live with this fact, at least during the fortunate intervals when you are yourself among the saved? And this problem would take your thoughts in a very different direction from that of the empirical-explanatory.

What is at issue here? How is it to be determined which direction our thoughts should take?

I have a practical though not a theoretical solution to this question. The recipient of such claims should not bother himself as to how general is the response imputed to him or what the natural direction of our thoughts is or ought to be but merely with how he himself stands in relation to them.

**Does ‘This Christ Business’ Constitute a Domain in Itself?**

One of Wittgenstein’s most extravagantly anti-empirical utterances was his reply to Drury’s remark (round about 1930) that the New Testament, unlike the Old, lost its significance if it was not an account of what really happened. Wittgenstein disagreed, maintaining that it would make no difference if there had never been an historical person such as Jesus is portrayed in the gospels. (Drury 1981, 116)

The remarks of Georg Simmel I quoted earlier go some way towards mitigating the extravagance of Wittgenstein’s sentiments as to the
irrelevance of the historicity of Jesus. ‘Emotional reactions are associated with our ideas even though they are conceived purely from the standpoint of their qualitative content and without regard to the question of their reality.’ (Simmel 1977, 62)

Can’t this a-historical non-empirical category of Simmel’s extenuate the apparent perversity of Wittgenstein’s denial of the pertinence of the historicity of the gospel stories? Wittgenstein’s statement about Jesus is so obviously false that it cannot mislead. Huizinga says somewhere that a strong rhetoric functions like the skull and crossbones on a bottle of poison. It is obvious that the millions of Christians who publicly concur with Paul: ‘If Christ is not raised then our faith is in vain’- are neither hypocrites nor self-deceivers. Nor does Wittgenstein think they are. If Wittgenstein’s statement is obviously false, in what sense is it true? In the sense that not everyone taken with the message of Jesus need treat the stories in which it is imbedded as does a traditional Christian. We can readily concede that a demonstration that the gospel stories are a-historical would have no bearing on Miss Lonelyheart’s attempt to cope with his demoralizing and self-destructive compassion by finding what he refers to as ‘a rational solution’ to ‘this Christ business’. (West, 1961, 9)

4 Others have held Wittgenstein’s a-historical view. J. C. Powys also maintained that ‘It does not matter to us whether Jesus “Really lived”; or whether, like other great figures, his personality has been created by the anonymous instinct of humanity.’ (Powys 1975, 240)

An exchange on the topic of the historicity of Jesus occurs in W H White’s The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford): The narrator in a discussion with a clergyman friend claims that ‘it did not matter whether Christ actually existed or not. What the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing his name’ (White, 50-51). Some years after his remark to Drury Wittgenstein argued that ‘queer as it sounds’ the account in the gospels might be ‘demonstrably false and belief lose nothing by this because historical proof is irrelevant to belief.’ (1980 32) Not only is there a shift in this remark from historical disproof to lack of historical proof but there is all the difference between a non-negotiable historical belief: ‘Everything counts against its being so. Nevertheless it is so. Jesus was crucified and did rise on the third day.’ and a declaration of the irrelevancy of historicity: ‘It does not matter whether the story of the crucified and risen Christ is true.’
Wittgenstein’s remark may be taken as *Flaschenpost* (a message in a bottle). Here too, Simmel provides us with a category, which sheds light on the issue. In his essay on philosophy Simmel introduces “a mental category…a third something in man beyond his individual subjectivity and the logical objective thinking which is universally convincing…” (1965, 296) Wittgenstein’s claims as to the character of our response to human sacrifice exemplifies Simmel’s ‘third something’, though so taken it appears to be false since it does not transcend his ‘individual subjectivity’. Of what use then is it?

What Paul Celan said about his poems, that they were messages in a bottle, sent out ‘in the not always greatly hopeful belief that sometime’ they might wash up on dry land’ (Felstiner 1995, 115-116) can be adapted to Wittgenstein’s anti-empirical, anti-explanatory pronouncements. We best not take them as presumptuous or risky communitarian claims as to what ‘we’ are really interested in, impressed by, want, etc, but as *Flaschenpost* – messages directed at anonymous others some of whom, it is hoped, will on reflection acknowledge themselves to have been beguiled by the prospect of explanation.

Although it can be argued, against Wittgenstein, that you misrepresent our epistemic predicament if you don’t give a prominent role to our craving for causal knowledge, for causal narratives and for our need to reconcile ourselves not just to inarticulacy but to vulgar causal ignorance, it can also be argued that Wittgenstein’s anti-explanatory sentiments ought nevertheless to be circulated and discussed.

This is because, though for all of us the darkness in which we live is the darkness of vulgar empirical ignorance, some of us can also be brought to realize that their predicament is not exhausted by this genre of darkness and that they had an inadequate grasp of the problems that plagued them and had persistently misconceived them as predominant matters which empirical discoveries could resolve.

Wittgenstein appears to have had a change of heart even on this point for he later wrote: ‘What inclines even me to believe in Christ’s resurrection. It is as though I play with the thought – if he did not rise from the dead then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. He is dead and decomposed. In that case he is a teacher like any other and can no longer help’ (1980, 33). Wittgenstein’s havering illustrates how difficult it can be to persist with an irrelevance of historicity thesis.
The possible minuteness of this constituency has no bearing on the personal momentousness for its members of their realisation that they have persistently mistaken ambivalence, vacillation and indecision for ignorance.

Orwell’s tribute to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, that it broke down the solitude in which the human being lives, is not shown to be ill-deserved because there are many of whom it is not true. In Orwell and in many others Joyce’s bottle found dry land. Why should not Wittgenstein’s?

**Literature**


Introduction

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein describes a ‘primitive’ language of just four words, used for communication between a builder and his assistant:

The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones (*Bausteinen*): there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab” and “beam”. A calls them out; – B brings the stone he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. (Wittgenstein 2001, §2)

The example dates back at least as far as the 1930s. An early version of it occurs on the first page of *The Brown Book*. My reading of these examples assumes that we are intended to interpret the builder’s four words as linguistic signs. If this is incorrect, then it is difficult to make sense of calling this a ‘language’ at all. The point may seem trivial, but is worth making for at least two reasons. One is that it is not always taken for granted by philosophers that words are signs (cf. Grice 1989, 215) and the other is that not all linguistic elements are linguistic signs. (Vowels and consonants are certainly linguistic elements of some kind, but they are not linguistic signs.) Any language has more to it than signs, although signs it must have.

The communication situation described in *Philosophical Investigations* §2 is clearly meant to be unproblematic. It is remarkable how closely it corresponds to the archetypal communication situation described by Leonard Bloomfield in the early 1930s in his famous linguistic parable fea-

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* We would particularly like to thank Roy Harris for his contribution to this volume. Unfortunately, Professor Harris was not able to join the conference. He did, however, send us his text in advance. The paper printed here was read out and discussed during the conference.
turing Jack and Jill (Bloomfield 1935, 22-27). In both cases, only one participant speaks: the other merely responds by going to fetch something. In both cases, it is implied that the success of the act of communication consists in what is fetched being identical with what the speaker wanted and intended to be fetched. The main difference seems to be that Bloomfield’s example is even more primitive than Wittgenstein’s. Wittgenstein at least gives his language a vocabulary of four specific words, whereas Bloomfield never tells us exactly what Jill said to Jack. Secondly, Wittgenstein’s scenario appears to presuppose an already established social division of labour (builder vs. assistant), which we are presumably expected to understand as partially explaining the distribution of communicational roles. Bloomfield never says anything about the social relationship between Jack and Jill, but his story implies that, whatever it is, Jack is prepared to do what Jill says, at least in this particular communication situation. So it is with the builder’s assistant in Wittgenstein’s example.

Wittgenstein, however, then adds the astonishing rider: ‘Conceive this as a complete primitive language (vollständige primitive Sprache).’ In this paper I wish to ask what we are to make of this. My remarks are also intended to supplement the observations on linguistic rules in Chapter 7 of Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein (Harris 1988) and my paper in the volume Linguistics and Philosophy (Harré and Harris 1993).

The first clue Wittgenstein gives us comes a few paragraphs later (§6), when he proposes that we could imagine this language as ‘the whole language of A and B; even the whole language of a tribe’. It seems important to ask exactly what we are being asked to imagine, and whether we could imagine this. What at first appeared to be a straightforward example immediately becomes highly problematic. For if that linguistic situation turns out to be unimaginable, then it seems that a large part of the plausibility of Wittgenstein’s language-games approach collapses along with it. I should like to suggest that perhaps we deceive ourselves in supposing immediately that we can imagine it. To be sure, it is not like being invited to imagine a four-sided triangle, where straight away it is clear that we are being asked to imagine contradictory things. But a no less serious contradiction may lie hidden here, disguised from view by the vagueness of such terms as language and complete. Someone who tells us he has no trouble
imagining a four-sided triangle may deserve our admiration (for possessing a superior imagination), but he also invites our scepticism.

**Problems with the builder’s language**

There are to begin with some obvious difficulties. What is the whole language of a tribe? By a ‘tribe’ I take Wittgenstein to mean a small non-Western people of the kind studied by anthropologists. In the *Brown Book* he speaks vaguely of people living ‘in a primitive state of society’ (Wittgenstein 1969, 81). But, as anthropologists had been pointing out long before it became politically incorrect to speak of ‘primitive’ societies, populations living in a very simple material culture do not speak correspondingly simple languages. It seems highly implausible that any such community would invent words just for the purpose of building, but for no other activity, or even that they might have passed through such a phase in the course of their history. For it strains credulity to imagine that a whole tribe would consist exclusively of builders and their assistants. Are there no cooks, farmers, carpenters, weavers or warriors? And if there are, what use would the builder’s four words be to them? It would also be a curious linguistic community if only one class of citizens (i.e. the builders) ever spoke. In the light of these obvious objections, it seems all the more necessary to ask what exactly Wittgenstein is driving at by describing the builder’s communication system as a ‘complete’ language.

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein’s aim in constructing imaginary ‘primitive’ languages and language-games seems to be to turn an analytic searchlight on features of more complex languages of the kind already familiar to his readers (German, English, etc.). But there is a serious risk that the strategy will backfire. There is inevitably a temptation to read back into these allegedly ‘primitive’ systems certain interpretations derived from our acquaintance with more ‘advanced’ systems, even when they are not supported by the semiological structure of Wittgenstein’s invented examples.

In this case, for instance, Wittgenstein chooses, for the vocabulary of his primitive language, forms identical with those of four ordinary German words. This already predisposes the reader to treat these four words as nouns and names of classes. This is potentially misleading, inasmuch as
the system Wittgenstein describes as a ‘complete’ language has no room for a metalinguistic distinction between nouns and verbs, or between these and any other parts of speech.

One is bound to ask whether this feature of the builder’s language is intended to have any ontological or conceptual implications. Some thinkers (Einstein would be one example, cf. Harris 2005, 190-191) have held that the concept of material objects is in some sense prior to the concepts of space, time and event. For such thinkers, it might seem ‘natural’ that a primitive language would consist just of names for material objects, since the primacy of material objects in the human understanding of the world is already taken for granted. In Einstein’s thinking, the motivation for this primacy is clear enough: it enables him to treat space, time and events as abstractions or logical constructs from our more basic recognition of the existence of material objects. This is a prerequisite for his general theory of relativity. But can any such motivation be attributed to the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*?

There seems little to indicate that. In the *Brown Book*, the builder’s language is at one stage supplemented by a temporal adverb ‘now’. So the builder can say, for example, ‘Slab, now!’. This adverb, we are told, was introduced by a programme of training involving a clock. The learner was taught not to carry out the instruction immediately, but to wait until the hand of the clock reaches a certain point previously indicated (Wittgenstein 1969, 107). It is not difficult to see why Wittgenstein dropped this clumsy ‘improvement’ in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The extended builder’s language is now much more sophisticated than the ‘primitive’ original. It presupposes that the learner already understands the somewhat complicated semiology of clocks, and in any case the new sign is not convincingly translated as ‘now’.

On *Philosophical Investigations* p. 196, where time crops up again, we are told that ‘Man learns the concept of the past by remembering’. This suggests that perhaps, analogously, man learns the concept of the future by anticipating. And then what does man do in order to learn the concept of the present? Whatever it is, it does not seem to involve any conceptual extrapolation from material objects antecedently ‘given’.
In § 18 Wittgenstein makes a half-hearted attempt to deal with one other elementary objection. He tells his reader not to be troubled by the fact that the primitive languages so far described consist only of orders.

If you want to say that this shews them to be incomplete, ask yourself whether our language is complete; – whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. [...] Our language may be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

I call this response ‘half-hearted’ for several reasons. In the first place, the objection to the plausibility of the builder’s language of §2 could hardly be that it consists only of orders. On the contrary, it does not consist of orders at all. It affords no linguistic basis for distinguishing an order from any other type of speech act. The best analytical commentary we have on Philosophical Investigations tells us that the builder’s language has only one mood, the imperative (Baker and Hacker 1980a: 26). But this is plainly wrong. If a language has no parts of speech, a fortiori it has no modal distinctions among its ‘verbs’. (One might as well claim that its ‘nouns’ have grammatical number, on the ground that the builder needs the various items to be brought one at a time; or grammatical gender, on the ground that the items in question are inanimate objects.) To insist otherwise is to make it impossible to distinguish structural linguistic features from functions of discourse.

But even if the builder’s language did consist only of orders, and that were the objection, that objection is not parried by pointing out that once upon a time German lacked the linguistic equipment to deal with various aspects of science and mathematics. ‘So what?’, the objector will immediately reply. ‘Belatedly adding a symbolism for chemistry and infinitesimal calculus is toto caelo a different matter from introducing into a communication system the kind of linguistic structure required to differentiate orders from statements, questions, wishes and so on. In fact it would be quite pointless to add signs for chemical and mathematical items to a communication system that was in any case too impoverished to accommodate the basic speech acts that all human languages recognize.’
Linguists will recognize that Wittgenstein’s unconvincing response about ‘our’ language in §18 relies on appealing to a model adopted in historical linguistics, sometimes called the ‘organic’ model, where languages are conceptualized as constantly developing accumulations of verbal materials from the past. According to this model, no current language is ever complete. What are called ‘languages’ in common parlance are simply transitional phases in an ongoing process of linguistic evolution, following its own laws. No dictionary can ever be complete, no grammar book final, until a language is ‘dead’. This was the received linguistic wisdom of some nineteenth-century theorists.

But when Wittgenstein published the *Philosophical Investigations* that historical model had been out of date for at least two generations. It became superannuated with the posthumous publication of Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, which introduced a totally different approach to linguistic analysis. It is the Saussurean model that has supplied the theoretical basis for modern linguistics. Without that, we should still be living in the world of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the brothers Grimm.

In any case, the appeal to the organic concept of languages in §18 manifestly conflicts with what we are told about the primitive language of §2. A recent comment on §2 observes that, like the primitive language of the Garden of Eden, the builder’s language seems to lie outside history. It can have no history, for it is destined to remain forever the same, endlessly recycling the same set of utterances and activities. Its lack of reflexivity means that there is no room for the negotiation of meaning between those who use it. The same commentator writes:

> The builders’ world is a totalitarian one in which language, command and obedient act are perfectly coordinated. Therein may lie a clue to its hold over the builders: perhaps authority lies in the language itself and there is no need of law, since in the imaginary domain of the primitive language, there is no room to think outside its categories and therefore no escape from the compulsion it exercises. (Hutton 2009, 2)
Grammar and arbitrariness

I have only time to touch on one more problem with the ‘primitive’ language of PI§2. According to Wittgenstein, grammar is not accountable to any reality. Its rules are arbitrary. In Philosophical Grammar §133 he tells us that the rules of cookery are not arbitrary, because cookery is defined by the end of cookery, whereas language is not defined by the end of language. In this sense, however, the grammar of the builder’s language is not arbitrary either. It is designed to accomplish a specific end, namely facilitation of the building operation. To that extent, if B brings a pillar when A has called for a block, it is as bad as adding salt when the recipe called for sugar. The grammar of the builder’s language would be arbitrary only if it made no difference whatever which building materials B fetched in response to any call. But if this were the case, then the four calls A uses could no longer be considered linguistic signs.

Wittgenstein and Saussure

Saussure was giving his lectures on general linguistics in Geneva at the same time as Wittgenstein was studying engineering in Manchester. Some people believe, in spite of the lack of concrete evidence, that Wittgenstein became acquainted with the work of Saussure at Cambridge in the 1930s. Certainly C.K. Ogden was familiar with it, and the first German translation appeared in 1931. But it seems to me unlikely that if Wittgenstein had read Saussure he would ever have deployed the analogy we find in §18 of the Philosophical Investigations. Leaving speculation aside, the relevant point for present purposes is that Wittgenstein has got his strategy of argument the wrong way round. Anyone who had read Saussure should have realized that the way to defend the notion of a complete primitive language is not to fall back on the feeble line that perhaps even highly advanced languages are not complete. That simply concedes the objector’s point at one remove. The way to defend the notion of a complete language, whether it be primitive or advanced, is to maintain that all languages are holistic systems; which amounts to championing the Saussurean model of semiological analysis for arbitrary signs. Only a radical holism of the Saussurean brand is going to do the theoretical job required.
It is interesting in this connexion that some commentators see Wittgenstein as having constant recourse to holistic presuppositions, and even as espousing a holism that outstrips that of other philosophers. One such commentator, for instance, seizes on the famous dictum in PI §199, ‘To understand a sentence means to understand a language’, and remarks ‘This semantic holism is reminiscent of Quine and Davidson’ (Glock 1996, 89). He goes on to elaborate: ‘Taken literally, it implies that one cannot understand any part of a language unless one understands every part’. This will cut no ice nowadays with those linguists who are sceptical of the very notion of ‘literal’ meanings and ‘literal’ interpretations of utterances (Harris & Hutton 2007). Literal or not, it makes little sense to speak of understanding ‘every part’ of a language unless indeed the language is a whole, i.e. a complete system. There could be no question of understanding ‘every part’ of a language of which the structure was inherently open-ended and subject to constant change. The same commentator proceeds immediately to defend Wittgenstein’s alleged holism against the objection that this makes language-learning impossible, since languages have to be learnt in segments. The defence offered is that we do not learn everything at once, but our grasp of each part is complete only once we have mastered the whole. Thus understood, semantic holism explains rather than ignores the fact that there are degrees of understanding. (Glock 1996, 89)

However, if that was indeed Wittgenstein’s position, it appears that none of us can possibly master our own native language, or indeed grasp the full meaning (the literal meaning?) of any single word in it. We are condemned to struggle on as permanent apprentices. Which seems puzzling, if not downright paradoxical.

**Explicating ‘completeness’**

In their essay on Wittgenstein’s language-games, Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker emphasize, quite rightly, that ‘the important feature of these primitive languages is that they are complete in themselves’ (Baker and Hacker 1980b: 53). They also point out that this notion is not a late addition to Wittgenstein’s thinking, but goes back at least as far as the *Brown Book*. That text in fact opens with a discussion of ‘completeness’.
Suppose a man described a game of chess, without mentioning the existence and operations of the pawns. His description of the game as a natural phenomenon will be incomplete. On the other hand we may say that he has completely described a simpler game. In this sense we may say that Augustine’s description of learning the language was correct for a simpler language than ours. (Wittgenstein 1969, 77)

This in turn takes up a remark in the *Blue Book* a year earlier.

A treatise on pomology may be called incomplete if there exist kinds of apples which it doesn’t mention. Here we have a standard of completeness in nature. Supposing on the other hand there was a game resembling that of chess but simpler, no pawns being used in it. Should we call this game incomplete? Or should we call a game more complete than chess if it in some way contained chess but added new elements? (Wittgenstein 1969, 19)

There are two points to note here. Wittgenstein speaks of ‘a standard of completeness in nature’. It holds, we are told, in the case of describing apples. Does anything similar hold in the case of describing languages? Or are languages not natural objects? We are not told explicitly, although chess, it appears, is a ‘natural phenomenon’, or at least can be treated as a natural phenomenon for purposes of description. Unfortunately none of this tells us what ‘completeness’ consists in where languages are concerned. It seems that we are being asked to accept that *any* linguistic description, however limited, is nevertheless a *complete* description of some language or other (as in the case of chess without pawns). But does this make sense?

Saussure, one feels, would have wanted to point out to Wittgenstein that a clockmaker who describes in minute detail the inner workings of a clock, but fails to say anything about the movement of hands on the dial, has not described a simpler form of clock. He has failed to describe a clock at all.

Or, to take a linguistic example, the current edition of the *Shorter Oxford* is published in two volumes. Volume I goes from A to M and Volume II from N to Z. Now suppose I have the misfortune to lose or destroy the second volume. Should I console myself with the thought that nevertheless I still have a complete description of a simpler form of English – one in which there happen to be no words beginning with any of the letters from N to Z? The answer is ‘No’. I don’t have a complete description of a simpler form of English, or a complete description of anything else for that
matter, but an incomplete description of approximately half the vocabulary of English. And the reason why Volume I is incomplete, even as a description of the words it contains, is that the description it gives refers to and relies on words in the missing Volume II. Or, to put it in Saussurean terms, the vocabulary of English is not just a nomenclature, but a self-contained système de valeurs.

In the complete language-games of the Philosophical Investigations, as Baker and Hacker rightly observe, ‘addition and modification may change the original base’.

Adding pawns to a proto-chess is not merely expanding the game, but inventing a different game, for it changes the range of possible moves and configurations. (Baker / Hacker 1980, 53)

This is an eminently Saussurean point: in fact, it is made explicitly on p. 43 of Saussure’s Course, if we reduce or increase the number of chess pieces, we automatically alter what Saussure calls la «grammaire» du jeu (the ‘grammar’ of the game). In other words, chess minus the pawns, or chess with sixteen extra pawns, are different games from the chess we know.

**Internal and external analysis**

It is on this basis that Saussure draws his famous distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ analysis. The internal analysis of a game involves ‘everything concerning the system and its rules’ (Course p.43). External analysis covers all the rest, everything to do with the geographical distribution of the game, where and when it is played, and by whom, its relations with other games, and so on. This has nothing to do with the system, which follows a quite different historical trajectory. Where languages are concerned, strictly speaking, even the loss of a single phoneme brings into existence a new system, since in a language operating with one less phoneme all the oppositions must change. This will be so even when the loss of a phoneme entails no difficulties of intercommunication for users of the earlier and the later systems. No system can be reduced to a list of positive terms, for it is based on differences between terms, and these differences are more complex, both lexically and syntagmatically, than any simple listing allows. To suppose otherwise would be just as mistaken as supposing
that a currency system in use in a community could be ‘completely’ described by giving a list of the coins and notes issued by the Treasury.

We could, to be sure, tighten up Wittgenstein’s vague notion of ‘completeness’ in an attempt to make it theoretically fit for purpose (i.e. fit for the articulation of an internal analysis). We could, for instance, start by stipulating (i) that the items the builder calls for, and his assistant brings, are items having no other function than as materials required in the building operation, and (ii) that A and B have no other language available in which to describe or refer to these objects.

Some such stipulations seem to be necessary if we are going to set aside – to the extent that we can as ‘outsiders’ – any preconceptions about what these four words mean for A and B. We shall also have to set aside Wittgenstein’s explanation (§6) that this language-game has been learnt by a systematic programme of ‘ostensive teaching’, involving a teacher who utters the words and points to the relevant objects. For this presupposes that there was a prior language-game (the teaching game) on which the language of A and B was based, and that at least one other person (i.e. the teacher) could play. And then there is the question of how the teaching game itself was learnt. We seem straight away to be led into a regress of primitive language-games incompatible with the notion that any of them is ‘complete’ in itself.

So let us shortcut these problems and postulate that we are dealing with a language-game already in operation (we don’t know anything about its antecedents or how it was learnt) and complete in the sense stipulated above. Let us for convenience give it a name: Constructionese. Here we approach Saussure’s conception of a synchronic état de langue. Our concern henceforth is with the semantics and semiological structure of Constructionese as seen from the viewpoint of the builder and his assistant. In other words, with what Saussure would have called its ‘internal’ linguistics.

If we now propose to ask what linguistic competence is required for A and B to communicate successfully in Constructionese, we, as literate and numerate investigators, are looking ‘from the outside’ at a semiological world which is quite different from our own. We shall find ourselves constantly in trouble when trying to describe a situation in which A and B, ex hypothesi, just do not have the resources that we habitually rely on. (Oddly, Wittgenstein tacitly credits A and B with a grasp of the type/token
relationship in roughly the sense defined by C.S. Peirce. This is presumably one of the things carried over from the previous teaching game. But we can dispense with it for our present purposes. It simply obscures the relevant issues.)

Operational discriminations and proto-numeracy

It seems clear that A and B, as thinking creatures, do need quite a number of operational discriminations of some kind, and that these are indispensable to the successful execution of the building programme. But does this include any kind of numerical competence – being able to count (as we would call it)? Clearly not, since Constructionese – their only language – has no counting words. (In an elaborated game introduced in §§ 9 and 10, the players do have primitive number-words, but this does not apply to original primitive language of §2.) Nevertheless, even if they have no numerical concepts, the builder and his assistant need a grasp of what I shall call ‘proto-numerical’ discriminations.

Thus A and B will need to grasp that each of them has a role that is complementary to the other’s, but separate from it. They have to understand that – as we might put it from an outsider’s perspective – what they are engaged in is ‘a two-person job’. But we cannot on that account attribute to them any notion of duality – which is an explicitly numerical concept. However, they do need to grasp a discrimination of some kind which corresponds to their perception of the individuality of their different roles as agents, of the fact that the operation divides into two parts accordingly (although again we must not allow that latter description because it lets in the banned numerical concept ‘two’). What we are groping to describe here is a proto-numerical concept (‘proto-two’, if you like) implicit in A and B’s recognition of the bi-partition of roles and the non-identity, non-interchangeability, of the activities which each must perform.

A and B will also each need four classificatory discriminations, corresponding to the four different kinds of building material they are called upon to handle. They must be able to distinguish blocks-from-pillars-from-slabs-from-beams, a quadruple division. But again we must not say that they need the concept ‘four’. Nor, it should be noted, do they both need to have ‘the same concepts’ of the different classes of object. How they draw
the mental-cum-perceptual discriminations between classes of objects does not matter. What matters is that in practice B always brings the kind of object that A called for, regardless of whether they are using criteria of size, shape, weight, colour, or any other differentiae.

They will also need four classificatory discriminations corresponding to the word-forms in their language. Here the same proviso applies. The way these word-forms are differentiated does not have to be ‘the same’. B needs only auditory criteria, since he never speaks. A needs both auditory and articulatory criteria, since he has to utter the words. All that matters for communicational purposes is that neither of them ever confuses, say, the call ‘Block!’ with the call ‘Beam!’, or the call ‘Pillar!’ with the call ‘Slab!’.

So far all this seems fairly straightforward. Let us now examine their operational discriminations in greater detail. When dealing with slabs, for instance, they seem to need to differentiate between ‘one-slab’ and ‘more-than-one-slab’. This is demanded by the requirements of the building operation. (Wittgenstein stipulates that B must fetch the individual items in the order in which A needs them. So it will not do for B to fetch two slabs when A calls ‘Slab!’, since at that point in the proceedings A does not need another slab.) But likewise B must not return empty-handed: so he needs to grasp the difference between ‘at-least-one-slab’ and ‘no-slab’. It would already be an over-generous interpretation to say that A and B distinguish in general between ‘one’ and ‘more than one’: all we can say if we take a parsimonious view is that they must distinguish ‘at-least-one-block’ from ‘more-than-one-block’, ‘at-least-one-pillar’ from ‘more-than-one-pillar’, and so on. For it is possible – even likely – that they may be using different operational criteria for each class of item.

It is important to note that if we speak of distinguishing, for instance, between ‘at-least-one-pillar’ and ‘more-than-one-pillar’, these descriptions have to be understood as ‘hyphenated’ expressions. The purpose of these hyphens is to remind us that as soon as they are removed full-blown numerical concepts sneak in (‘one’, ‘more than one’). Ex hypothesi, speakers of Constructionese have no such concepts. For them Constructionese is a complete language and their only language: their grasp of operational discriminations is in every case bound up with the particular operations in question. So ‘more-than-one-pillar’ is not on a par with ‘more-
than-one-block’. The difference might be pragmatically realized in a variety of ways, e.g. B finds that whereas he can carry several blocks if need be, he cannot manage more than one pillar at a time.

The point is not trivial, since we are focussing here on what is *needed* in the way of linguistic competence for a *complete* primitive language; and this makes a difference. That is to say, part of the understanding necessary for dealing with blocks will have to *include* discriminating between ‘at-least-one-block’ and ‘more-than-one-block’, which may in turn involve different criteria from those relevant to pillars. Likewise it is going too far to say that either A or B has the concept ‘one’, which would indeed be a numerical concept. For the concept ‘one’ as we understand it – from the perspective of those accustomed to a far richer language than Constructionese – is part of an extended system of numeration (which includes contrasting it with ‘two’, ‘three’, etc.). All of this is beyond the reach of the resources of Constructionese.

**Temporal segmentation**

The discriminations A and B need are also tied in with another aspect of the whole building programme. We have not described the situation adequately by indicating what is needed to underpin the quadruple classification of building materials on which the whole collaboration between A and B is based, or the quadruple classification of calls. That is only part of the story. For B has to be able to put A’s calls into appropriate *temporal* correlation with the fetching and carrying that he is being called upon to perform. If he could *not* do that – for whatever reason – the system would break down. That temporal correlation has *nothing to do* (from our ‘external’ perspective) with being able to recognize the differences between the various building materials. When A calls ‘Block!’ he is not only saying – in our terms – that he wants an item of a certain kind, but that he wants it brought *now* in the sequence of operations. It is a call for immediate action on B’s part. B ‘responds’ by going to fetch a block. This ‘you-then-me’ aspect of the communicational process requires operational discriminations which set up a segmentation of the temporal continuum into potentially denumerable parts. The temporal segment that is identified as ‘now’ at any given point needs to be distinguished from immediately preceding and
immediately following segments. So, from an ‘outside’ point of view, there must be at least three such segments (the current one, the preceding one and the following one). They ‘would be’ countable if A and B could keep count; but speakers of Constructionese have no resources for counting. So here proto-countability resolves itself into a sequence of operational discriminations involving correlating calls from A and corresponding fetching-and-carrying by B. It is the succession of these A-B correspondences one after another that structures the concatenation of the communication process. A and B have to grasp that structure for their collaborative work to proceed at all. B, for instance, does not ‘save up’ a sequence of calls from A and then fetch those items all in one journey.

All that has been said so far might be summed up ‘from the outside’ by saying that this primitive communication system is based on a combination of just two semiological archetypes. One is the sign functioning ‘a-temporally’ as a classifier. The other is the sign functioning ‘dynamically’ as the initiator of another stage in the building operation. The words in this language have to fulfil both semiological functions simultaneously. That is, every time the builder utters a word, that utterance has to function as a prompt to his assistant to do something: but what the assistant will do depends on which of the words is uttered. The dynamic function anchors the operational discriminations to the here-and-now, alerting the assistant to the need for immediate action. It allocates the utterance (e.g. ‘Slab!’) to a place in a temporal sequence, in which the next place has to be occupied by B going off to fetch a slab.

How are these two functions related? Unless we understand this, we shall never make sense – from the inside – of the primitive language that A and B are using. The answer is that ‘from the inside’ those two functions are indistinguishable. What accomplishes one automatically accomplishes the other. There is no way of separating out the dynamic semiological function from the classifying function. Here at last we can put our finger on what makes Constructionese a semiologically ‘primitive’ language.

Operational discriminations and reasoning

By Aristotelian standards, the builder and his assistant are neither literate nor numerate. A fortiori, they are incapable of reasoning. They cannot ar-
articulate the proposition that this ‘follows from’ that; they have no words for ‘not’, ‘because’, ‘therefore’, etc. Nevertheless, they communicate successfully.

Furthermore, their system provides a form of communication radically different from any implied in Aristotle’s account. There is no room here for supposing that when the builder calls ‘Block!’ the assistant thinks to himself ‘Ah! That means he needs a block.’ Even less ‘Ah! That means that if I don’t go and get one I shall be breaking the rules.’ Ex hypothesi, the assistant cannot think such thoughts, for their articulation in that analytic form presupposes more linguistic resources than Constructionese possesses. The assistant just thinks ‘block’ (where thinking ‘block’ means both recognizing the call in question and initiating the action required to respond). Is then block in Constructionese a kind of homonym? Is it the name of a certain class of building materials plus an instruction to fetch one, both having the same form? No, since a separate identification of those two words is again beyond the resources of Constructionese and the proficiency its use requires.

The proficiency A and B have is an integrational proficiency, an ability manifested pragmatically by integrating one’s actions systematically with those of another person. The words of Constructionese are integrational signs, not Aristotelian sumbola. The latter are deemed to fulfil their semiological function whether or not the hearer takes appropriate action in accordance with the speaker’s utterance. The sumbola have already done their job when the hearer has heard and understood what was said. Not so in the case of A and B: they are not using Aristotelian sumbola, but signs of a different kind. In their world, there is no room for ‘understanding a sign’ as an independent psychological state or event – not even as a fleeting ‘Eureka!’ experience that intervenes between B’s hearing the word and taking action.

Given all these caveats, we nevertheless recognize that what A and B are engaged in is a rational activity and that A and B are acting as rational agents. But it is a quite different level of rationality from Aristotle’s. It does not depend on the agents being able to give reasons for what they do. It is a rationality which consists in grasping how to partake meaningfully in a joint programme of coordinated activity. Aristotelian rationality tacitly presupposes that ability, but fails to acknowledge it as rationality
until it can be translated into a language fully equipped with *ands, ifs* and *therefores*.

**Rationality and ‘rules’**

Wittgenstein would probably not have wished to develop the parable of the builder in the way that I have proposed here. For Wittgenstein it is important to retain, come what may, an appeal to grammatical ‘rules’. Without it, he cannot muster a coherent account of what a language is.

According to Gordon Baker, the later Wittgenstein’s notion of the ‘autonomy’ of grammar has two striking features. First, it implicitly rejects the whole notion of ‘a system or calculus of rules’. Instead, ‘it might be called a *motley* of rules’ because the rules in question ‘are not uniform in form or application’ (Baker 1986, 301). Second, in virtue of this autonomy explanations of meaning cannot be justified (and hence cannot be faulted). They are free-floating creations like the planets. Nothing holds them in place. There is nothing behind the rules of grammar, there is, as it were, no logical machinery. (Baker 1986, 301)

If this is right, for Wittgenstein ‘rules of grammar’ mark the *nec plus ultra* of linguistic explanation. The notion of a ‘motley of rules’ is profoundly anti-Saussurean. (The same phrase also occurs in Baker / Hacker 1985, 37, 39.) Furthermore, for Wittgenstein, logic does not ‘explain’ grammar (as many thinkers in the Western tradition had supposed): grammar just *is*. Logic itself (e.g. as articulated by Aristotle) presupposes grammar.

By the time he wrote *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein seems to have abandoned his earlier belief in ‘logical form’ (Glock 1996, 212-6). But the ghost of logical form survives in his distinction between ‘depth grammar’ and ‘surface grammar’ (§664), a distinction which seems to anticipate that between ‘deep structure’ and ‘surface structure’ popularized by post-Saussurean grammarians after Wittgenstein’s death. It is the same ghost that haunts the terminology employed by Chomsky in the 1980s, where the meaning of a sentence is designated ‘LF’, standing for ‘logical form’ (Harris 2009, 144-5).
Conclusion

It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein, like another influential figure in modern linguistic thought, Benjamin Lee Whorf, never seems to have read Saussure. This is perhaps more surprising in the case of Whorf (Harris 2009, 55-60), since Wittgenstein never professed any interest in linguistics. Both Whorf and Wittgenstein are sometimes presented as pioneers of linguistic relativity, but neither deals with the objections that Saussure had raised to relativistic assumptions years before. Although Wittgenstein eventually abandoned the calculus model, he never managed to break free from the intellectual tyranny of ‘grammatical rules’ in the way that is accepted today in integrational linguistics. We are told that Wittgenstein in the end realized that rules of grammar are ‘in a deep sense, arbitrary’ (Baker and Hacker 1985, 40). Quite so. But it was Saussure who had originally proposed the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as the first axiom of modern linguistics, and set about showing how everything else in linguistic structure follows from this axiom, including the principles of linguistic change – another task that Wittgenstein never attempted.

Saussure’s premature death left Saussurean linguistics with a holistic framework, but no explicit account of how all parts of the language were holistically interrelated within it. Chomsky attempted to resolve this seemingly intractable problem mathematically, i.e. by construing the entirety of rules of grammar as a single interlocking generative system of algorithms. To consider to what extent that reconceptualization of grammar was successful would require an excursus into linguistic theory that there is no time to embark on here. Suffice it to say that neither Saussure nor the mature Wittgenstein had any such conception of languages, and that is the principal criticism that generativists brought – and still bring – against the way both approach linguistic questions.

In all this it is important not to confuse rules with regularities, as both Chomsky and Wittgenstein seem at times variously prone to do. In Wittgenstein’s case, the discussion on pp. 12-13 of the *Blue Book* would be one example, and §54 of *Philosophical Investigations* another. Although Wittgenstein is constantly warning us to be on our guard against the confusions caused by words, it seems that he has sometimes fallen victim to the morphological connexion between Regel and regelmäßig, which has no
counterpart in English. An interesting illustration of this occurs in *Philosophical Investigations* §§ 207-208, where the discussion of how to teach someone a rule ostensively reads far more persuasively in German than it does in the English translation. If we read the English translation alone, without reference to the German text, it immediately strikes us that Wittgenstein is blurring the difference between rules and regularities. What his learner ends up grasping is a regularity, not a rule.

According to Hans-Johann Glock, the characterization of a language that we are given in the *Philosophical Investigations* ‘fits de Saussure’s conception of *langue* as an abstract system of rules which underlies *parole*’ (Glock 1996, 68). But the comparison falls far wide of the mark. In Saussure’s final reflections on the subject, his Third Course of lectures at Geneva in 1910-1911 (Komatsu and Harris 1993), *la langue* is not presented as a system of rules at all, but as a holistic structure of differences. In this there is no room for a concept of rules, and all Saussure’s remarks on the subject of rules are highly critical. Grammatical rules he sees as belonging to an outdated approach to the study of languages: they perpetuate what Saussure describes as ‘fictions’ derived from the confusion between a language and its writing system (Komatsu / Harris 1993, 47). In this respect at least, Saussure was the first ‘rule-sceptic’ of modern thinking about language.

Declaring A and B to be acting *rationally* on the basis of Constructionese – as opposed to *deterministically*, in the manner of the similar language-game played by Bloomfield’s Jack and Jill – is not a conclusion reached by confusing the regularities of Constructionese with rules. But it does require opting for a different interpretation of rationality from Aristotle’s. The rationality of what A and B are doing consists in the reciprocal integration of their activities by means of signs. Furthermore, these signs are based solely on operational discriminations. Nothing more is required, no more sophisticated level of mental activity, no higher-order conception of communication.

According to the account I have given, A’s actions anticipate B’s, which in turn presuppose A’s. That is what makes their signs part of an integrated language-game. What each of the participants does is contextually and systematically relevant to what the other does within the same temporal continuum and the same programme of activities. It has nothing to do
with truth. It has nothing to do with following rules. It proposes a semiology of human interaction that is radically different, in theoretical basics, from any other account that has been proposed in the Western tradition.

Some theorists, undeterred by Wittgenstein’s sad example, still go on constructing ‘primitive’ languages and language-games, in an effort to ‘explain’ how more complex languages operate. Invariably they proceed by copying what they take to be simple analogues of ‘real’ linguistic structures, or parts thereof, into the Mickey Mouse models they have set up to throw light on the more profound workings of verbal interaction between human beings. What they fail to realize is the complete futility of proceeding in this way. For the mini-models they construct invariably have a semiology which bears no relation to the complex semiology of communication operative in human communities. The error consists in supposing that the structure of German, English, etc., can be projected back piece-meal, without distortion, on to those allegedly ‘primitive’ languages that the theorist’s misguided quest for explanatory simplification has left standing.
Literature


Lebensformen und Lebensmuster: Zur Deutung eines sogenannten Grundbegriffs der Spätphilosophie Ludwig Wittgensteins*

Stefan Majetschak, Kassel

I.


² So Garver 1984, 33, in einem Überblick über seine frühe Rezeption.

gen verwenden, scheinen ja von der bestimmten Lebensform, in die sie jeweils eingebettet sind, gar nicht abgelöst werden zu können. Und eben dies scheint Wittgenstein an jener berühmten Stelle der *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* zum Ausdruck bringen zu wollen, an der er sagt, das „Wort ’Sprachspiel’“ solle „hervorheben, dass das Sprechen einer Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform.“ (PU 23) Wie nämlich Spiele Teil einer bestimmten Kultur sind, in der sie gepflegt werden – so scheint er hier zu sagen –, ebenso müssten auch die menschlichen Sprachspiele als Teil einer besonderen Lebensform angesehen werden, welche ihre Erscheinungsgestalt bestimmt und fundiert.


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3 Savigny 1999, 120.
4 So Beerling 1980, 165.
Dutzend weitere Male vor und dies mehrheitlich in Zusammenhängen, die Wittgensteins Leser aus den *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* kennen. Und auf diese insgesamt gesehen uneindeutige Textlage ist es insofern wohl zurückzuführen, dass der Lebensformbegriff auch innerhalb der Wittgenstein-Forschung im engeren Sinn recht unterschiedlich aufgefasst worden ist.\(^7\)

Angesichts der Tatsache, dass Wittgenstein in den sog. ‚Teilen‘ I und II der *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* vier Mal im Singular von der bzw. einer ‚Lebensform‘ und nur einmal im Plural von ‚Lebensformen‘ spricht, hat z.B. Newton Garver in einer bekannten Interpretation die These vertreten, Wittgenstein denke beim Gebrauch dieses Begriffs gar nicht an eine Pluralität möglicher soziokulturell unterschiedlicher Lebensformen von Menschen, relativ zu welchen man ihre vielfältigen Sprachspiele zu verstehen habe. Vielmehr habe er die gattungsspezifische Lebensform des Menschen von tierischen Lebensformen abgrenzen wollen. „Die Wittgensteinschen Lebensformen“ im Plural, schrieb er, „sind die der Naturgeschichte: die kuhartige, die fischartige, die hundeartige, die menschliche, die löwenartige u.s.w.“.\(^8\) Die „Lebensform eines Menschen“ ist so verstanden *eine* unter zahlreichen, die sich naturgeschichtlich unterscheiden lassen; diejenige nämlich, die im Unterschied zu allen tierischen durch die menschliche Fähigkeit zum Gebrauch einer komplexen natürlichen Sprache „bestimmt ist“.\(^9\) Und nur dies habe Wittgenstein durch die Unterscheidung der verschiedenen Lebensformen herausarbeiten wollen.\(^10\) Doch die-

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\(^8\) Garver 1984, 34.

\(^9\) Garver 1984, 45.

\(^10\) Selbst wenn ich mich der Deutung von Garver im folgenden nicht anschließe, sei an dieser Stelle doch betont, dass er ein für Wittgenstein außerordentlich wichtiges, von ihm oft erwogenes Gedankenmotiv hervorhebt: die naturgeschichtliche Tatsa-

Sowohl die Garver- als auch die Standardinterpretation des Lebensformbegriffs lassen sich mit einer Reihe von Bemerkungen Wittgensteins stützen; beide haben mit der befriedigenden Erhellung anderer freilich auch jeweils Schwierigkeiten. Beide stimmen hinsichtlich des Grundgedankens zudem darin überein, dass sie einer „Lebensform“ im Sinne Witt-

11 Haller 1984, 57.
13 Schulte 1989, 146
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...systematisch gesehen „die Rolle eines die Sprache einbettenden sozialen Systems“ zuschreiben, um eine Formulierung von Eike von Savigny zu gebrauchen. Und dies ist zweifellos eine philosophisch interessante Deutung des Lebensformbegriffs, die sich heute – ich deutete es bereits an – auch über die engeren Kreise der Wittgenstein-Interpreten hinaus einer gewissen Popularität erfreut. Doch entspricht sie auch der Auffassung Wittgensteins?


II.

Sollten die Garver- oder die Standardinterpretation zutreffend sein, wäre – wie gesagt – zu erwarten, dass der Begriff der ‚Lebensform‘ (im Singular oder Plural) insbesondere dort Erörterung findet, wo Wittgenstein explizit auf die Einbettung von Begriffen in Kontexte, die sich für ihre Bedeutung


Überblickt man diese Untersuchungen im Ganzen, so gilt es zunächst, die im Zusammenhang unserer Fragestellung durchaus bemerkenswerte Tatsache festzuhalten, dass Wittgenstein in ihnen nie von einer Einbettung der psychologischen Begriffe in eine Lebensform gesprochen hat. Wohl hat er, wie er selbst einmal betont, oftmals den Ausdruck „eingebettet“ gebraucht, gesagt, die Hoffnung, der Glaube, etc. sei im menschlichen Leben, in allen den Situationen und Reaktionen, die das menschliche Leben ausmachen, eingebettet. (BPP II, 16)\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Vgl. MS 136, 28 b; PU 337; PU 581; u.ö.

als ein sehr kompliziertes filigranes Muster vorstellen, das wir zwar nicht nachzeichnen könnten, aber nach seinem allgemeinen Eindruck wiedererkennen. (ebd.)

Tatsächlich zeigt sich uns das Leben der Menschen in jenem nicht-biologischen Sinne, den Wittgenstein in diesem Zusammenhang vor Augen haben dürfte, ja nicht nur als chaotische Unübersichtlichkeit individueller menschlicher Handlungsweisen. Vielmehr gewahren wir es insgesamt auch als ein komplexes Muster, erkennen darin wiederkehrende, ähnlich ausschneidende Teilmuster, erfassen mehr oder minder konstante, mehr oder weniger variable Regelmäßigkeiten und Strukturen in ihm, u.s.w. D.h., wir se-


17 Vgl. auch BPP II, 672f.; LSPP 406; Z 568f.; einmal spricht er in diesem Zusammenhang auch von „Lebensschablone“ (LSPP 206).
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18 Vgl. ähnlich LSPP 406.

wir, in unserer Begriffswelt, sehen immer wieder das Gleiche mit Variationen wiederkehren. So fassen’s unsere Begriffe auf. Die Begriffe sind ja nicht für den einmaligen Gebrauch. (ebd.²⁰)

Viemehr setzen sie im wiederholten Gebrauch je verschieden sich zeigende Erscheinungen von Mustern des Lebens unter Begriffen gleich.


Was will ich aber sagen? Dass — dass wir andere Begriffe hätten, wenn unsre Umgebung & unser Leben anders wären? Und wäre das eine wissenschaftliche //naturgeschichtliche// Hypothese?

Oder will ich sagen: Andere Begriffe — das heißt: andre Sprachspiele, also ein anderes Leben. (MS 137, 8b)

Und eine eindeutige Antwort, die es erlauben würde, ihm mindestens implizit eine bestimmte Theorie zu dieser Verbindung zu unterstellen, hat er auf diese Fragen nirgendwo gegeben.

Immerhin wird in den späten Texten noch deutlich, dass er jenes „Leben“, in das der menschliche Sprachgebrauch mit all seinen Besonderheiten eingebettet ist, nicht ausschließlich in jenem naturgeschichtlichen Sinne meint, den die Garver-Interpretation des Lebensformbegriffs betonte. Denn Wittgenstein kann sich, wie er ausdrücklich sagt, innerhalb des menschlichen Lebens durchaus ein „anderes Leben“ vorstellen, als er oder seine Zeitgenossen es führten; gleichsam ein Leben, das andere Akzente setzt, als wir dies in unserem Leben wirklich tun; oder wie die Vertreter der Standardinterpretation des Lebensformbegriffs wohl sagen würden: eine zu der unsrigen alternative Lebensform mit ihr entsprechenden Sprachspielen. Doch eine solche Ausdrucksweise verwendet Wittgenstein aus Gründen, die sich nun bald ergeben werden, nicht. Vielmehr spricht er von einem „anderen Leben“ und schreibt, um die Bindung von Sprachspielen daran zu betonen:


Und deshalb könnte man nach Wittgenstein durchaus auch sagen, dass „die Begriffe der Menschen zeigen, worauf es ihnen ankommt und worauf nicht“ (BF III, 293). Sie zeigen nämlich, was Menschen in ihrem Leben als ein wiederkehrendes Muster betrachten. „Aber nicht“, so fügt er sofort hinzu, „als erklärte das die besonderen Begriffe, die sie haben.“ (ebd.) Um eine Erklärung geht es ihm auch hier nicht. Vielmehr will er nur die verbreitete „Auffassung ausschließen, als hätten wir richtige, andre Leute falsche Begriffe“ (ebd.). Er will also letztlich „sagen: eine ganz andere Erziehung, als die unsere;“ eine andere Art und Weise, Muster des Lebens hervorzuheben, „könnte auch die Grundlage ganz anderer Begriffe sein“ (BPP II,

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21 Vgl. Anm. 10.


Wäre es also im Lichte dessen, was sich in Wittgensteins späten Texten über die Verbindung von Sprache und Leben finden lässt, „richtig zu sagen, in unsern Begriffen spiegelt sich unser Leben?“ (BF III, 302) Signifikant andererweise beantwortet er auch diese Frage nicht, vermeidet er auch hier jegliche Theorie über die Art der Beziehung zwischen Sprache und Leben. Vielmehr fügt er anstelle einer Antwort hinzu: „Sie stehen mitten in ihm“ (ebd.). Denn dies ist eigentlich alles, was er über diese Beziehung sagen will.

III.

Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Verhältnisbestimmung von Sprache und Leben, für die der Begriff der „Lebensform“ in allen relevanten Zusammenhängen der Wittgensteinschen Texte keine Rolle spielt, kann man sich nun fragen, was es mit diesem Begriff in Wittgensteins Denken dann überhaupt auf sich hat. Was ist mit ihm gemeint, und wie verhält er sich zu jenem menschlichen Leben als solchem, das sämtliche Sprachspiele einer natürlichen Sprache einbettet? Einer Antwort auf diese Frage dürfte man bei einer genaueren Betrachtung einer oft zitierten Bemerkung aus dem sog. „Teil II“ der Philosophischen Untersuchungen näherkommen, in der der Begriff der „Lebensform“ in aufschlussreicher Weise verwendet wird. „Kann nur hoffen, wer sprechen kann?“, fragt Wittgenstein hier. Und er antwortet:
Nur der, der die Verwendung einer Sprache beherrscht. D.h., die Erscheinungen des Hoffens sind Modifikationen dieser komplizierten Lebensform. (PU, S. 277)

Im Lichte seines eben skizzierten Gedankens, dass Begriffe wie 'Hoffnung' und 'Erwartung', 'Bescheidenheit' und 'Prahlerie' gar nicht ontologisch eigenständige Phänomene der psychischen oder sozialen Welt bezeichnen, sondern vielmehr auf Muster des Lebens Bezug nehmen, die innerhalb einer Sprachgemeinschaft als signifikant empfunden und mittels Begriffswörtern herausgehoben werden, ist der erste Teil seiner Antwort klar. Denn die Frage, ob nur 'hoffen' könne, wer auch sprechen kann, ist in diesem Lichte natürlich zu bejahen, weil nur derjenige, der die Verwendung einer Sprache beherrscht, sprachliche Äußerungen machen kann, die wir zum Lebensmuster der 'Hoffnung' bzw. des 'Hoffens' rechnen. Doch was sagt Wittgenstein im zweiten Teil dieser berühmten Bemerkung, in dem er mit den Worten, 'die Erscheinungen des Hoffens' seien 'Modifikationen dieser komplizierten Lebensform', seine erste Antwort präzisiert?

Sowohl Garver 22 als auch namhafte Vertreter der Standardinterpretation lesen diese Bemerkung so, dass sich der deiktische Ausdruck 'dieser' in der Rede von 'dieser komplizierten Lebensform' auf 'die Verwendung einer Sprache' im Satz zuvor beziehe. Gesagt sei an dieser Stelle also,

dass die 'Erscheinungen des Hoffens' – d.h. unsere sprachlichen und nicht-sprachlichen Äußerungen hoffnungsvoller Einstellungen – 'Modifikationen dieser komplizierten Lebensform' sind, nämlich der Lebensform von Geschöpfen, die eine Sprache beherrschen.23

Doch ist diese Lesart wirklich zwangsläufig?

Wie ich einsichtig machen möchte, könnte Wittgenstein an dieser Stelle freilich auch etwas gänzlich anderes gemeint haben. Seine Rede von 'dieser komplizierten Lebensform' könnte nämlich auch, um eine unschöne Wortwiederholung zu vermeiden, elliptisch sein und mittels des deiktischen Ausdrucks 'dieser' auf das 'Hoffen' als eine konstante Form, gleichsam als ein wiederkehrendes Muster im Leben der Menschen verweisen. Zu lesen wäre in diesem Falle hier: Die mannigfaltigen individuellen 'Erscheinungen des Hoffens', den wir im Leben begegnen, seien 'Modifikati-

22 Garver 1984, 43f.
onen dieser komplizierten Lebensform’ des Hoffens. Und insofern wäre dann das ‘Hoffen’ hier die von Wittgenstein in den Blick genommene Lebensform, die als solche viel komplizierter sei als die Erscheinungen des Hoffens, die jemand im Einzelfall in seinem Sprechen und Verhalten erkennen lässt.


In dieser Formulierung ist der Begriff der ‘Lebensform’ aus der oben zitierten Bemerkung aus ‘Teil II’ der Philosophischen Untersuchungen durch den Begriff des ‘Lebensmusters’ ersetzt, ohne dass der Sinn der Bemerkung im Ganzen verändert wird. Entsprechend wird hier wie dort ge-


Wenn man diese Deutung des Lebensformbegriffs in Wittgensteins Spätphilosophie zunächst absonderlich finden mag, dann sollte man sich klarmachen, dass dieser Eindruck vor allem deshalb entsteht, weil sie ein-

25 Siehe dagegen Garver 1984, 44.

So weist Wittgenstein in einer Bemerkung zum Problem der Regelbefolgung aus einem Taschennotizbuch der Jahre 1943/44 darauf hin, dass die „Umbgebung bestimmter Lebens[-] und Sprachformen“ (MS 127, S. 92) die Bedingung dafür sei, ob wir eine Verhaltensweise als Regelbefolgung verstehen oder nicht. Und damit scheint er in diesem Zusammenhang zu meinen, dass gewisse Konstellationen, bestimmte Muster von sprachlichen und nicht-sprachlichen Erscheinungen vorliegen müssen, damit wir veranlasst werden, von Regelbefolgung oder Zuwiderhandlung zu sprechen. Diese Deutung legt jedenfalls eine Bemerkung aus einem weiteren im Nachlass befindlichen Taschennotizbuch (= MS 165) nahe, das Wittgenstein zwischen 1941 und 1944 bearbeitete, und die eine Variante zu PU 206 darstellt. Ebenso wie an dieser bekannten Stelle der Philosophischen Untersuchungen diskutiert er hier die Frage, wann wir den Mitgliedern einer für uns fremden Kultur, deren Sprache wir nicht beherrschen, ähnliche Muster des Sprechens und Verhaltens zuschreiben würden, wie wir sie bei uns kennen. „Kämen wir in ein fremdes Land mit fremder «Sprache & fremden» Sitten,“ schreibt er,

so wäre es manchmal «in manchen Fällen» leicht eine Sprach- & Lebensform zu finden «sehen» die wir Befehlen & b Befolgen zu nennen hätten, vielleicht aber besäßen sie keine Sprach- & Lebensform die ganz unsern Befehlen etc entsprächen. So wie es vielleicht ein Volk gibt, das nichts «keine» unserm

26 Datierung nach von Wright 1986, 53.
27 Datierung nach von Wright 1986, 55.
Gruß entsprechenden Lebensform besitzt. //das nichts unserm Grüßen entspre-
chende besitzt// (MS 165, 110f.).

Hier kommt mit aller wünschenswerten Deutlichkeit zum Ausdruck, dass
das ‚Befehlen’ und das ‚Befolgen von Befehlen’ von Wittgenstein je als
Sprach- und Lebensform verstanden werden. Zu diesen Sprach- und Le-
bensformen könne es in der fremden Kultur zwar ein Pendant geben, doch
cönten die dort gepflegten Sprach- und Lebensformen den unsrigen aber
vielleicht auch nur partiell entsprechen. Und neben ‚Befehl’ und ‚Befol-
gung eines Befehls’ bezeichnet er den ‚Gruß’ bzw. das ‚Grüßen’ an dieser
Stelle sogar ganz explizit als eine Lebensform unserer sozialen Welt, zu
der es in einer fremden Kultur nicht notwendigerweise ein Gegenstück gibt.

Das ‚Grüßen’ ist natürlich eine relativ einfache Lebensform: ein so-
zusagen primitiveres Muster des Sprechens und Handelns, bei dem sich in
sehr viel geringerem Maße sprachliche und nicht-sprachliche Merkmale zu
einer Gestalt verbinden, als etwa im komplizierten Falle des ‚Hoffens’.
Und tatsächlich scheint Wittgenstein primitive und grundlegende von
komplizierten und abgeleiteten Lebensformen unterscheiden zu wollen, die
die grundlegenden Formen gleichsam variieren. So sieht es jedenfalls in
einer Bemerkung der Jahre 1947/48\(^2\) aus, in der er geltend macht, dass je-
nes Muster, das wir als ‚Zweifel’ bezeichnen, bestimmte grundlegendere
Formen des Sprechens und Handelns voraussetzt, weil es nämlich als deren
Variation aufzufassen sei. Denn, wie er ausdrücklich betont, will er

sagen: Erst in einem Leben, das Mitteilung, Frage, u.a. kennt tritt was wir
‚Zweifel’ nennen (sozusagen in voller Blüte) als eine Variation dieser Formen
des Lebens auf. (MS 136, 141a-b)

Hier werden ‚Mitteilung’, ‚Frage’ und andere Formen unseres Lebens als
grundlegender als der ‚Zweifel’ verstanden, der als eine auf den grundle-
genden Formen gründende Variation gedeutet wird. Ähnliches hatte Witt-
genstein bereits zehn Jahre früher in einem Manuskript hervorgehoben, das
auszugsweise unter dem Titel *Ursache und Wirkung. Intuitives Erfassen*
veröffentlicht wurde. Auch hier unterstreicht er, dass das Sprachspiel des
Zweifelns keine grundlegende Lebensform, kein einfaches Muster unseres
Lebens darstellen könne, weil Zweifel, „Unsicherheit […] nicht zur Tat

\(^2\) Datierung nach von Wright 1986, 54.
führen“ (UW, 115) würde, auf die es im Zuge der Verrichtungen des Lebens nach Wittgensteins Ansicht freilich stets ankommt. Auch das Sprechen einer Sprache steht für Wittgenstein ja, wie man weiß, im Dienst der Tat, und weil dies so ist, fügt er zu seiner Feststellung hinzu, es sei

charakteristisch für unsere Sprache, dass sie auf dem Grund fester Lebensformen, regelmäßigen Tuns, emporwächst.

Ihre Funktion ist vor allem durch die Handlung, deren Begleiterin sie ist, bestimmt. (ebd. = MS 119, 74v)


zugleich auch erkennen, dass und wie sich die jeweiligen Sprachverwendung
ungen mit nicht-sprachliche Handlungsmustern verknüpfen.29

Darüber hinaus verwendet Wittgenstein den Lebensformbegriff im
Rahmen der Philosophischen Untersuchungen noch an zwei weiteren Stel-
len, auf die ich im Zuge der vorangegangenen Überlegungen noch nicht
eingegangen bin. Beide Stellen sind von solcher Art, dass sie die Interpre-
ten seit je zu besonders gedankenschweren Interpretationen ermuntert ha-
ben. Ich dagegen möchte abschließend noch zeigen, dass sie vor dem Hin-
tergrund der hier vorgetragenen Interpretation des Lebensformbegriffs ei-
en einfachen und klaren Sinn haben.

Die erste dieser beiden Stellen findet sich in Teil I der Philosophi-
schen Untersuchungen in Bemerkung 241:

„So sagst du also, dass die Übereinstimmung der Menschen entscheide, was
richtig und was falsch ist?“ – Richtig und falsch ist, was Menschen sagen; und
in der Sprache stimmen die Menschen überein. Dies ist keine Übereinstim-
mung der Meinungen, sondern der Lebensform. (PU 241)

29 Natürlich will Wittgenstein nicht behaupten, dass Sprachspiele und Lebensformen
identisch seien oder dass jedem Sprachspiel genau eine Lebensform entspreche,
auch wenn dies so erscheinen kann, weil das „Grüßen“ in PU 23 als „Sprachspiel“, an einer anderen Stelle im Nachlass aber als „Lebensform“ bezeichnet wird. (Siehe
dazu Stosch 2001, 32f.; dort weitere Literaturhinweise zur „Identitätsthese“ über
das Verhältnis von Sprachspiel und Lebensform.) Dieser Eindruck der Identität
beider Begriffe entsteht allerdings nur deshalb, weil man die Lebensform des
‚Grüßens‘ in philosophischen Zusammenhängen nicht an sprechen kann, ohne dabeizugleich das Sprachspiel des ‚Grüßens‘ zu nennen. Doch der Begriff der ‚Le-
bensform‘ ist der weitere Begriff als der des ‚Sprachspiels‘. Zu den uns vertrauten
Sprachspielen des ‚Grüßens‘ rechnet z.B., dass gewissen Handlungen vollzogen
und bestimmte Worte ausgesprochen werden. Und in diesem Falle könnte man tat-
sächlich behaupten, dass hier das Sprachspiel mit der Lebensform übereinstimme.
Doch natürlich würde die Lebensform des ‚Grüßens‘ ein Muster unseres Lebens
auch sein, wenn die Gepflogenheit existierte, beim Grüßen gar nichts zu sagen,
sondern nur im beschriebenen Sinne zu handeln. Dann könnte man nicht vom
„Sprachspiel“, wohl aber von der „Lebensform“ des „Grüßens“ sprechen. Doch
Wittgenstein selbst, so scheint mir, interessiert eine genauere Klärung dieses
Punktes schon deshalb nicht, weil er den Begriff der „Lebensform“ gar nicht als
terminus technicus seiner Spätphilosophie einführen will.
In dieser Bemerkung schließt Wittgenstein ein mögliches Missverständnis seiner Gedanken aus: das Missverständnis, dass er ein konsensustheoretisches Verständnis von Wahrheit vertrete, demzufolge die Übereinstimmung der Menschen ein Kriterium für die Richtigkeit oder Falschheit ihrer Urteile sei. Demgegenüber hebt er an unserer Stelle hervor, dass er durchaus an der gewöhnlichen Auffassung festhalte, dergestalt das, was Menschen sagen, richtig oder falsch sein kann. Allerdings macht er darauf aufmerksam, dass er sehr wohl in anderer Hinsicht die Übereinstimmung der Menschen betone: ihre Übereinstimmung in der Sprache, in der sie ihre richtigen oder falschen Aussagen formulieren. Diese besteht darin, dass die Menschen, die eine bestimmte Sprache sprechen, dasselbe als ,rot‘, dasselbe als ,Schmerzen haben‘ oder dasselbe als ,rechnen‘ bezeichnen, um nur einige Beispiele zu nennen, die Wittgenstein im Umfeld von PU 241 diskutiert. Obgleich in jedem dieser Beispielsfälle skeptische Zweifel möglich sind, ob man etwas im Einzelfall wirklich ,rot‘, ,Schmerzen‘ oder ,Rechnen‘ nennt, ist es ja doch ein Faktum, dass wir uns im gewöhnlichen Gebrauch der Sprache von der Möglichkeit solcher Zweifel unbeeindruckt zeigen und übereinstimmend mit anderen die Wörter gebrauchen. Und diese Übereinstimmung, sagt Wittgenstein nun, sei keine ,der Meinungen, sondern der Lebensform‘.30


30 Vgl. als Parallelstelle MS 124, 212f., wo die Tatsache, dass „die Sprache [...] den Menschen gemeinsam“ ist, auf „eine Lebensform in der sie übereinstimmen (nicht eine Meinung)“ zurückgeführt wird. Auch hier wäre es grundverkehrt, diese Stelle wie Stosch (2001, 33) als Beleg für die Standardinterpretation zu lesen. Was wäre dann nämlich die Position, die Wittgenstein hier zurückweist? Soll man ihm wirklich unterstellen, er habe sagen wollen, die Gemeinsamkeit der Sprache in einer Sprachgemeinschaft basiere auf einer gemeinsamen kulturellen Praxis, nicht auf einer Meinung? Es ist wohl nicht einmal absehbar, was dies heißen könnte.
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*nicht* daraus, dass sich alle unabhängig voneinander jeweils eine subjektive Meinung gebildet hätten, ob bestimmten Regeln tatsächlich gefolgt wurde; eine Meinung, in der dann zufälligerweise auch noch alle übereinstimmen. Vielmehr resultiert der Konsens hier daraus, dass alle der Mathematik Kundigen in einer bestimmten Lebensform, d.h. in einem bestimmten, für unser Leben eminent wichtigen Handlungsmuster übereinstimmen: nämlich dass alle *das* tun, was wir zum Muster des ‚Rechnens‘ zählen. Das ‚Rechnen‘ ist also in diesem Falle die übereinstimmend geteilte Lebensform, und zu ihr gehört, dass gewisse Dinge – auf dem Papier, auf einer Tafel oder mittels anderer Hilfsmitteln – *getan* werden und dass Bestimmtes *gesagt* wird, nämlich dass übereinstimmend das als korrekt geltende Ergebnis einer Rechnung genannt wird.\(^{31}\) Auf die Techniken, die zum ‚Rechnen‘ gehören – ‚Multiplizieren‘, ‚Subtrahieren‘, ‚Addieren‘ etc. – sind wir um Zuge unserer Sozialisation unerbittlich trainiert worden, und darum kann Wittgenstein in einem ähnlichen Zusammenhang sagen, dass unsere Übereinstimmung in dem, was wir ‚einer mathematischen Regel folgen‘ nennen, auf ‚Abrichtung, Drill, & die Formen unsres Lebens‘ (MS 160, 26r) zurückzuführen sei. Es handele sich eben *nicht* „um einen Consens der Meinungen sondern der Lebensformen“ (MS 160, 26v-r).


die Tatsache, dass wir so und so handeln, z.B., gewisse Handlungen strafen, den Tatbestand so und so feststellen, Befehle geben, Berichte erstatten, Farben beschreiben, uns für die Gefühle der Andern interessieren (BPP I, 630),

alle diese Formen, die er in den Bemerkungen über die Philosophie der Psychologie auflistet, entziehen sich in ihrer Faktizität der Begründung. Und darum fügt Wittgenstein auch an dieser Stelle die Bemerkung hinzu: „Das hinzunehmende, gegebene — könnte man sagen — seien Tatsachen des Lebens.//seien Lebensformen.“ (ebd.32)

IV.

Ich komme zu einem kurzen Fazit: Der Begriff der ‚Lebensform‘ ist in Wittgensteins Spätphilosophie gewiss ein interessanter Begriff, doch zweifellos kein ‚Grundbegriff‘ im Sinne der eingangs genannten Hauptströmungen seiner Deutung. Für das, was mit ihm gemeint ist – eine Konstellation von Regelmäßigkeiten sprachlichen und nicht-sprachlichen Handelns, die wir als mit Variationen wiederkehrende Struktur in unserem Leben betrachten –, kann Wittgenstein in anderen Zusammenhängen auch ‚Lebensmuster‘, einmal auch ‚Lebensschablone‘ (LSPP 206) schreiben. Und dieser Begriffsgehalt ist philosophisch nicht nur im Blick auf Wittgensteins sprachphilosophische ‚Theorie‘ der Sprachspiele interessant,

32 Siehe auch MS 133, 28r; TS 229, 333, sowie TS 245, 245.
sondern vor allem auch im Blick auf seine Analyse der Semantik psycholo-

   gischer und soziologischer Termini. Denn letztere beziehen sich – wie
   wir im ersten Teil dieser Überlegungen gesehen haben – auf Lebensformen
   und Lebensmuster. Wie die Substituierbarkeit des Lebensformbegriffs
durch andere Begriffe wahrscheinlich macht, hat Wittgenstein, der ja phi-

   losophischen Jargon verabscheute, ihn wohl gar nicht als *terminus techni-
cus* seiner Spätphilosophie dem Ausdruck „Sprachspiel“ an die Seite stellen
wollen. Dies lässt auch sein seltenes, eher beiläufiges und stets unkommen-
tiertes Vorkommen in den *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* vermuten. Die
interessantesten Verwendungen des Begriffs finden sich dabei zudem noch
im sog. zweiten Teil dieses Werkes, von dem – nochmals gesagt – aus heu-
tiger Sicht mehr als fraglich ist, ob Wittgenstein ihn jemals in sein zweites
Buch aufnehmen wollte. In den Manuskripten des Nachlasses ist ohne
Veränderung des Gemeinten statt von „Lebensform“ gelegentlich einfach
von „Formen“ bzw. – im sog. *Braunen Buch* – von „Form des Le-
bens“ (EPB, 202) die Rede.33 Und dies legt die Vermutung nahe, dass der

33 Diese letztgenannte Stelle ist in Wittgensteins Nachlass übrigens die einzige, die
überhaupt als Beleg für die Standardinterpretation angeführt werden könnte (vgl.
in diesem Sinne Schulte 1999, 160 und Stosch 2001, 33). Sie findet sich in Witt-
gensteins deutschsprachiger Umarbeitung des *Brown Book*. Dort hieß es:

   Imagine a use of language (a culture) in which there was a common name for
   green and red on the one hand, and yellow and blue on the other. [...] 
   We could also easily imagine a language (and that means again a culture) in 
   which there existed no common expression for light blue and dark blue, [...] .
   (D 310, 89)

   Dies übernimmt Wittgenstein folgendermaßen ins Deutsche:

   Stellen wir uns einen Sprachgebrauch vor (eine Kultur), in welchem es einen 
gemeinsamen Namen für grün und rot, und einen für blau und gelb gibt. [...] 
Umgekehrt könnte ich mir auch eine Sprache (und das heißt wieder eine Form 
des Lebens denken, die zwischen Dunkelrot und Hellrot eine Kluft befestigt.
   etc. (EPB, 202)

   Hier wird der Ausdruck „Form des Lebens“ tatsächlich einmal anstelle des Wortes
„culture“ in der englischen Vorlage benutzt. Doch lässt sich daraus ableiten, dass
Wittgenstein *generell* unter einer „Lebensform“ eine „Kultur“ verstand? Angesichts
der Tatsache, dass es keine Parallelstelle zur zitierten Stelle gibt, erscheint es mir
ermeneutisch außerordentlich gewaltsam, aus ihr die Behauptung ableiten zu
Ausdruck ’Lebensform’ einfach nur eine aus stilistischen Gründen vorgenommene Substantivierung des Ausdrucks ’Form des Lebens’ darstellt; – und nichts weiter. Ambitionen, die Terminologie der Philosophie zu bereichern, scheint man Wittgenstein bei der Verwendung dieses Begriffs jedenfalls nicht unterstellen zu müssen.

Literatur


versity Press. (Als MS, TS oder D mit der jeweiligen Manuskript-, Typoskript- oder Diktatnummer und der Seitenzahl zitiert.)


If we want to understand human communication, ... we cannot begin with language. (Michael Tomasello 2008, 59)

It is extraordinary how a philosopher who was allegedly averse to theorizing made such an impact on theorists of all disciplines, and indeed was the often-acknowledged inspiration of new and ground-breaking theories. Recently, when I investigated Wittgenstein’s views on memory, I was astonished to find how deeply even a superficial knowledge of those views had impacted neuropsychological research on the subject (Moyal-Sharrock 2009). And as I embark on an exploration of his view of language acquisition, I find the field – or at least the progressive side of the field – more than superficially cognizant of at least the Philosophical Investigations, and carving with it its new, fertile, furrows.

A little aside to explain the subtitle of my paper: ‘Wittgenstein’s “Theory” of Language Acquisition’. I don’t share the radical Therapeutic reading of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, which takes Wittgenstein as not attempting to do anything constructive in philosophy, but interested only in keeping us from succumbing to misleading philosophical pictures. I am what might be called ‘right of centre’ in my reading of Wittgenstein, and am not averse to saying that his insights on language acquisition, as on many other things, amount to a theory, inasmuch as a theory can be a suggested rearrangement – in the best of cases: a more perspicuous presentation – of what is ‘always before our eyes’ (PI 122, 415). The inverted commas around ‘theory’ are there merely to acknowledge the fact that Wittgenstein might not have liked to call it that.
1. The critique of Referentialism

One of the important things Wittgenstein said about language is that it has its root in gesture – or, as he also put it, in ‘action’ (‘the deed’), and more precisely: ‘reaction’ or ‘instinct’. No Chomsky here:

What we call meaning must be connected with the primitive language of gestures (pointing-language). (BT 24)

This prompted Michael Tomasello to realize that – contrary to current primatologist dogma – apes’ gestures, not their vocalizations, are the precursors of human language (2008, 53-5).

As Wittgenstein says, repeatedly and variously: our language-games are grounded in instinct or primitive reactions: our shared primitive behaviour. By this, he means things like spontaneous gestures – which, through training, get replaced by words. This, which John Canfield calls Wittgenstein’s ‘primitivism’ (1997, 258), contrasts with the unabashed intellectualism or mentalism of views like Chomsky’s and Fodor’s, according to which at the basis of language is a perfect linguistic structure or even a ‘language of thought’ (‘Mentalese’) located in the brain. On this view, our words are, as it were, informed by the mind; they get their meaning from what must be an inner full-blown ‘referential’ language. Language acquisition is primarily a problem of figuring out which mental concept a word maps on to or hooks on to.

Chomsky’s and Fodor’s perpetually-refurbished theories notwithstanding, progress away from Referentialism has been made. Derek Montgomery, in his excellent ‘Mental Verbs and Semantic Development’, shows how, drawing on Wittgenstein’s private language argument, contemporary theories have been emphasizing semantic development as a process of learning how, when, and for what purpose words are used. He calls this ‘the contextual view’ (2002, 368), which he summarizes as follows:

... the semantic development of mental verbs is better characterized as a process of learning how to use a word rather than a process of learning to label a referent. Meaning is not defined ‘in-the-head’ of the word learner, but is embedded in the social practices responsible for framing the purpose a word serves and for guiding the proper ways to use it within relevant discourse contexts. (2002, 376)
Nor can an act of ostension give meaning to an object or a sign, or produce criteria for the latter’s further use. As Jerome Bruner writes:

> There is a *long road* between following another’s gaze out to an object and being able to comprehend a referring expression like ‘the cream cheese on the top shelf of the fridge’. (1983, 123; my emphasis)

It is in social practices, not in the mind, that we shall find this long road to understanding, for it is in social practices that the meaning of words and the standards for their use are established. Meaning, as Wittgenstein says, is ‘in use’ – out there – not in the head, not in some mental repository.

2. The ‘long road’ to understanding

2.1 The Primitivity of Action: the deed, not the word

In the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein writes that ‘[t]he study of language games is the study of primitive forms of language or languages’ (BLB 17). What are those primitive forms of language? They are not words or symbols, but ‘reactions’:

> The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop.

Language – I want to say – is a refinement. “In the beginning was the deed.” (CE 395; CV p. 31)

> The basic form of the game must be one in which we act. (CE 397)

> The essence of the language game is a practical method (a way of acting) – not speculation, not chatter. (CE 399)

Language, then, is a refinement; it emerges from the *development* of some of our natural reactions. Not just *any* natural reaction – not singular or idiosyncratic ones, like tics – but our *shared* natural reactions. Wittgenstein suggests just this when he writes: ‘it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in *steady ways of living, regular ways of acting*’ (CE 397; my emphasis). The kind of reaction from which language can develop must be the *shared* or instinctive behaviour of mankind; reactions such as: crying when hurting or sad; smiling when glad; jumping when startled; gasping or screaming when afraid; but also reacting to someone’s suffering. Indeed:
In its most primitive form [the language-game] is a reaction to somebody’s cries and gestures, a reaction of sympathy or something of the sort. (CE 414)

These instinctive common reactions or action patterns are the *prototypes* of our concepts\(^1\), including those of belief and doubt:

Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour.) (Instinct). (Z 545; cf. also RPP I, 151)

And so, the basis for the development of language is constituted by a number of distinct primitive, instinctive, behavioural patterns that John Canfield calls ‘proto-language games’ (1996, 128). Without these behavioural patterns, there would be no language. This is the case phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically; for these biological given configurations of behaviour – such as: ‘[t]he natural, untutored behaviour of one pre-linguistic hominid helping another it sees is hurt’ – are part of the species’ inheritance (ibid.). So that, for Wittgenstein, too, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

2.2 Training

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes that the primitive forms of language are those used by the child when it is learning to talk (PI 5) and that, here, ‘the teaching of language is not explanation, but training’ (PI 5). Why? For an obvious reason: inasmuch as here – that is, in initiate learning, or the learning of a first language – the initiate has only reactions and no words at its disposal, the learning of a native language will *have* to do with action or behaviour; words can only play a secondary (background music) role. This is why, at the very beginning – where the teacher has only the infant’s instinct to work with – the teaching of language can only be a training, not an explaining. Language cannot take its grounding in thought or reflection:

\[^1\] ‘What, however, is the word “primitive” meant to say here? Presumably, that the mode of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*: that it is the prototype of a mode of thought and not the result of thought.’ (RPP I, 916; Z 541).
I really want to say that scruples in thinking begin with (have their roots in) instinct. Or again: a language-game does not have its origin in reflection\(^2\). Reflection is part of a language-game. (Z 391)

I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. … Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination. (OC 475)

Because it has reactions and no words, the preverbal child is much like an animal; and so the kind of training it will have to undergo resembles that effected on animals – it resembles *taming* (*Abrichten*, PI 5):

I am using the word ‘trained’ in a way strictly analogous to that in which we talk of an animal being trained to do certain things. It is done by means of example, reward, punishment, and suchlike. (BB 77)

Language, then, is an extension of our patterned non-linguistic behaviour through training. ‘But how is the connexion between the name and the thing set up?’ asks Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*; and he replies:

This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? – of the word ‘pain’ for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour. (PI 244)

So the connection between the name and the thing is not made by an act of ostension, not by merely hooking gestures on to their public referents, but by processes of drill or habituation that are similar to stimulus-response conditioning, but that must be supplemented by training *into the practice* in which those words are used\(^3\).

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\(^2\) I have modified the translation of ‘Überlegung’ here as ‘reflection’, preferring it to the more opaque ‘consideration’.

\(^3\) Cf. Medina 2002, 173. As Montgomery observes, if the carer repeatedly uses the verb ‘*want*’ while interpreting the infant’s behaviour in certain contexts, it is ‘reasonable to suspect that when the verb emerges in the child’s lexicon it will be in familiar contexts such as [those] where the child has repeatedly heard it being used. The meaning of the term, like the meaning of the prelinguistic gesturing, is bound up in the role it plays within such contexts’ (2002, 372).
What the child is taught in learning to replace his primitive reactions with words, is ‘new ... behaviour’ (PI 244). Natural reactions are replaced by modified action patterns: ‘a stylized overlay upon the prior naturally existing interaction pattern’ (Canfield 1997, 261). So, for instance, the child learns to replace his initial crying for food with intentional gesturing for food, and eventually with more sophisticated – i.e. linguistic – requests. The word replaces the gesture and takes over its function. It isn’t that the word is now hooked or mapped on to the behaviour, but that it replaces it:

“So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying?” – On the contrary: the verbal expression [Ausdruck] of pain replaces crying and does not describe it⁴. (PI 244)

On what Montgomery calls the ‘contextualist view’ of semantic development, this substitutive function of the word – its doing the same job as the gesture – is due to the continuity that exists between the communicative goals children have pre-linguistically and the goals they have when using words (2002, 370). But we must be wary here of Montgomery’s over-intellectualization of the primitive gesture that will extend into language; there can hardly be a communicative goal at the initial stage. Indeed, Wittgenstein speaks of a ‘reaction’ at the basis of the language-game (CV 31; CE 395); this implies spontaneity, not purpose or goal-directedness. The infant’s primitive crying is not goal-directed, but instinctively expressive; of course the infant will soon learn to ‘direct’ or stage its crying to serve a purpose, but that is a refinement of the primitive gesture. So that, contra Montgomery (2002, 370), at the root of language is not prelinguistic social-communicative behaviour, but prelinguistic behaviour tout court.

⁴ ‘Primitive pain-behaviour is a sensation-behaviour; it gets replaced by a linguistic expression’ (RPP I, 313). When Wittgenstein says that what the child learns when he learns to replace the sensation-behavior by a linguistic expression is ‘new behaviour’, he is not only suggesting that language is also behavior (using language is primitive behavior), but means to emphasize that in picking up the linguistic expression, the child is not describing with it, but reacting with it. This will remain the case in some adult reactions: ‘The words “I am happy” are a bit of the behaviour of joy.’ (RPP I, 450); ‘For think of the sensations produced by physically shuddering: the words “it makes me shiver” are themselves such a shuddering reaction; and if I hear and feel them as I utter them, this belongs among the rest of those sensations.’ (PI p. 174)
The primitive gesture is only expressive, not expressly communicative or social; it will gradually become a tool for intentional communication, and it will also be replaced with language. This is not to say that we lose all gestures to language; gestures remain, but they are no longer our only mode of expression. And the uses of gestures become as various as the uses of language — in the main, those delineated by Karl Buehler (1934): descriptive, expressive and directive (steering/signalling).

Ostensive teaching, as opposed to mere ostensive definition, involves behavioural conditioning: the child is taught, through repetition and exercises, to utter certain words in certain contexts or situations. These drills are used to tap and channel the child’s natural reactions. What we witness in these initial stages is not yet language, but ‘processes resembling language’ (PI 7); for a language is not the mere repetition of certain sounds in certain contexts and after certain prompts. Wittgenstein is not a behaviourist. Drill is not enough: a normative attitude towards utterances, towards how things are to be done, must be inculcated in the child, so that it can learn to regulate itself. It is thanks to her acquiring this normative attitude that the child is eventually able to go on, on her own; to proceed from other-regulation to self-regulation (Medina, 2002, 165). And acquiring a normative attitude demands nothing less than being enculturated. Successful enculturation means the child can then judge for herself that in a particular instance a word or phrase makes sense, not by comparing it to a benchmark, context-free, use but on the basis of her experience of multiple language-games in which the word or phrase is used.

So that, contra Chomsky, the learning of a first language is essentially social; it requires that a member of the child’s linguistic community mould its primitive reactions and proto-language games into language-games; bringing the child, through a process of enculturation, to assimilate, conform to and apply the standards of correctness of its linguistic community. Lest this normalisation of the child be deemed un-Wittgensteinian, I should add that Wittgenstein refers to, and quite often, to a normal way of doing things and of using words. In the Lectures on Philosophical Psy-

5 ‘Our children are not only given practice in calculation but are also trained to adopt a particular attitude towards a mistake in calculating [variant: ‘... towards a departure from the norm’]’ (RFM VII 61, p. 425).
chology, for instance: ‘having been taught, the child must use the word in a normal way’ (LPP 37). More on this later.

Acquiring language is like learning to walk: the child is stepped into language by an initiator and, after much hesitation and repeated faltering, with time, multifarious practice and repeated exposure, it disengages itself from its teacher’s hold and is able, as it were, to run with the language.

3. The two problems of language acquisition: learning and productivity

The two main problems of native language acquisition, as I have found them in the literature, are: 1) the problem of learning what is being taught; and 2) the problem of productivity of novel sentences. Fodor’s and Chomsky’s solution to both these problems is to posit an innate mental linguistic structure or universal grammar that enables learning and productivity. I briefly summarize their approach to these problems and then show that the Wittgensteinian solution also appeals to a grammar – but of a different kind.

3.1 The Problem of Learning

The problem of learning is summarized in one of Fodor’s hallmark claims: ‘one cannot learn a language unless one has a language’ (1975, 64). How can a child understand the words or sentences we are trying to teach it, if it has never come across words or sentences before? On Chomsky’s view, the child could not make sense of the language it is being taught if it did not have an innate language acquisition device (LAD) with which to recognize, interpret and analyze that language. Chomsky describes language acquisition as the gradual experience-triggered disclosure of innate grammar. Chomsky’s innate or internal universal grammar is made up of innate principles that are common to all external or natural languages (such as English, Greek, Hebrew etc.). It is from this full-blown innate grammar that the child is able to abstract or infer the structure or rules of its native language from its limited and faulty manifestations. An immediate objection is that this may at best offer an explanation of how the child comes to learn what the correct structure (or syntax) of its native regional language is, but what about meaning? The difficulty was well illustrated by Searle’s
Chinese Room Argument, according to which competence with syntax does not imply understanding. In an effort to import meaning into his deficient scenario, Chomsky appeals to ‘deep structures’. But let us move on to Fodor.

Taking Chomsky’s lead, Jerry Fodor claims that language acquisition requires that we already possess a ‘language of thought’ (LOT) – that is, an inner language that contains all the concepts or representations of anything we can ever learn (including language), think or express. It is by successfully matching words it encounters in experience with words (or physical meanings) in the language of thought that the child comes to acquire language. The LOT, that is, provides meaning itself. Indeed, as Fodor stated in a recent talk at the University of London: ‘concept-learning is … an oxymoron’; ‘All our concepts are innate’ (15 May 2009). This of course implies that all homo sapiens are born with the basic concepts, say, of nuclear science; and the idea of inner interpretation and matching calls for the services of a homunculus.

However, my aim here is not to examine the plausibility attached to the idea of inner, innate concepts that echo the Platonist view that we can never really learn anything new since experience only draws out what is innately in the mind. My aim here is rather to address the problems which Fodor and Chomsky think solvable only by postulating an innate universal grammar or language of thought. I’ll just briefly summarize the second problem before going on to the Wittgensteinian solution.

3.2 The Problem of Productivity
The problem of productivity, or creativity, is how to account for our capacity to produce and understand a potentially infinite number of novel and correct sentences. Here, the poverty of stimulus argument strikes at social theories of language acquisition by claiming that the utterances encountered by the child in experience being faulty and limited, it is impossible that she should learn the language by generalizing from this inadequate experience. Moreover, the syntax of any language is so abstruse that no child could learn it unless she already had the form of the grammar hardwired into her brain. Because experience cannot account for our ability to understand and produce novel correct sentences, we are forced to suppose the existence of a universal grammar which must be both endowed with recur-
sive rules so as to enable productivity or creativity, and innate for we could never acquire it from our limited exposure to imperfect language use. Note that this inner grammar is not only productive, but also restrictive; it suppresses overly idiosyncratic or deviant uses of language.

4. Wittgenstein’s Social Conception of Language Acquisition: grammar, yes, but not innate

From Wittgenstein’s social view of language acquisition, the problem of learning is readily deproblematized: the child need not already have a language in order to learn a language; what it needs is to be in a situation in which there is already language (but it isn’t yet the child’s); and to have human instincts and reactions, as well as a carer who can train it into developing those instinctive reactions into words. So we might substitute Fodor’s ‘one cannot learn a language unless one has a language’ with ‘one cannot learn a language unless there is already a language there’. And in the case of the first human language, there was no learning a language but an evolving into language from shared natural reactions.

Fodor’s claim that the initiate must already have a language if she is to understand what she is being taught would be right if what the teacher were attempting to pass on, from the get-go, were the whole language, and/or if she were teaching it solely through words or sentences. But if – as is the case – what the teacher is attempting to transmit is not a whole language from the get-go, but the bare rudiments of one; and if her teaching it consists not only in the use of words but in contextualized actions, gestures, facial expressions, tones, etc.; and if the child’s understanding is not achieved in an instant or a flash, but requires multifarious repetition in multifarious contexts, why would a language of thought or built-in mental grammar be required at all to start with? As to the grammar necessary for language acquisition, it does not need to be already in place in the initiate; it simply needs to be in place in her environment. The initiate does not need to have prior knowledge of the type she is learning – i.e. of language – she need only be properly equipped to learn it – and by that, is meant: she must be a biologically and socially adept human being living in a human world. On a Wittgensteinian conception, the necessary conditions for initiate language acquisition include the following:
a) that a fully-fledged language be there and that it be used by the carer in training the child;

b) that the child have natural reactions that it shares with the rest of humanity including, as we have seen, shared instinctive behaviour (e.g. crying when hurting or sad; jumping when startled), but also shared instinctive responses (e.g. to pain, to pointing) and shared basic discriminations (e.g. of taste, colours, shapes). Indeed, our acquiring concepts, such as pain, requires that we have appropriate (i.e. normal) human reactions:

If a child looked radiant when it was hurt, and shrieked for no apparent reason, one couldn’t teach him to use the word ‘pain’. Even if we taught him to use it instead of shrieking it would still not have the consequences like taking him to the doctor; it would be a new use. One couldn’t teach him our use of psychological words. (LPP 37)

The frame of reference to which we fasten these words is ordinary human behaviour. The further away a human being is from this the less we could know how to teach him. (LPP 159)

And for concept acquisition to even get off the ground, the initiate must be susceptible to training; must react to such things as pointing and encouragement appropriately:

… acts [of encouragement] will only be possible if the pupil responds, and responds in a particular way. Imagine the gestures, sounds, etc., of encouragement you use when you teach a dog to retrieve. Imagine on the other hand, that you tried to teach a cat to retrieve. As the cat will not respond to your encouragement, most of the acts of encouragement which you performed when you trained the dog are here out of the question. (BB 89-90)

c) a fundamental trust on the part of the initiate is also required for language acquisition; her blind acceptance of the authority of the teacher or of the rule (PI 219). In On Certainty, Wittgenstein insists on the blind trust that must lie at the bottom of the learning process if that process is to go on at all:

The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief. (OC 160)

For how can a child immediately doubt what it is taught? That could mean only that he was incapable of learning certain language games. (OC 283)
A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. (OC 143)

This is not to say that children will not often inquire about what they are taught, but that children do not normally question the teacher’s authority or the basic rules or facts that they are taught (e.g. the multiplication tables, the letters of the alphabet; that Napoleon existed; that Paris is the capital of France; what some words mean). Alexander Bain speaks of ‘the natural or primitive credulity of the mind’ (1868, 377):

We are all faith at the outset; we become sceptics by experience, that is, by encountering checks and exceptions. We begin with unbounded credulity. (1868, 382)

And of course, this is helped by the fact that we are first taught the use of a word in its most obvious or unambiguous context:

The way in which we learn to use the word [pain], and therefore the way in which it is used, is … complicated, difficult to describe. For instance it is first taught under certain circumstances where there is no doubt, i.e. where there is no question of doubt. (LW II 30)

Indeed, in the *Blue Book*, we are reminded that language, in its simplest forms, stems from ‘activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent’ (BB, 17).

d) and finally, an important condition for language acquisition would go under the broad heading of *training*, and include drill, repeated exposure as well as a competent trainer – that is, a reasonably adept user of the language, endowed with enough pedagogic ability to mould or shape the child’s responses to the training so that they end up in harmony with the norm. It may be objected that training is not necessary for language acquisition and that exposure to a language may be sufficient. I, for one, share Philippe Narboux’ view that training is a necessary though insufficient condition for the learning of a *native* language whereas *second-language* acquisition doesn’t require it, and can rely on nothing other than ostensive definition, because it relies on previous training (2004, 136).

On Wittgenstein’s view, then, the framework that must be in place for language acquisition is not homogeneous, but heterogeneous. And *pace*
Chomsky and Fodor, the human brain—though biochemically necessary to language acquisition—is not the repository of language. Meanings are established outside the individual mind, and so their acquisition requires socio-linguistic interaction. The grammatical rules that establish criteria for the proper uses of words are not internally or privately applied principles; they are norms or conventions (PG 138) applied and regulated by a linguistic community, and transmissible only through enculturation. This makes language acquisition internally related to learning, exposure and initiation into normative practices.

5. Wittgensteinian ‘grammar’, not in the head

As Christina Erneling writes: ‘Communicating requires something beyond the speaker’s subjective, private mental state; it requires an objective and intersubjective framework, which the speakers share’ (1993, 26). Wittgenstein never denied that an objective and intersubjective framework is needed for a language to be possible. And he certainly never denied that language or communicating depends on grammar—keeping in mind Wittgenstein’s somewhat idiosyncratic use of ‘grammar’ as the network of conventional rules that describe what it makes or does not make sense to say in a particular language. Wittgenstein never stopped reflecting on the nature and extension of grammar. Indeed, it may well be argued—and I have—that the continuing thread in Wittgenstein’s philosophy is his attempt to elucidate grammar and extricate it from its too-often misleading resemblance to ordinary language.

The Wittgensteinian solution to the two problems of language acquisition is not as foreign to Fodor and Chomsky’s as may be supposed, for Wittgenstein, too, posits the existence of a universal grammar. But Wittgenstein’s grammar has nothing of the mental about it: it is neither innate nor inner; it is, like language, rooted in our primitive reactions, and transmitted socio-culturally—both explicitly, through heuristic means, and implicitly, through exposure to, and practice of, the language.

Our grammar, Wittgenstein likes to say, is ‘autonomous’ (PG 63); by this, he does not mean that it has no link with reality, but that it is not, as he writes: ‘answerable to any reality’ or ‘accountable to any reality’ (BT 184, PG 184). What he means is that grammatical rules are not ration-
ally justified by reference to anything empirical. The relationship between grammatical rules and reality is not a rational one; we can neither justify nor invalidate a grammatical rule empirically. The rule of grammar: ‘Red is darker than pink’ is not a conclusion we come to from observing colours, but a description of the way we use the terms ‘red’, ‘darker than’ and ‘pink’; according to which, if I were to say: ‘I’ll wear the pink dress rather than the red; dark colours suit me better’, I would not be speaking grammatically.

What truck, then, do some rules of grammar have with reality (besides the fact that people use them)? It is mostly in his last work, *On Certainty*, that Wittgenstein addresses the question. Here, he comes to realize that many of the sentences that we usually take to be empirical or epistemic conclusions – such as ‘Here is a hand’, ‘The world exists’, ‘I have parents’, ‘Cats don’t grow on trees’ – are in fact expressions of rules of grammar, or rules of thought. Their link with reality is not rational, but causal (OC 130-1, 429, 474) – causal in the sense of conditioned, as opposed to reasoned. Let me try to explain.

Our language-games are conditioned by the world we live in, indeed by regularities in the world, by ‘very general facts of nature’ (PI, p. 230), but this draws a causal connection, not a justificatory one: ‘I cannot say that I have good grounds for the opinion that cats do not grow on trees or that I had a father and a mother’ (OC 282; my emphasis). A fact may be, then, at the origin of a grammatical rule, but it will have been transformed into a rule as a result of conditioning, not reasoning. Repeated exposure will have, as it were, hammered the fact into the foundations of our thought:

We say we know that water boils and does not freeze under such-and-such circumstances. Is it conceivable that we are wrong? Wouldn’t a mistake topple all judgment with it? More: what could stand if that were to fall? Might someone discover something that made us say “It was a mistake”? Whatever may happen in the future, however water may behave in the future, – we know that up to now it has behaved thus in innumerable instances.

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6 Or indeed, ‘laws of thought’: ‘The propositions of logic are ‘laws of thought’, ‘because they bring out the essence of human thinking’ – to put it more correctly: because they bring out, or shew, the essence, the technique, of thinking. They shew what thinking is and also shew kinds of thinking.’ (RFM 133; I, 90)
This fact is fused [eingegossen] into the foundations of our language-game. (OC 558)

Some facts have been fused into the bedrock, have become part of our conceptual scaffolding. Wittgenstein’s image of a fact being fused into (or infused, or cast in, or poured into: eingegossen) our foundations is deliberate and crucial. It reminds us that many conceptual necessities are related to facts (or a posteriori discoveries), but that these facts have become part of our foundational or grammatical bedrock through a nonepistemic process – like repeated exposure or training (although our initial awareness of them might have been epistemic or empirical). Essentially, in the last sentence of the above passage, Wittgenstein is saying, before Kripke, that some of our conceptual necessities have their origin in a posteriori discoveries. As Rom Harré and Edward Madden explain:

It is contingent that any man is a father, but conceptually necessary that being a father he has (or has had) a child. But that conceptual necessity is a reflection of the natural necessity of the father’s role in the reproductive process, a role not known to some Aboriginal tribes even in historical times …. The conceptual necessity has come into being in response to an a posteriori discovery of the natural necessity of the father’s role. … But so deeply has this conceptual necessity become embedded in the language, we forget that it has its source in an a posteriori discovery. (1975, 48)

The term: ‘embedded’, like ‘fused’, is meant to convey the nonratiocinated manner in which a posteriori conclusions have infiltrated our language-games. The terms ‘fused’ and ‘embedded’ call to mind others which Wittgenstein uses when he wants to avoid reference to an epistemic or rational assimilation: conditioned (OC 617), swallowing or absorption (OC 143), and he also speaks of some propositions hardening (OC 96) into rules. Indeed, that infiltration or assimilation be nonratiocinated is essential if grammar is to be autonomous or objective. A rule of grammar is not answerable to reality, but is assumed in all our language-games about reality; in all we can say or ask about reality. It is part of the unquestioned framework that allows us to form our hypotheses, our questions and answers about reality: ‘it is anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch it’ (OC 103).

To say that grammar is autonomous is to say that it is not justifiable by empirical facts or by human decision, and therefore to recognize its ob-
jectivity. Although grammatical rules – being conventional norms – are indeed a product of agreement (RFM 353; Z 428-30), the agreement here is not a concerted or deliberate agreement, but a ‘peaceful agreement’ (RFM 323), an ‘agreement in form of life’ (PI 241): essentially a blind agreement in our shared natural behaviour and human practices. It is this ‘consensus of action: a consensus of doing the same thing, reacting in the same way’ (LFM 183-4) – that is at the normative root of our grammar and our concepts. We might say that it is this ‘shared sense of the obvious’ (Williams 1999, 206) in our form of life that grammatical or normative ‘propositions’ formulate. So that where our rules of grammar have their root in facts, their anchorage is effected in and through practice, not decision. The objectivity or autonomy of grammatical rules is guaranteed by the blindness with which they are intersubjectively established and followed.

In *On Certainty*, then, Wittgenstein realizes how more far-reaching grammar is than he previously thought: it includes certainties of our world-picture which, when formulated, resemble empirical and contingent propositions:

I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language). (OC 401; my emphasis)

If I say “we assume that the earth has existed for many years past” (or something similar), then of course it sounds strange that we should assume such a thing. But in the entire system of our language-games it belongs to the foundations. The assumption, one might say, forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought. (OC 411)

These ‘propositions’ that resemble – are ‘of the form of’ – yet are not in fact empirical and epistemic propositions are ‘propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions’ (OC 136; my emphasis) – in fact, rules of grammar. They can be:

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7 ‘That is, we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if making judgments is to be possible at all. Or again: I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition is one.’ (OC 308)
1. certainties that were once learned as empirical or epistemic propositions, but have become so intersubjectively ingrained and fossilized, that they are no longer part of the wealth of empirical or epistemic propositions of a given community (e.g. modern educated adult) but belong to the ‘scaffolding’ of their thoughts (OC 211); e.g. ‘The earth is round’; ‘Trains arrive in train stations’; ‘Human beings can go to the moon’.

2. certainties that we may have learned as children, but as rules, not as questionable empirical facts: ‘Babies cannot speak’; ‘People die’; ‘People sometimes lie’; ‘The earth has existed for a long time’.

3. certainties that may never have been expressed or taught; these are either lived certainties, or certainties that are assimilated through repeated exposure: e.g.; ‘The world exists’, ‘The earth is a (large) body on whose surface we move’, ‘Trees do not gradually change into men and men into trees’, ‘If someone’s head is cut off, he is dead and will never live again’, ‘I have a body’, ‘People usually smile or laugh when they’re happy; cry when they’re sad or in pain; yell or snap when they’re angry’; ‘I recognise the people I regularly live with’; ‘The majority of people are not mistaken about their names’ etc.

The basic certainties listed in the last two groups can be called ‘universal certainties’ or ‘universal rules of grammar’ in that they belong to the scaffolding of thought of any normal human being. They are rules of grammar that are rooted (nonratiocinatively) in ‘very general facts of nature’ appertaining to ‘the natural history of human beings’ (PI 230, 415). Any empirical enquiry has to take such ‘general facts of nature’ as ‘The world exists’, ‘Human beings live and die’, or ‘Newborn babies cannot speak’ as part of its logical or grammatical starting points – its grammar.

So that language builds on reflexive gestures, as well as on lived and acquired certainties which in fact hardly differ from reflexive gestures and function like grammatical rules: they condition our use of language, determine meaning. Wittgenstein’s grammar – indeed a partly universal grammar – replaces Chomsky’s. But where Chomsky’s universal grammar is in the head, Wittgenstein’s grammar is external and does not consist of

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8 Most of the examples are drawn from On Certainty.
symbols or structures. It is really nothing but a way of acting – a logic in action\textsuperscript{9}:

Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)

That is, although we can formulate our rules of grammar (as I’ve been doing here, and as Wittgenstein often does), this formulation or verbalization is always merely heuristic; an expression of a rule of grammar is never an occurrence of the mastery of that rule. Our mastery of grammar cannot meaningfully be expressed in the flow of the language-game\textsuperscript{10}; it can only show itself in what we do and in what we say (e.g. my mastery of the grammatical rule ‘There exist beings other than myself’ shows itself in my speaking to others or of others). Indeed, Wittgenstein often speaks of language mastery in terms of a know-how, of being able to do certain things, make acceptable moves in the language:

“Understanding a word” may mean: knowing how it is used; being able to apply it. (PG, p. 47)

“I can use the word ‘yellow’” is like “I know how to move the king in chess”. (PG, p. 49)

But is it wrong to say: “A child that has mastered a language-game must know certain things”?

\textsuperscript{9} For more elaborate discussion, see Moyal-Sharrock 2003.

\textsuperscript{10} In On Certainty, Wittgenstein gives several examples where stating one’s mastery of a grammatical rule, or merely formulating a grammatical rule, in non-heuristic situations causes nothing but perplexity: ‘If a forester goes into a wood with his men and says “This tree has got to be cut down, and this one and this one” – what if he then observes “I know that that’s a tree”? (OC 353); ‘So if I say to someone “I know that that’s a tree” ... a philosopher could only use this statement to show that this form of speech is actually used. But if his use of it is not to be merely an observation about English grammar, he must give the circumstances in which this expression functions’ (OC 433). For a more elaborate discussion of the (technical) ineffability of grammatical rules in the flow of the language-game – their being ‘removed from the traffic’ (OC 210) of ordinary discourse, see Moyal-Sharrock 2007, 65ff; 94ff.
If instead of that one said “must be able to do certain things”, that would be a pleonasm, yet this is just what I want to counter the first sentence with. (OC 534)

He also calls the acquisition of language, the acquisition of a *capacity*:

When he first learns the names of colours – what is taught [the child]? Well, he learns, e.g. to call out ‘red’ on seeing something red … What I teach him … must be a capacity. So he can now bring something red at an order; or arrange objects according to colour. (Z 421)

So that we have come full circle back into the realm of action; and rightly so, for the primitivity of the deed, of action, is not only anthropological, but logical. When Wittgenstein writes that ‘[t]he basic form of the game must be one in which we act’ (CE 397; my emphasis), he is not only talking about the primitivity of action in the acquisition of language, but in the possibility of language: ‘it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game’ (OC 204).

6. Rule-Following: Wittgenstein’s answer to the productivity problem

How are we able to extend our limited acquired knowledge of language to new situations and contexts? Wittgenstein’s answer to this is that the teaching of language is not a teaching of definitions, but the transmission of a technique; and that it does not aim for total regulation, but for self-regulation.

Wittgenstein did not disparage the use of ostensive definition in teaching, but deplored its being viewed as the paradigm of teaching:

Teaching which is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given is different from that which ‘points beyond’ them. (PI 208)

Indeed, Wittgenstein’s rule-following argument shows precisely that generating new sentences is nothing but an instance of knowing how to go on, ‘how to extend the speech that [we] have into new contexts’ (Bruner 1983, 39).

Criteria determine whether a speaker is following a rule or using a word in accordance with the norm that is being inculcated. These criteria are public, not private; they can be transmitted to the child and invoked to guide and correct him in his attempts to use the words he is being taught.
The child’s various attempts are guided (encouraged/discouraged) until enough training allows her to grasp what sorts of contexts are propitious for the use of the word: semantic development involves precisely ‘becoming increasingly sensitive to how characteristics of different contexts constrain the words one can use’ (Montgomery 2002, 373). However, though constraint is necessary, there is no exhaustive determination of use but an indication of proper use (the use is constrained, not shackled), which allows for and explains creativity/productivity. We might make an analogy here with a dog that is trained not to bite: the dog will not only not bite the people present during the training, but not bite in all similar contexts (e.g. unthreatening contexts). Or again, when the child is taught to open a door, she doesn’t just learn to open that white, single panelled door which her mother is using to teach her, but all doors that she will come across in experience – whether they be white, black, double-panelled, glass and so on.

Productivity or creativity is possible inasmuch as rules are seen to be mere enablers of meaningful language. Grammatical rules do not completely convey or circumscribe use; they are standards of use. Wittgenstein speaks here of a ‘ROUGH regularity’ in our use of words (LW I, 968). So that meaning can be guided by specific rules and yet apply, and be seen to apply, to new instances. Grammatical rules are mere tools with which we can build a countless number of meaningful sentences. Wittgenstein’s answer to the productivity problem is encapsulated in this passage: ‘Yes, there is the great thing about language – that we can do what we haven’t learnt’ (LPP 28).

Communication, objectivity and constancy of meaning are made possible by a grammar, but that grammar is not innate; it is transmitted. It is social training, not a language of thought, that makes language possible, prevents communication from breaking down, and allows for the production of novel, meaningful sentences.

7. Conclusion

If universality or uniformity is the motivating force behind nativism, there is in our shared instinctive and second nature reactions universality and uniformity enough. We need no mental universal grammar to serve as the shared basis from which language, our language-games, can be acquired. It
is to the stream of life that we must go to find the bedrock of our lan-
guage – or what Wittgenstein calls ‘the riverbed of thought’ (OC 97) – as
well as its fluid and ever-changing waters.

Language is internally connected to life and action: this is what
Wittgenstein’s concept of the language-game conveys. At the root of lan-
guage is a nonlinguistic framework of shared instinctive reactions, shared
genetic make-up and a good dose of socio-cultural interaction. For Witt-
genstein, our language could not mean independently of the context of our
individual acts, of our cultural traditions, or our human form of life:
‘Words have meaning only in the stream of life’ (LW I, 913). Fodor’s and
Chomsky’s failure to grasp the essentially contextualized nature of lan-
guage is a major failure to appreciate the importance of language as a re-
pository of our human form of life. And so, to Fodor’s: ‘one cannot learn a
language unless one has a language’, I am always tempted to reply: ‘Get a
life!’

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Sind Tatsachen vom Sprachspiel konstituiert?
Zu Wittgensteins Philosophie 1946-51

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1. Einleitung

Die Spätkonzeption Wittgensteins zählt man öfters, und nicht nur außerhalb, sondern auch innerhalb der Wittgenstein-Forschung, zu jenen, die für eine überwältigende Macht unserer begrifflichen Schemata bzw. unserer Kultur und Lebensform plädierten, und zwar sogar in dem Sinne, dass sie im Hinblick auf die Tatsachen dermaßen bestimmend wären, dass die letzteren von ihnen konstituiert sind (was auch immer der Ausdruck „konstituieren“ bedeuten könnte). Dieser Interpretationstrend lässt sich wohl u.a. auf ideengeschichtliche Gründe zurückführen, aber auch mit etlichen Textstellen Wittgensteins untermauern wie auch mit der folgenden:

Wir sind an eine bestimmte Einteilung der Sachen gewöhnt.
Sie ist uns mit der Sprache, oder den Sprachen, zur Natur geworden.

Dies sind die festen Schienen, auf denen all unser Denken verläuft, und also nach ihnen auch unser Urteilen und Handeln. (MS 137: 64b-65a; vgl. TS 232: 763-764, TS 233b: 4)

Oder auch mit Passagen aus den Philosophischen Untersuchungen wie z.B.:

Welche Art von Gegenstand etwas ist, sagt die Grammatik. (PU, § 373)

Die Frage ist freilich, ob diese „Einteilung der Sachen“, die „festen Schienen“ der Sprache, die „Grammatik“, unsere Sprachspiele mehr oder weniger von der Wirklichkeit bedingt oder aber eben umgekehrt, vollkommen willkürlich in Bezug auf die Wirklichkeit sind. Letzteres gilt als (wenn auch alleine noch nicht ausreichende) Bedingung dafür, eine eindeutig bejahende Antwort auf unsere Ausgangsfrage geben zu können.

2. Die Aussagen des Wissens und der Grammatik

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einem von unseren fundamentalen Urteilen abweicht, so wird er für uns als abnormal, als geistesgestört erscheinen, den wir nicht einmal richtig verstehen können. Das heißt auch, dass wir in diesen Fällen nicht geneigt sind, auch nur in Erwägung zu ziehen, dass er vielleicht Recht hat: Dass wir uns in einigen Urteilen nicht irren können, bedeutet nämlich nicht, dass kein Fehlurteil möglich ist, sondern es charakterisiert unsere Einstellung zu diesen Sätzen. Es heißt, dass sie für uns unumstößlich sind, egal, was auch passiert: Nichts auf der Welt kann uns vom Gegenteil überzeugen, und so auch keine Tatsachen, Gegenbeweise können diese Urteile falsifizieren.

Den fundamentalen, mythologischen Urteilen stehen die empirischen Sätze, die Aussagen des Wissens gegenüber: Diese können schon sowohl wahr als auch falsch sein; was aber als „Irrtum“, „wahr“ und „falsch“, und was als „Wirklichkeit“ und „Übereinstimmung mit der Wirklichkeit“ gilt, wird vom Sprachspiel definiert. Somit haben wir aber selbst über die Erfahrungssätze keinen Zugang oder wenigstens nicht direkt zur Wirklichkeit. In ihnen können wir uns aber jedenfalls irren, und sogar mehrmals, ohne Gefahr zu laufen, dass man uns als Narren betrachtet. Ein Irrtum ist hier nämlich keine Unregelmäßigkeit, die nur ausnahmsweise vorkommt, und er bereitet auch keine Verständnisschwierigkeiten: Für ihn ist im Sprachspiel ein Platz vorgesehen – er lässt sich ohne weiteres in das Sprachspiel einordnen. Irrtümer sind daher diskutabel und lassen sich auch korrigieren – u.a. dadurch, dass wir unsere Aussagen mit der – vom Sprachspiel definierten – Wirklichkeit vergleichen. Wahrheiten sind auf der anderen Seite nicht unumstößlich: Es ist normal, dass man bereit ist, sich seine Aussagen nochmals zu überlegen und als Irrtümer aufzugeben, und dazu kann dadurch der Anstoß gegeben werden, dass jemand anderer Meinung ist. Irrt sich jemand aber all zu oft, dann ist das trotzdem kein Irrtum mehr, sondern zeugt vom Mangel am Verständnis des Sprachspiels; es zeigt, dass der Betreffende nicht imstande ist, sich unser Sprachspiel anzueignen. So einen Menschen werden wir nicht mehr verstehen, sondern er wird in unseren Augen zum Narren und Ketzer – ebenso, wie jemand, der mit uns ein fundamentales Urteil nicht teilt.

Bis zu diesem Punkt ist es nicht zu sehen, wo die Dinge „selbst“ in dem Sprachspiel eine konstitutive Rolle spielen, bzw. dass ihr So- oder Anders-Sein auf unsere Begriffe und Sprachspiele einwirken könnten. Es gibt aber trotzdem einen Platz für sie, der über die Irrtümer auf der Seite
der Erkenntnisse und über die Fehlurteile auf der Seite der fundamentalen Wahrheiten eröffnet wird.

Was die letzteren betrifft, kann es trotz dem oben Gesagten vorkommen, dass jemand seinen unerschütterlichen Glauben an der einen oder anderen fundamentalen Wahrheit aufgibt. Das wird aber sein ganzes System, sein ganzes Weltbild erschüttern, auch alle seine anderen Urteile mitreißen (MS 175: 75v) und „alles [...] in ein Chaos [...] stürzen“ (MS 176: 75r). Dann wird er „vor dem Nichts“ (MS 175: 59r), d.h. sozusagen ohne Sprachspiel, hilflos da stehen. Das wäre also ein Augenblick, in dem ihm die Tatsachen nicht vom Sprachspiel konstituiert erscheinen und zu Wort kommen könnten. Passiert dies nur einem einzigen Menschen, so gefährdet es das Sprachspiel selbst noch nicht. Wie aber, wenn viele Menschen sich gezwungen fühlten, ihre fundamentalen Urteile aufzugeben? Das würde das Sprachspiel schon aufheben und möglicherweise – wenigstens für eine Übergangsperiode, bis sich neue Gewohnheiten und Sprachspiele etablieren – den Dingen selbst wieder Spielraum lassen, und zwar diesmal nicht nur aus der Perspektive des Einzelnen, sondern auch aus jener der Sprachgemeinschaft.

3. Können Tatsachen eine Veränderung unserer Begriffe bewirken?

Wie gesagt, die fundamentalen Urteile sind dadurch charakterisiert, dass man sie unter keinen Umständen ändern muss. So werden sie auch nicht von einzelnen Beobachtungen in Zweifel gezogen. Wittgenstein spielt allerdings die Möglichkeit durch, wie es wäre, wenn unerwartet, ohne jeglichen Grund, etwas äußerst Außerordentliches passieren würde oder wenn zuviel Unerwartetes, was nicht mehr unseren, vom Sprachspiel bedingten Erwartungen entspricht, geschieht:

Wie, wenn etwas wirklich unerhörtes geschähe? Wenn ich etwa sähe, wie Häuser sich nach und nach ohne offenbare Ursache in Dampf verwandelten; wenn das Vieh auf der Wiese auf den Köpfen stünde, lachte und verständliche Worte redete; wenn Bäume sich nach und nach in Menschen, und Menschen in Bäume verwandelten? Hatte ich nun recht, als ich vor allen diesen Geschehnissen sagte "Ich weiß, daß das ein Haus ist" etc., oder einfach "Das ist ein Haus" etc.?

Diese Aussage erschien mir als fundamental; wenn das falsch ist, was ist noch 'wahr' und 'falsch'?! (MS 176: 43v-44r)

Wie der letzte Satz nahelegt, ist die erste Möglichkeit, die eintreten kann, der oben erwähnten ähnlich, nämlich dass dadurch alle Urteile mitgerissen werden und alles in ein Chaos gestürzt wird: Es ist offensichtlich durchaus vorstellbar, dass ich „durch gewisse Ereignisse in eine Lage versetzt [würde], in der ich das alte Spiel nicht mehr fortsetzen könnte. In der ich aus der Sicherheit des Spiels herausgerissen würde“ (MS 176: 75v-76r).

Tatsachen können also unmöglich machen, dass ein Sprachspiel weiter gespielt wird. Das passiert aber nicht notwendigerweise: Alles kann wenigstens dem Anschein nach ebensogut auch unverändert bleiben. Auf die Frage nämlich,

Aber wäre es denn undenkbar, daß ich im Sattel bleibe, auch wenn die Tatsachen noch so sehr bockten? (MS 176: 75v)

gibt Wittgenstein eine bejahende Antwort:

Wenn auch plötzlich eine Unregelmäßigkeit im Naturgeschehn einträte, so müßte das mich nicht aus dem Sattel heben. Ich könnte, nach wie vor, Schlüsse machen — aber ob man das nun "Induktion" nennen {wird / würde}, ist eine andre Frage. (MS 176: 76r-76v)
Der letzte Satz des Zitats weist allerdings darauf hin, dass das scheinbar unveränderte Sprachspiel unter den veränderten Umständen in der Tat schon ein anderes geworden ist.

Das Fazit dieses Gedankenexperiments ist also, dass „{ein Sprachspiel / die Möglichkeit des Sprachspiels}“, ob in dem ersten oder in dem zweiten vorhin genannten Sinne, aber „{nur durch gewisse Tatsachen möglich ist / durch gewisse Tatsachen bedingt ist}“ (MS 176: 76r).

4. Farben und Farbwörter

Wittgenstein stellt im Zusammenhang mit den Farben und Farbwörtern in vielen Bemerkungen weitere Gedankenexperimente an, mittels welchen er auf die Frage eine Antwort sucht, ob es von den Tatsachen abhängt, welche Begriffe wir zu bilden und welche Sprachspiele wir zu spielen imstande sind.

Die physikalische Beschaffenheit der Welt hat also beide Male Folgen bezüglich dessen, ob ein Sprachspiel überhaupt gespielt wird: Unsere Begriffe, unsere Sprache sind gegenüber diesen „harten“ Fakten sozusagen machtlos.


Das Fazit der drei Gedankenexperimente ist nun das Folgende: 1.) Daraus, dass sowohl die „natürlichen“ als auch die „begrifflichen“ Umstände dieselben Konsequenzen haben können, nämlich, dass einige Sprachspiele nicht gespielt werden bzw. nicht gespielt werden können, er- gibt sich der Schluss, dass die Dinge der Welt, zumindest in manchen Fäl- len, nicht weniger bestimmend ist, als die Sprache. 2.) Der dritte Fall – in dem es nicht auszuschließen war, dass man die Grenzen der eigenen Sprachspiele überschreiten kann – legt sogar nahe, dass die Macht der Fak- ten in einigen Fällen sogar überwältigender ist als jene der Sprache.

5. Konklusion

Mit der Formulierung der Schlussfolgerung, dass die Sprachspiele durch gewisse Tatsachen bedingt sein müssten, ist Wittgenstein aber offensicht- lich unzufrieden und versucht immer wieder, diese Idee neu zu formulieren. Der Grund seiner Unzufriedenheit mag darin liegen, dass die Behauptung eine wissenschaftliche Hypothese, bzw. das Wort „bedingt“ einen kausalen
Zusammenhang nahelegen, und Hypothesen und kausale Zusammenhänge werden von Wittgenstein nicht als geeignete Gegenstände einer philosophischen Untersuchung akzeptiert. Eine Formulierung dieser Art verwischt den Unterschied zwischen der physischen und logischen Möglichkeit bzw. Unmöglichkeit. Uns interessiert aber eben nicht,

unter welchen Umständen das Sprachspiel mit den Farbnamen physisch nicht möglich – also eigentlich, nicht wahrscheinlich ist.

Ohne Schachfiguren kann man nicht Schach spielen – das ist die Unmöglichkeit, die uns interessiert. (TS 232: 654-655, vgl. MS 136: 52a)

Als Ausweg aus diesem Dilemma bietet sich erstens an, dass man einfach feststellt: Es ist eine alltägliche Erfahrungstatsache, dass Sprachspiele nur unter bestimmten Umständen gespielt werden, bzw. dass die Veränderungen der Dinge öfters mit Veränderungen der Sprachspiele einhergehen oder von ihnen gefolgt werden (z.B. MS 137: 74a; TS 232: 771). Somit wird also bloß eine Tatsache unserer Sprachspiele festgelegt. Das heißt, dass wir mit so einer Behauptung nichts anderes tun, als dass wir unsere Sprachspiele beschreiben – und das lässt sich schon ohne weiteres in die Wittgensteinsche Konzeption einordnen. Eine andere Lösungsmöglichkeit bieten die folgenden Ausführungen an:

Wenn du dir gewisse Tatsachen anders denkst, sie anders beschreibst, als sie sind, dann kannst du die Anwendung gewisser Begriffe dir nicht mehr vorstellen, weil die Regeln ihrer Anwendung kein Analogon unter den neuen Umständen haben. — Was ich sage, kommt also darauf hinaus: Ein Gesetz wird für Menschen gegeben und ein Jurist mag wohl fähig sein, Konsequenzen für jeden Fall zu ziehen, der ihm gewöhnlich vorkommt, das Gesetz hat also offenbar seine Verwendung, einen Sinn. Trotzdem aber setzt seine Gültigkeit allerlei voraus; und wenn das Wesen, welches er zu richten hat, ganz vom gewöhnlichen Menschen abweicht, dann wird z.B. die Entscheidung, ob er eine Tat mit böser Absicht begangen hat, nicht etwa schwer, sondern (einfach) unmöglich werden. (TS 232: 705; vgl. MS 136: 121a)

Der erste Satz des Zitats führt den darauf folgenden Fall als Gedankenexperiment ein, das als solches nicht mehr auf kausale, i.e. externe, sondern auf nicht-kausale, interne Eigenschaften gerichtet ist. Diese Verfahrensweise lässt sich mit jener vergleichen, die Wittgenstein als „Naturtatsachen erdichten“ bezeichnet, und das heißt, dass man, anstatt eine kausale, naturgeschichtliche Untersuchung durchzuführen, die Tatsachen anders denkt,
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sie sich anders vorstellt, als sie sind, um dadurch seine Augen auf gewisse nicht-kausale Zusammenhänge schärfer zu machen.


Fassen wir nun mit Hilfe eines einfachen Beispiels das Fazit unserer Ausführungen zusammen. Nehmen wir das Tennisspiel: Entscheiden wir uns – obschon alle äußeren Umstände wie gewöhnlich sind –, Tennis nach anderen Regeln zu spielen als üblich und im Regelverzeichnis vorgeschrieben, so spielen wir kein Tennis mehr. Steht uns hingegen plötzlich kein Tennisball mehr zur Verfügung, sondern nur noch ein Fußball, so können wir das Spiel entweder nicht oder nur ganz anders als üblich spielen – und so spielen wir wieder kein Tennis mehr. Hätten wir nie im Leben Tennisbälle, sondern nur Fußball zur Verfügung gehabt, so hätten wir die Regeln des Spiels schon von Anfang an anders gebildet. Unsere Regeln richten sich nämlich u.a. nach den Möglichkeiten: Kein Aufschlag wird
z.B. vorgeschrieben, der über die menschlichen Kräfte geht. (Oder wenn so einer trotzdem vorgeschrieben würde, dann würde so eine nicht durchführbare Anweisung im Sprachspiel eine andere Rolle spielen, als die Regeln, die sich auch befolgen lassen.) Diese Lehre wird auch im obigen Zitat vermittelt, indem es darauf hinweist: Die menschlichen Gesetze funktionieren nur unter Menschen und haben keine Verwendung unter Wesen, die sich von uns wesentlich unterscheiden.

Abschließend möchte ich diese Schlussfolgerungen noch mit zwei weiteren Textstellen belegen, wobei ich kurz auch die Frage eines „Third Wittgenstein“ thematisieren werde.

6. Third Wittgenstein

Das vorhin Gesagte, nämlich, dass die aufgrund der Textstellen aus den Jahren 1946-51 dargestellte Wittgensteinsche Auffassung die sprachspielkonstituierende Rolle der Tatsachen betreffend ohne Schwierigkeiten der Sprachspielkonzeption eingliedern lässt, deutet schon darauf hin, dass sich die Konzeption Wittgensteins in der Periode nach den Philosophischen Untersuchungen zumindest in dieser Hinsicht nicht wesentlich von seiner früheren unterscheidet. Die Idee geht in der Tat sogar auf eine lange Zeit zurück, wie es dem folgenden Zitat entnehmen lässt:

So lernen ja die Kinder bei uns rechnen, denn man läßt sie drei Bohnen hinlegen und noch drei Bohnen und dann zählen, „was da liegt“. Käme dabei einmal 5 einmal 7 heraus (weil wie wir jetzt sagen würden einmal von selbst eine dazu, einmal eine weg käme), so würden wir zunächst Bohnen als für den Rechenunterricht ungeeignet erklären. Gesc hähe das Gleiche aber mit Stäben, Fingern, Strichen und den meisten andern Dingen, so hätte das Rechnen damit ein Ende.

„Aber wäre dann nicht doch noch 2 + 2 = 4?“ – Dieses Sätzchen wäre damit unbrauchbar geworden. (MS 118: 32v)


Nach der bearbeiteten Frühfassung nahm Wittgensteins Arbeit an den *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* eine andere Richtung, wobei er die Bemerkungen zu Fragen der Mathematik, in denen die obigen Zeilen ihren Platz gehabt hatten, fallen ließ. Infolgedessen ist die Bemerkung in der Zwischenfassung und somit freilich auch in der Spätfassung der *PU* nicht mehr zu lesen. Die Position aber, die in ihr zum Ausdruck gekommen ist, bleibt weiterhin aufrechterhalten, wie davon etwa §142 der PU zeugt:

> Und verhielten sich die Dinge ganz anders, als sie sich tatsächlich verhalten [...] so verlöre unsere normalen Sprachspiele ihren Witz. – Die Prozedur, ein Stück Käse auf die Waage zu legen und nach dem Ausschlag der Waage den Preis zu bestimmen, verlöre ihren Witz, wenn es häufiger vorkäme, daß solche Stücke ohne offenbare Ursache plötzlich anwuchsen, oder einschrumpften. (PU, §142)

ZWischen den Konzeptionen vor und nach den *Philosophischen Untersuchungen* ist also, was zumindest die konstitutive Rolle der Tatsachen betrifft, kein wesentlicher Unterschied zu sehen. Wollen wir mit dem Termin „Third Wittgenstein“ nicht nur auf Wittgensteins verstärktes oder schwächeres Interesse für gewisse Fragen oder bloß auf eine weitere Nuancie-

\(^1\) Der erste Teil der bearbeiteten Frühfassung ist in PU-KGE, der zweite als Teil I der *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik* erschienen.
rung und Vertiefung von früheren Konzepten, sondern auch auf konzeptio-
nelle Unterschiede hinweisen, so gibt es wenigstens im Hinblick auf diese
Frage keinen „Third“ Wittgenstein. Damit will ich allerdings nicht behau-
ften, dass es überhaupt keinen gibt: Der Umstand, dass sich der früher als
Teil II der PU, inzwischen als Philosophie der Psychologie – Ein Frag-
ment herausgegebene Text konzeptionell schwerlich an die Stelle der letz-
ten ca. 170 Paragraphen der PU einarbeiten lässt (Neumer 2000, 243f.,
fn15), wie es noch die Herausgeber der Erstauflage gedacht haben, bzw.
dass „das Buch [...] im Falle einer solchen Überarbeitung ein völlig ande-
res geworden“ wäre (Schulte 2001, 30), legt schon nahe, dass man das
Konzept nicht so leicht vom Tisch haben kann. Diese Fragen gehören aber
bereits zu einer anderen Untersuchung.

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Wittgenstein, Ludwig 2003: Philosophische Untersuchungen, auf der Grundlage der

² Die Manu- und Typoskripte Wittgensteins werden auf der Grundlage der BEE zi-
tiert. Ich zitiere zwar die „normalisierte“ Version der BEE, ergänze sie aber auf-
grund der Faksimileaufnahmen der BEE mit allen Textvarianten, die Wittgenstein
nicht gestrichen, sondern stehen gelassen hat. Ich habe in den Zitaten die
Transkription der BEE überprüft und die Transkriptionsfehler stillschweigend kor-
rigiert, darüber hinaus Wittgensteins Leerzeilen wiederhergestellt.
Textvarianten werden in geschwungenen Klammern {.../...} und unterstrichene in
cursiver Schrift wiedergegeben. In den angeführten Zitaten verwendet Wittgen-
stein keine von seinen anderen üblichen Hervorhebungsarten.
Wittgenstein’s Nachlass
I would like to propose that; a) Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is structured following a tree-like fashion and should be read following this framework, by looking firstly at the seven cardinal propositions, then at the comments upon these propositions, then moving on to the comments upon these comments, and so on; b) when regarded in this perspective, not only does the text show great cohesion and perfect consistency, but many of the difficulties generated by the more usual, sequential reading fall away; c) the *Tractatus* really was constructed by successive layering of text, growing the tree level by level, and layer by layer. As a result, if we read the *Tractatus* following the series of commentary, rather than sequentially, we can trace the same progression of thought followed by Wittgenstein himself when compiling his manuscript.

The project of the *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* was born when, in spring 1915,¹ Wittgenstein adopted a particular application of decimal coding for his propositions (already used, although only “with reference purpose”², and with completely different modalities, in Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*). Decimal numbering enabled him to work in parallel on various related matters, develop his considerations on progressive levels of analysis, and to assign a very specific form to his text. In October 22nd 1915, he writes to Russell: “I have recently done a great deal of work and, I think, quite successfully. I am collecting it all and writing it down in the form of a treatise”. It is the hierarchical organisation, based on a numbering system, which gives “the form of a treatise” to the collection of propositions, at that time already existing in different manuscripts. Decimal coding is ultimately “absolutely” indispensable to also understand the finished work. Wittgenstein, writing to von Ficker, insists

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¹ The justification for the chronological course assumed here is given in Bazzocchi, 2008b.
that, in case of publication “the decimal numbers of [his] remarks absolutely must be printed alongside them, because they alone make the book perspicuous and clear: without the numbering it would be an incomprehensible jumble” (Wittgenstein 1969, letter 5.12.1919, p. 39).

I believe we must truly recognise the decimal numbering, and in doing so, read the *Tractatus* following a recursive process of inspection. The starting point, naturally, begins with the seven cardinal propositions, to be considered in numerical order. Afterwards, for example, as with each of the other cardinal propositions, proposition 4 can be elucidated by reading, in series, its direct remarks, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5; to go into yet more detail, on 4.2 for example, one may pass to its sub-comments, 4.21, 4.22, … 4.28; or, return to a previous level, to choose another, different yet parallel, line of analysis. Thus, the *Tractatus* presents itself in this way (in the schema, an oval outline is used to highlight the presence of distinct lines of thought):

![Diagram of the Tractatus structure](image)

The initial chain of seven cardinal propositions represents a first, substantial line of thinking. Conceptual meshing occurs naturally, from the termi-
nological connection between each remark and the one that follows: “what is the case” between 1 and 2; “facts” between 2 and 3; “thought” between 3 and 4; “proposition” between 4 and 5; “truth-function” between 5 and 6.

1. The world is everything that is the case.
2. What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts.
3. The logical picture of the facts is the thought.
4. The thought is the significant proposition.
5. Propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions.
   (An elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself.)
6. The general form of truth-function is: \([\bar{\xi}, \xi, N(\bar{\xi})]\).
   This is the general form of proposition.
7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

From our perspective, proposition 7 needs to be taken as complementary to proposition 6. Proposition 6 defines the general form of every meaningful proposition, while proposition 7 declares that nothing else can be meaningful. One might say that proposition 7 serves the function of a clause, “only if” in an “if and only if” definition: a proposition has a sense if, and only if, it has the form stated by proposition 6.

When we pass to the commentary on, for example, proposition 4, we read in this way:

4.1 A proposition presents the existence and non-existence of atomic facts.
4.2 The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of the existence and non-existence of the atomic facts.
4.3 The truth-possibilities of the elementary propositions mean the possibilities of the existence and non-existence of the atomic facts.
4.4 A proposition is the expression of agreement and disagreement with the truth-possibilities of the elementary propositions.
4.5 Now it appears to be possible to give the most general form of proposition: [...] 

We can observe here a repeated, predicative relationship between two subjects. The exact meaning of such similar turns of phrase can be grasped only by comparing their different wordings.

4.1 A proposition presents the existence and non-existence of atomic facts.
4.2 The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of the existence and non-existence of the atomic facts.
We see that in 4.1, *a proposition* (p) and *the existence and non-existence of atomic facts* (e) are directly related, while in 4.2, they have a more mediated relationship. Using the introduced abbreviations p and e, we get:

4.1  p presents e
4.2  The sense of p is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of e.
4.3  The truth-possibilities of the elementary ps mean the possibilities of e.

If we interpret “mean” in 4.3, as equivalence between, “the truth-possibilities of the elementary ps “ and “the possibilities of e”, we can replace the one with the other in 4.4, to get:

4.4  p is the expression of agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of e.

Whatever this may imply, it is evident that even a very simple structural analysis, like that shown above, is unfeasible for a reader of the sequential text, who encounters proposition 4.2 some pages, and thirty statements, after 4.1 and would be hard pressed to realise any connection between them.

From another perspective, looking at the tree, we can easily recognise that, when we arrive at the end of one line of analysis, for instance at proposition 2.02331, this is where the path ends and there is *nothing after* it: we must backtrack to a previous intersection and choose another path. Sequential reading may prove meaningless:

2.02331 […] For if a thing is not distinguished by anything, I cannot distinguish it – for otherwise it would be distinguished.
2.024  Substance is what exists independently of what is the case.

All similar situations result in nonsense or, at the very least, risk serious misunderstanding:

2.063  The total reality is the world.
2.1  We make to ourselves pictures of facts.

Now, let us consider the following quotation:

I want now to turn to the end of the book […]. Here we have these sentences:

My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: anyone who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through
them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up it.)

He must overcome these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

About what cannot be spoken of one must be silent.

I want to draw attention to a slight oddness in phrasing, slight but deliberate. […]

This is the very turning point of Cora Diamond’s contribution to *The New Wittgenstein* (Cray et al. 2000, p. 150). In quoting Wittgenstein’s text, Diamond pays no attention to the decimal structure; indifferent to it, she specifies neither the numerical codes of “these sentences”, nor distinguishes them in any way at all, as if they were three (or perhaps four) consecutive propositions, or they would constitute a continuous clause. But, with full evidence, propositions 6.54 and 7 are shown to be in the same structural relationship, or better still, *lack of relationship*, than the sentences of the two previous examples. Following our way of approaching the *Tractatus*’ tree, it becomes impossible to read, or to quote, propositions 6.54 and 7 sequentially: they appear on different branches of the tree and belong to different lines of sight. If we wish to extract them from their contexts – as if the book was a mere collection of aphorisms – and put them near one another, we must be fully aware that we are building an alternative text. We must justify this procedure and to be sure we have not altered the original meaning of the sentences. I stress that Wittgenstein’s line of reflection from 6.51 to 6.54 (commenting on 6.5) ends with 6.54 and, after this, in the tree of the *Tractatus*, there *is nothing else*. The fact that this simple consideration seems obvious in the case of 2.02331/2.024 or 2.063/2.1, but it does not appear equally evident in the case of 6.54/7, does not modify their structural similarity inside Wittgenstein’s numbering system.

That the decimal numbers indicate a different structure to the work, hence a different reading from a merely sequential one, is easily confirmed if you consider Wittgenstein’s note at the very beginning of the *Tractatus*. For the sake of clarity, I include it in its original form, together with the

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3 This is a very common habit, in particular for those critics who underline the contradictory aspects of Wittgenstein’s text. In Black 1964, 378, the two propositions are combined in a unique paragraph, without any typographic distinction.
adjustments\textsuperscript{4}, which can be seen on Ts204, one of the final typewritten copies of the book:

\[\ldots\] The propositions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 are the cardinal propositions, \textit{<T>}he propositions n.1, n.2, etc. \textit{<are>} comments on the proposition n° n; the propositions n.m1, n.m2, etc. comments on the proposition n° n.m; and so on.

In other words, the work \textit{consists} of seven cardinal propositions, of their elucidations, then of elucidations upon these elucidations, and so on.\textsuperscript{5}

Yet more convincing evidence can be drawn from the original manuscript of the \textit{Tractatus}. There is no way of composing, in a sequential manner, a text with a complex tree-like structure; it is impossible, even for a genius like Wittgenstein. If we refer to the Ms104 Notebook, on which the \textit{Tractatus} was in fact based, we can instantly see that Wittgenstein does indeed start from the root of the tree, and operates systematically, level by level: from cardinal propositions (first level) to their comments (second level: n.1, n.2, etc.), before adding comments to these comments (third level: n.m1, n.m2, etc.), and so on. Here is the structure of the \textit{first page} of text (page 3 in Wittgenstein’s pagination):

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}

\node {Ms104}
child {node {1}
child {node {1.1}}}
child {node {2}
child {node {2.1}}
child {node {2.2}}}
child {node {3}
child {node {3.1}}
child {node {3.2}}}
child {node {4}
child {node {4.1}}
child {node {4.2}}
child {node {4.3}}
child {node {4.4}}}
child {node {5}}
child {node {6}}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{4} Often Wittgenstein amends a proposition not because it was incorrect, but because it was \textit{too obvious}.

\textsuperscript{5} From the viewpoint of its decimal structure, therefore, the \textit{Tractatus} does consist essentially of elucidations (see 4.121: “A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations”).

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{4} Often Wittgenstein amends a proposition not because it was incorrect, but because it was \textit{too obvious}.

\textsuperscript{5} From the viewpoint of its decimal structure, therefore, the \textit{Tractatus} does consist essentially of elucidations (see 4.121: “A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations”).
On this first page, we already encounter six of the seven cardinal propositions, and some second level remarks. (Note that propositions 4.1-4.4 were composed in straight sequence, exactly as we suggest they are to be read. It should now become clear as to why they result in such an immediate connection to each other).

The following diagram shows the contents of the first three pages of the manuscript; in these first pages, the numbers and propositions correspond, in general, to the published version of the book:

Wittgenstein proceeds in horizontal fashion, adding distinct series of remarks to each of the propositions of the main page, without specifying, for the time being (with very few exceptions), comments at a more detailed level. For instance, series 2.01-07\(^6\) is fully developed within two steps: 2.01-2.02 on the second page, 2.03-2.07 on the third; 2.031 being added only after 2.07 was written down. To limit ourselves to the branches that we depicted in our first schema, we can observe that the third level succession, 2.021-027, was composed only on page 27, with sub-comments 2.0231 and 2.0232. Comment 2.0233 was added on page 94; while fifth level comment, 2.02331, was added on page 96. Similarly, series 4.21-4.28

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\(^6\) The union of 2.06 and 2.07 corresponds to TLP 2.06.
(or its equivalent: TLP 4.28 corresponds to the manuscript’s 4.26) appears on page 9; the equivalents of 4.241 and 4.242 are to be found on page 15; 4.243 concludes with page 46.

With regard to the numeration that we find in the manuscript, this top-down procedure – that is, from the first level statements until the remarks of the second, third, forth and successive levels – is rigorously maintained. First, Wittgenstein composes a, more or less, complete series of remarks, then, even several pages and several months later, he adds more detailed comments to it. At the precise moment that Wittgenstein puts his thoughts into words, he generally doesn’t insert the comments that now, in the sequential layout, we can find between these statements themselves. Evidently, the semantics of each horizontal series does not require the remarks that are added later. Consequently, when we read the *Tractatus* in its tree fashion, by distinct chains of remarks belonging to the same level, we are in fact following the original lines of Wittgenstein’s reflections. It comes as no surprise to see that, following our way of reading, the text not only appears sensible and logical, but often becomes more meaningful and clearer.

From the other side, the contiguity between the end of a line of reflection and what appears, in the sequential arrangement, as the “succeeding”, higher-level proposition, results in a totally random effect of the linearisation of the tree and may make no deliberate sense. For example, 2.024 was defined 70 pages, and perhaps two years, before 2.02331; the latter being added as a comment on 2.0233, without any interest or awareness that with the final linearisation – required to obtain a printable text – appears immediately before 2.024:

We can say the same about proposition 7. Proposition 7 is composed on page 71, in relationship to an immediately previous enquiry on “the general form of the proposition” (statement 6, just integrated or completed at the bottom of p.3), “of the operation” (statement 6.01, p. 70) and “of the number” (statement 6.02, now TLP 6.03). In addition, proposition 7 appears immediately after a remark that we can rebuild as:\footnote{Its first paragraph was later deleted, reappearing inside a comment of further level. In Bazzocchi 2010a, I complete, in this way, the analysis drafted by McGuinness (1989 and 2002).}:
6.2 Ethics doesn’t consist of propositions. All propositions are of equal value.

An interesting feature of the decimal coding method is that at every phase of its development, the *Abhandlung* can be maintained perfectly coherent and “complete”, ready to be published: this was of crucial importance to Wittgenstein, who might, at any moment, be killed on the War Front. If the compositional work had been stopped at this point, then the last propositions of the linearisation would be 6.2 and 7, as Wittgenstein had arranged them at the end of 1916.

However, a few pages, and possibly several weeks later, Wittgenstein restructures and elucidates statement 6.2 (renumbered in the meantime as 6.3), concluding with proposition 6.33. Now, the possible “finale” becomes more esoteric:

6.33 There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical.
7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

But, on page 76, this suddenly changes into an apparent neopositivist claim:

6.4 For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed.
*The riddle* does not exist.
If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.
7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Soon, it evolves into a more doubtful consideration:

6.42 We feel that even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all. Of course there is then no question left, and just this is the answer.
7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

On page 83, however, proposition 7 seems to develop an Aesopian moral:

6.4211 Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?

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8 Here I follow the manuscript numeration, as it existed during the time I refer to. All the codes of groups 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 were visibly renumbered as 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 when Wittgenstein added, to page 101, a new proposition on mathematics, with code 6.2. This effort demonstrates that the decimals *do not have* the purpose of avoiding renumbering, when Wittgenstein needs to insert afterthoughts.
Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Of course, we are talking here for the sake of discussion, from an absurd point of view, the point of view of the sequential paradigm; for us, clearly, the meaning of proposition 7 does not depend on the presence of whatever sentence has the highest number in group 6. In fact, up to page 83, the structure of the Abhandlung was not an equivocal one:

Nevertheless, let us follow the absurd train of thought: when the composition arrives at page 85, the “finale” might appear to be pedagogical advice:

6.43 The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something

6.43 The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something
that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

On page 86, the “ending” seems to become completely paradoxical: 9

6.45 He must surmount these propositions, then he will approach, on the right level, what can be said.
7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

In the manuscript, this is later modified to:

6.45 He must surmount these propositions, then he will approach the world on the right level.
7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

The obvious conclusion here is that the *Tractatus* has no conclusion in a sequential sense, because it was not composed along a sequential frame, nor was it intended to be observed or read as a continuous sequence, as if its codes did not exist, or, as if Wittgenstein’s ladder was an improbable ladder composed of 526 rungs. 10 I leave it to the reader to judge whether this may have some relevance to the very sophisticated discussion of, and around, “The New Wittgenstein”. 11 My idea is that we must first learn to

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9 Evidently, it is he who surmounts *Tractatus*’ propositions (*included* proposition 7) who realises “what can be said” (“i.e. propositions of natural science”, see the preceding 6.43) and *can* meaningfully talk. The warning of proposition 7 is not addressed to him in any particular way. On the contrary, he has already understood Wittgenstein himself.

10 Such a ladder would lead us to twice overcome the height of the Statue of Liberty; nevertheless, following Conant’s, “what sort of foothold(s) a given remark provide(s) a given reader in her progress up the ladder […] depend(s) upon the sort(s) of aspect it presents to her […] – on the use(s) to which she is drawn to put it in the course of her ascent”. Nor the nightmare seems ended yet: “And then, finally, when I reach the top of the ladder, I grasp that there has been no ‘it’ in my grasp all along (that that I cannot think I cannot ‘grasp’ either)” (Conant, James, in Cray et al. 2000, 217 and 196). At this point, it is no surprise that one is tempted to cling nervously to the ladder, instead of resolutely throwing it away…

11 However, I suggest that we consider that the actual form of proposition 6.54, “then he sees the world rightly”, corresponds to the original “then he will approach, on the right level, what can be said” [*dann kommt er auf der richtigen Stufe zu dem*
draw upon Wittgenstein’s decimals, in order to see the *Tractatus* rightly\textsuperscript{12}; then can we discuss its meaning better.

**Literature**


\textit{was sich sagen läßt}. Later, the remark was modified (since what one can speak about is none other than “the world” of proposition 1) into “then he will approach the world on the right level”. The question of “the right level” is the leit motiv of the whole book. If we understand Wittgenstein, then we understand that the level to be reached (really, the only conceivable level) is the same level of proposition 1, the level of the facts of the world. It finally becomes clear as to why we are able to throw away the ladder without fear: not because, opportunistically, we have already used it to arrive at the top of some scaffolding, but because there was never anything higher to reach. Wittgenstein’s ladder, like Escher’s stairs, leads us to the same level we started from; indeed, there was no need of a ladder at all. Wittgenstein’s advice about ladders: “If the place I want to get to could only be reached by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me” (Ms109, p. 207, 7.11.1930; quoted by Peter Hacker, in Crary et al. 2000, 382).

\textsuperscript{12} For a more complete improvement of this perspective, see Bazzocchi 2010b.
Really can Tractatus’ ladder be a ladder with 526 rungs?
On the Origin and Compilation of ‘Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness’

Kim van Gennip, Groningen

1. A puzzling preface

MS 119 was written between September and November 1937 and consists of almost 300 pages. ‘Cause and Effect’ successively selected pages 1-5, 100-155, 21-26, 28-31, and 51-59. Based on his preface to the 1976 edition, Rhees’ general procedure appeared to be to publish those passages of MS 119 that did not end up in the typescript that is now printed as Part I of Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics:

this typescript did not include any of the passages we are printing, except the three we have placed at the end (Wittgenstein 1976, 391).

These last three remarks cover three topics: the machine as a symbol (pp 28-31); a medicine and its effect (pp 51-56); and the procedure of weighing objects (pp 56-59). Surprisingly, in the last sentence of his preface Rhees noted that two of these three remarks ‘have not been published before’. So, what are we to conclude? Did Wittgenstein select these two remarks for RFM I, or did he not?

The puzzlement disappears if we consider that Rhees fails to mention which typescript he is referring to. The suggestion is that Wittgenstein prepared only one typescript on the basis of the manuscript material on mathematics – one of these manuscripts being MS 119 –, namely the typescript that is published as Part I of RFM. However, Wittgenstein assembled two closely related typescripts, TS 221 and TS 222. The editors of RFM nowhere say that Part I is printed from TS 222, but Von Wright is more specific elsewhere (Von Wright 1982, 118); TS 221 originally existed in three copies, one of which Wittgenstein cut up into ‘Zettel’. This typescript of cuttings, TS 222, was printed posthumously as Part I of RFM I. TS 222 thus consists of cuttings from TS 221. In looking at the entries on the medicine and its effect and weighing objects, we see that Wittgenstein se-
lected these from MS 119 for inclusion in TS 221, but he left them out of TS 222. With this in mind, Rhees’ remarks gain some sense: if we substitute TS 221 for ‘typescript’ in ‘the typescript did not include any of the passages we are printing, except the three we have placed at the end’, Rhees is right, but only if we replace ‘three’ with ‘two’, for TS 221 includes the two passages on the medicine and the weighing of objects, which are also included in ‘Cause and Effect’. The other remark on the machine was selected both for TS 221 and TS 222. In addition, we need to add a phrase to Rhees’ second statement that ‘the other two have not been published before’: namely, ‘as these were not selected for TS 222 and thus are not printed in RFM I part I’. Without knowledge of the existence of these two manuscripts, Rhees’ editorial comments are difficult to understand.

There is more. At first sight, the preface suggests a rather pragmatic approach to editing the source text, the primary motive seeming to be to print those passages which are not printed before. However, the inclusion of the remark on the machine as a symbol does not fit this criterion. Why did Rhees decide to print it again? Klagge and Nordmann suggest that Rhees aimed to underscore the interconnections of Wittgenstein’s various concerns as they first appeared in a single manuscript volume (Wittgenstein 1993, 369). This may be so, but it says little about which interconnections Rhees aimed to bring forward, and why he considered this entry important in this context. This lack of a clear editorial strategy is also illustrated by the omission and rearrangement of several other passages. It is not necessary to mention all discrepancies between the source text and the publication, for this would not help us in understanding Rhees’ considerations. Nevertheless, to gain a clearer picture of Wittgenstein’s considerations, it is worthwhile to analyse the relationship between MS 119 and ‘Cause and Effect’ in some detail. This will be done in the following.

2. Pages 1-5

The first pages of ‘Cause and Effect’ are identical to MS 119, with one important exception. Rhees omits the first remark of MS 119, indicating that this is Philosophical Investigations 415 yet failing to mention that this entry is also included in TSS 221 & 222. The exclusion of this remark from
‘Cause and Effect’ is unfortunate, as the entry provides a key to Wittgenstein’s later philosophical method:

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes.

Like the first 5 pages of MS 119, this entry originates from a notebook written in February 1937 (MS 157b). For a proper understanding of the development of Wittgenstein’s thoughts it is essential to know that this thought then emerges. Klagge and Nordmann fortunately add the entry in a footnote to the second edition of ‘Cause and Effect’ – in my view, it should have been added to the primary text. A great part of MS 119 focuses on the notion of the basic form of the language-game, Wittgenstein clarifying that our language-games are bound up with the facts of our natural history. ‘Cause and Effect’ partly aims to elaborate upon these connections, taking language-games with cause and effect as an example. For example, a fact of nature is that humans respond to the cries of their children, trying to comfort and nurse them as good as they can. These reactions are essential of the language-game with cause and effect.

The omitted remark also connects to Wittgenstein’s reflections on mathematics. According to Wittgenstein, as far as we can say that it is a property of ‘9’ that it follows after ‘3 x 3’, this ‘property’ is found in the functioning of our intellect, in facts of our natural history. That is, to say that it is a property of 9 to be the result of 3 x 3 is to say that 9 is at the end of this chain, and it is a fact of our natural history that we calculate as such. A major goal of MS 119 is to elaborate the distinction between rules and empirical propositions, and a clarification of the role and function of logical and mathematical propositions is a means to this end. Wittgenstein tries to break free of the idea that these propositions are necessarily true. The idea of necessity does not lie in the rule itself, but in the fact that we apply it as a rule. And this is a fact of our natural history.

So, the remark that Rhees excluded from ‘Cause and Effect’ is crucial for understanding Wittgenstein’s considerations on language-games, rules, empirical and mathematical propositions, cause and effect, and doubt
and certainty. Without any knowledge of the source text, these considera-
tions lose their coherence.

Pages 100-155 of ‘Cause and Effect’ largely follow the source text – for that reason I will not pay attention to these pages here. I will now turn to pages 21-26 and 28-31.

3. Pages 21-26 & 28-31

These pages allow for two interpretations; one becomes apparent only when we turn to Wittgenstein’s remarks on mathematics. Pages 21-26 discuss the relation between plants and seeds. In Wittgenstein's view, this example illustrates the ‘powerful urge’ to see everything in terms of cause and effect. Take two plants, A and B, and take a seed from both. Both seeds look identical and examinations reveal no difference between them. Nevertheless, a seed of the A plant always produces an A plant, and the seed of a B plant always produces a B plant. So, we can say which plant will grow from which seed only if we know the history or origin of the seed. However, says Wittgenstein, we are inclined to think that there must be a difference in the seeds themselves to account for this distinction. The origin, we say, cannot be the cause. What this means, Wittgenstein explains, is that biologists do not count the history or origin of the seed as a cause. The ‘cannot’ and ‘must’ express the ideal of the causal scheme, which guides us in our research, and this causal scheme does not allow for saying that the previous experience causally determines the outcome of the seed.

If we consult the original context of the discussion on plants and seeds, a striking contrast between external or empirical relations, and internal or grammatical relations emerges. As mentioned, MS 119 argued that the inexorability with which ‘9’ follows ‘3 x 3’ is something that lies with us, and not so much in the system that allegedly functions independently of us. We are inclined to say that 9 must be the result of the calculation. This ‘must’, says Wittgenstein, is the expression of an internal relation. That is, the relation between 3 x 3 and 9 is laid down in grammar. When we ask a child to calculate ‘3 x 3’ and it submits ‘9’, we say that it has calculated correctly. If however the child submits ‘10’, we say that it has not calculated correctly, and precisely this answer, says Wittgenstein, illustrates that
we reckon the result among the rule. So, the relation between $3 \times 3$ and 9 is found in grammar, and this is what is expressed by saying that the result must be present in what precedes it. This ‘must’ points at a grammatical or logical or internal relationship between a calculation and its result.

In contrast, the relation between the seed and the plant is external; we can set up an experiment to find out whether there is a difference between the seeds, but the result we may find is external to the cause. So, the relation between cause and effect is external, and the possible difference between the seeds is something to be established empirically by performing an experiment. This contrast between internal and external relations has disappeared in ‘Cause and Effect’.

After pages 21-26, MS 119 continues for 5 more pages on the example of a machine, while ‘Cause and Effect’ separates these notes. The connection between the example of the plants and the example of the machine is apparent; as much as we are inclined to think that the A plant is already present in the seed of the A plant, we are also inclined to think that the movements of the machine are determined in advance. Wittgenstein warns us not to be misled by expressions such as ‘I know how the machine works’ into thinking that it is a priori determined what movement follows. If we think that something is determined a priori we are dealing with a conceptual relation.

These examples indicate that something is to be gained from consulting the underlying manuscript for our understanding of ‘Cause and Effect’. As mentioned, a central purpose of Wittgenstein’s reflections on mathematics is to elucidate the distinction between rules and empirical propositions and, as a corollary, to elucidate the distinction between internal and external relations. The remarks on causation in MS 119 partly function as an illustration of this very distinction between internal and external relations. Without any knowledge of MS 119, several remarks in ‘Cause and Effect’ lose an important dimension. A discussion of the last pages of MS 119 that Rhees selected for ‘Cause and Effect’ displays this point once more.
4. Pages 51-59

These pages discuss two examples, one on the relation between a medicine and its working, the other on weighing objects. It is worthwhile to examine these examples briefly, as they nicely illustrate one of Wittgenstein’s major concerns, namely to remind us of the way in which our language is connected to our actions and, in addition, the way in which the sense of certain expressions in our language becomes unclear when they are disconnected from these actions. In this way, these remarks prepare for the later examination in pages 100-155 of MS 119, in which the connection between actions, reactions and language is further examined. ‘Cause and Effect’ blurs the fact that pages 51-59 are a preparation for what follows, as these two examples are now given at the very end of the printed text. Also, since these entries do not return elsewhere in the Nachlass and are not discussed in the literature on ‘Cause and Effect’, it is worthwhile to discuss them.

The first example relates to the invention of a new medicine, which is said to prolong life with a month when taken for several months. A critic might say that we cannot know whether it was really the medicine that prolonged the life of the patient; the patient might just as well have lived just as long without it. This expression is misleading, says Wittgenstein, for the language-game with this sentence misses the essential point which makes the game useful. That is, the essential point of the game with the concepts of ‘new medicine’ and ‘prolongation of life’ is that the medicine can be tested. There is a connection between these words and our actions in the sense that we can set up an experiment; we can select 300 people with the same disease, give the medicine to half of the group and withhold it to the other half, and check whether the last group of patients dies a month earlier than the other half. This is what would be called a proper test - not to mention the cruelty of it - of the claim about the medicine. The expression ‘we cannot know…’, which is something a philosopher might typically say, lacks this context of testing a claim by means of an experiment. The expression at hand seems to be an ordinary expression, but on closer scrutiny it appears to be wholly disconnected from the ordinary language-game with this expression and the actions that accompany it.

The second example makes a similar point, though from a slightly different angle. Wittgenstein imagines different language-games with
weighing objects. For example, we can imagine a game in which we say that a body has weight only when it is actually weighed on a scale. In this case, an expression as follows makes sense: ‘the object has no definite weight except when it is measured’. Or, we can imagine a custom in which some material is weighed every 5 minutes, and we calculate the price according to the result, say after half an hour, of the last weighing. Then it makes sense to say ‘I do not know how much it will cost yet, we are only halfway measuring’. Wittgenstein’s point is again to emphasise the connection between language and our actions. If the practice of weighing objects is different, the expressions that accompany it are different accordingly.

With this example on weighing objects the main text of ‘Cause and Effect’ has come to an end. Clearly, this publication is very much a motley of remarks, presumably compiled both with pragmatic and substantial reasons in mind. As mentioned, Rhees’ general aim in compiling this text might have been to bring out the interconnections between Wittgenstein’s thoughts. This goal is only partly established, for several of his decisions actually blur connections, for example between Wittgenstein’s overall methodology and the examples of language-games that he discusses, and between the concern for rules or grammatical propositions, and empirical propositions. By focusing on these connections, we have seen in what way ‘Cause and Effect’ is embedded in several other of Wittgenstein’s ongoing concerns.

**Literature**


Francis Skinner’s Original Wittgenstein Brown Book Manuscript

Arthur Gibson, Cambridge

The Mathematical Association’s Wittgenstein Archive of Francis Skinner

It was an absence continually present with us: did manuscripts dictated by Wittgenstein to Francis Skinner exist?

We can thank the Mathematical Association for their survival. It is important to compliment this august institution for its retention, care, and exemplary handling, of the Wittgenstein Skinner archive (see Plate 1), as well as its willingness to make the archive available.¹ Another reason that the Skinner Archive survives is due to Professor R. L. Goodstein’s good offices. He was an outstanding, even historic, President of and wise influence in the Mathematical Association with a distinction that enhanced its already considerable reputation.

Wittgenstein, Skinner and Goodstein

In the early and mid 1930s Wittgenstein, Skinner, and Goodstein had a special triangular, supportive relationship. Goodstein was supervised in his mathematics PhD research by Wittgenstein. There is a background to add to his presence as an undergraduate in Wittgenstein’s lectures, which reveals him to be a victim brave against disadvantage, and with courage to overcome sever obstacles. Perhaps these qualities and his modesty, attracted Wittgenstein.

It would be helpful to have Wittgenstein’s correspondence with Goodstein. Instead, we have only one case of Goodstein writing to Witt- 

¹ The main credit for the archive’s survival and good condition goes to the work over many years of M. Price and M. Walmsley (of the Mathematical Association). The Archive is on loan from the MA to Trinity College Cambridge.
genstein – thanking him for sending the aforementioned archive, soon after Skinner’s death. Insight into the biographical triangle can be afforded by the following letters sent from Skinner to Wittgenstein:

**Letter [1]**

Saturday, 22ND July, 1933.

Dear Ludwig,

…

On Thursday morning I had a letter from Goodstein. He is having a very hard time now, as it is very hot in London now, and very exhausting sitting in the shop. He was very depressed…We took the train, and spent the afternoon and evening at a fishing village at the mouth of the Thames. He brought his fiancée with him. I think it did both of them good, as the hot weather in London had made things very difficult between them. Everything went alright for them, I think.

Goodstein’s fiancée was Goodstein’s uncle’s wife. His very orthodox Jewish parents had banned Goodstein from being with her. As an undergraduate he was deprived of financial support for this reason.

**Letter [2]**

17 Sollershott, West,
Letchworth, Herts..
Tuesday, Aug. 22ND.

Dear Ludwig,

I went to London yesterday …and saw Goodstein for about an hour…I saw Goodstein again in the afternoon and evening. Things had been going slightly better with him. Last time, when I saw him, on Thursday, he looked much more cheerful and happy than earlier in the holidays, but yesterday he seemed anxious and did not look happy. His fiancée left her husband last Wednesday. I think he feels uncertain what she is going to do now, whether she will go back to her husband or not. I had a feeling he didn't quite know what he wanted her to do, and that he was almost relieved that there were difficulties,

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2 For which see McGuinness 2008, letter 295.
3 These are quoted from Wittgenstein 2005 and Brian McGuinness, with all due acknowledgement and thanks. (Variations in orthography attempts to preserve the original writing styles.)
which might make it necessary for her to return. I think he would be very glad of a letter from you.
I think of you a lot, and how dear and lovely you are to me.
With love,

Letter [3]

5 Sept 1933

...Sunday and Monday. I wanted very much to write to you, but I never felt quiet enough. I was very glad to get your second letter Monday morning. It helped me a lot. While I was in London, Goodstein's affairs became very difficult. I feel afraid he may be doing lots of things in his state of excitement which will really make things harder for him.
His fiancée's husband is in a mad state of anger with him. I was with Goodstein when he went to the house where his fiancée is staying. When he got there, her husband suddenly came out of the front door. He had only just discovered where she was living. He rushed down the steps to the gate of the front garden, and shouted at Goodstein waving his fists at him and threatening him. I don't know whether he would really have attacked Goodstein, but he had already attacked Goodstein's brother, who has practically no connection at all with Goodstein. I felt very depressed after this happened. I think it makes it very hard for Goodstein to do things quietly. ...
I think of you a great deal.
With love,

Letter [4]

Jan 3rd 1934

Francis.

P.S. On Monday evening my Mother received a letter from Goodstein's Uncle saying Goodstein had succeeded in enticing his wife from him and that I was now assisting him, and would she use her influence to stop me. I have never talked about Goodstein's affairs with my parents. I don't think my Mother understands my connection in the matter. She wants me not to talk to Goodstein about this matter any more, at least till his agreement with the College has ended. I have told her I couldn't do this as long as Goodstein himself cared to talk over his affairs with me.

Letter [5]

N FRANCIS SKINNER, 8. 1. [1934]
As from 17 Sollershott, West,
Letchworth,
Herts..
Monday, Jan 8th

Dear Ludwig,

... 

In my last letter I wrote to you that my parents didn't understand my connection in Goodstein's affairs.
I don't seem to be able to say anything about the matter to my Mother which doesn't depress her, partly because she doesn't understand what I am trying to say, but mostly because practically everything I say is so bad and said in such a bad spirit. This makes me depressed too. I don't mean there has been a lot of conversation about it, but the little there has been has generally not gone in the right way. I think of you a lot and I am longing to see you again. If you can say anything about what I have just written, I should be awfully glad to hear it.

With love,

Letter [6]

ER, 10. 1. 1934
17 Sollershott, West,
Letchworth,
Herts..
Wednesday, Jan 10th.

Dear Ludwig,

I got back here last night. This morning I had a short conversation with my Mother about my connection with Goodstein's affairs in which everything she said about the matter was very kind and nice. I feel very glad as I hated to go back to Cambridge while there was still a misunderstanding. At present I intend to return to Cambridge Friday, Jan. 12th. I look forward very much to seeing you again. I think of you a lot.

With love,

Letter [7]

N. 2. Great Court,
Trinity College,
Cambridge.
Thursday, Mar. 22ND.

Dear Ludwig,
I miss you terribly here in Cambridge… The telegram we sent to Hutt did not reach him… I spent most of Monday and also Tuesday morning trying to find Goodstein in London. I have sent a letter to Hutt in Munich asking him to write me Goodstein's address. I am very sorry I haven't yet been able to have a talk with Goodstein. … With love, Francis.

Goodstein was friends with Hutt, and in later years he and his family sometimes visited Hutt; but when Hutt, long after Wittgenstein’s death, wrote a contribution to the public debate about the claim that Wittgenstein was homosexual, Goodstein refused to have any contact with him.

*Letter [8]*

25. 3. 1934
N. 2. Great Court,
Trinity College,
Cambridge.
Sunday, March 25th.

Dear Ludwig,

…

I haven't yet got Goodstein's address. I had a conversation with my Mother today. I didn't manage to make my Mother understand why it was impossible that I should allow my parents to come in any way between myself and Goodstein. I think of you a great deal.

With love,

We already knew that at least some of Skinner’s family opposed Wittgenstein’s influence on Skinner’s (lack of) career. Letter [8] shows that only a temporary respite was signalled by Letter [6]. The tense dynamics reported in Letters [4] and [5] continued between some of Goodstein’s and Skinner’s families. It may also help explain why Goodstein’s remarks directed at Skinner family, in his reply to Wittgenstein about the archive (in McGuinness, 208: Letter 295) are so terse and dismissive of Skinner’s family.

*Letter [9]:*

SKINNER, 4. 4. [1934]
17 Sollershott, West,
Letchworth,
Herts.
Wednesday, April 4th.

Dear Ludwig,

I got your letter last Wednesday evening. I was very glad to get it. Later in the evening I had a letter from Hutt. I had told Hutt roughly what I wanted to write to Goodstein about and why I wanted his address. Hutt said he was writing to Goodstein and would tell him that I wanted to see him, but he said he would not like to give me an address if for some reason it was better kept unknown. …

When I got back here on Friday, I found a letter from Goodstein. Goodstein wrote me a very nice letter and gave me his address. On Saturday I wrote him about everything I wanted to say to him. I didn't finish the letter till yesterday…

With love,

Letter [10]

S SKINNER, 8. 4. 1934
Isle of Portland.
Sunday, April 8th.

Dear Ludwig,

…When I got back [to Cambridge] I found a letter from Goodstein waiting for me. Goodstein wrote that he had failed to get the job at Hull and was beginning to feel very desperate about a job. He said that his fiancée thought that the best thing if he didn't get a job was to find a shop for her and for him to go back to Cambridge for a year. Later on in the letter he wrote that another idea of his fiancée[']s was that he should work next year for the Civil Service and that in any case she thought another year at Cambridge would improve his chances of a job. He said that he did not believe they would have him back at Cambridge but that could easily be tried. He said he certainly did not care for such a solution even though it was so temporary: it seemed like putting off all the difficulties for yet another year. He said he'd be awfully glad if I could offer some suggestion. I find it very hard to know what I should write him. I feel if I could see him and could find out exactly how he felt about the matter, then I might know what to say. I don't like the idea of his trying for the Civil Service as I don't feel that is at all the right kind of life for him. Also I think there would be lots of other difficulties for him if he tries to do that. I also don't know what I feel about his being at Cambridge another year. Before he left Cambridge I had felt it might be a very good thing. But now I feel it might be
in a sense making a step back and therefore might not be good for him. I feel I could judge all this much better if I saw him. Though upset about not getting the job, I thought on the whole Goodstein seemed happy from his letter. I feel if things are going well between him and her it might be better not to break this up… I was glad to leave Cambridge as I didn't feel able to work there at all… Thank you for everything. I hoped very much your work with Waismann would go off well...

August 11 1934
Saturday, Aug.11th
Dear Ludwig,
...
I have had another letter from Goodstein. I felt from his letter that he seemed to be feeling some sort of unhappiness. He seemed to me discontented in a way. He is also depressed at not being able to get a job. He is very anxious to see me. I think I shall go to see him either next Tuesday or Wednesday.

Letter [12]
Overdale,
Cock's Hill,
Perranporth,
Cornwall.
Wednesday, Aug. 22ND.

Dear Ludwig,
...
I didn't tell you in my last letter that Hutt is also staying here with Goodstein. It has been very nice seeing him again. He seems to me very well. I think also he is feeling more happy and confident about his work next year. I think he cares about it very seriously. Goodstein hasn't yet got a job. I feel very sorry as he definitely looked forward to teaching and now feels very disappointed. I don't think at present he cares about the idea of going in for a shop. If he doesn't feel cheerful about the idea of a shop, I don't think it will be the right thing for him. Goodstein himself also thought the idea of the Civil Service absurd. I told him what you thought. I also think he realises that he probably wouldn't be able to go back to Cambridge with her. Hutt thinks they certainly wouldn't have him. I feel things will be very hard for Goodstein. I wish he had had better luck.
...Goodstein is very kind to me. I enjoy very much doing housework and cooking with Goodstein and Hutt. I think it does me good and gives me a rest. I think about you a great deal.

With love,

Letter [13]

17 Sollershott, West,
Letchworth, Herts.
Sept.17th Tuesday.

Dear Ludwig,

It was very lovely to get your letter today from Leningrad... I have just heard from Goodstein that he has got a job at Reading University. I think the position is rather a good one – senior lecturer in pure mathematics. He said the people there were very kind and considerate to him in his interview. I am very glad that he has at last got some security and that it's a good job. I think it may be a very good job for him. It is only a small University, so I suppose he will only have to teach (or mostly at any rate) elementary work. I think he will do that very well and his pupils will find him very stimulating. I hope it goes well. I shall miss him a lot next year at Cambridge. He was always very kind to me and always welcomed me when I went to see him. I depend on friendly intercourse of this sort such a lot. I can't help feeling sad he won't be there, although I know this is selfish. I think a lot about the work which we are going to do next year. I feel that the spirit of the method which you used last year is so good.

Everything, I feel, is absolutely simple and yet its all full of light. I feel it will be very good to go on with it and get it ready in some form for publication. I feel that the method is so valuable. I hope very much we shall be able to get on with it. We will do our best. I'd like to say again that I hope you will stay longer in Moscow than the time you arranged for if you feel there is any chance that you might learn more. It would be valuable for both of us. I was very glad to get both your letters. I think of you a great deal and hope that you are feeling well.

W. I.

Ray Monk rightly regards the ‘work’ and ‘it’ in Letter [13] as a reference to the emergent Brown Book. In the letter there is no presumption of authorship on Skinner part. Rather, he appears to presuppose unity of purpose

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4 A Skinner bearing on this appointment is to be found in the Appendix.
and activity. This was the blend that served Wittgenstein: identities in symmetry and unity subservient to the creative purpose.

**The Archive**

The contents are described and published – with one exception – in the forthcoming publication *Dictating Philosophy*. The manuscripts are comprised of:

Add.ms.a.407/1: ‘PINK BOOK’ (SUCCESSOR TO THE ‘YELLOW BOOK’)
Add.ms.a.407/2: ‘COMMUNICATION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE’
Add.ms.a.407/3: ‘PHILOSOPHY – COURSE OF LECTURES’
Add.ms.a.407/4: ‘VISUAL IMAGE IN HIS BRAIN’
Add.ms.a.407/5: ‘THE NORWEGIAN NOTEBOOK’
Add.ms.a.407/6: ‘SELF-EVIDENCE AND LOGIC’
Add.ms.a.407/7: ‘NEW BROWN BOOK’
Add.ms.a.407/8: ‘MATHEMATICAL INVESTIGATIONS’

Since the edition *Dictating Philosophy* [forthcoming] publishes with all but one of these manuscripts – i.e., ‘Add.ms.a.407/8’ – and this manuscript is being prepared as a new edition of the *Brown Book*, I will restrict attention here to a few facets of Skinner’s Wittgenstein *Brown Book*’s manuscript.

**Wittgenstein’s Brown Book**

Until the discovery of the Wittgenstein Skinner Archive, there appeared to be no original manuscript or first-generation copy of the *Brown Book*. There seemed only to be a later generation carbon – the Von Wright carbon copy in Trinity College Library. It may be that there were some manuscript(s) of the first generation, apart from Skinner’s, for example in Rhees’s a portion of now partly auctioned and partially dispersed as well as unpublished and uncatalogued papers, in some anonymous ownership. So the first and only handwritten copy of the *Brown Book* is in the Archive. Page 1 of the manuscript is typical in that Wittgenstein has written new expressions that have no parallel in the Rhess published version (see Plate 2).
The *Brown Book* manuscript comprises of five foolscap exercise books, in brown, buff and pink. This Skinner *Brown Book* is replete with Wittgenstein’s own handwritten revisions and additions to it, which frequently differ from the published and other printed versions. Wittgenstein’s handwriting adds material in the form of new phrasing, sentences, and even paragraphs. Sometimes he corrects, revises, or adds to Skinner’s handwritten version. Such corrections are strong evidence of the need for a new edition of the *Brown Book*. Some of the Skinner readings differ from the published version, and are not corrected by Wittgenstein, it could be that Ambrose’s version (if there were one) was not informed by Skinner’s manuscript, or not in Part II.

That Skinner’s *Brown Book* attracts should attract further enquiry is illustrated by Skinner Book III, p, 20, which parallels the published *Brown Book* p.135. In the Skinner version on the page facing p.135 there is a paragraph in Wittgenstein’s handwriting, which parallels paragraph two of the published version (the German related to Philosophische Untersuchungen August 1936, p.118.); yet this latter German is not identical to the English version. It also seems that Wittgenstein has deleted the phrase “an explanation”, which is in the printed version. This leaves in Skinner’s text the reading “proposition”, which may indicate Wittgenstein prefers that to the (printed?) version he knew. This is typical of many other changes from the published text.

There are instructions in the manuscript that readily read as instructions to a printer for publication. So, for example, we find in manuscript Book II, Remark §64 that the instruction “new line” is written above the

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5 Sometimes here smaller changes have some importance: at the bottom of page 1 of the Skinner manuscript Wittgenstein appears to have deleted “Note:”, which is “Note.” in Skinner. This has the effect of restoring the following word “Objection:” to a stronger narrative role. This is typical of numerous changes of detail by Wittgenstein.

6 Questions abound here, ones that I would like to pursue while preparing a new edition. For example, may it be that the text written in Wittgenstein’s hand-writing in the Skinner manuscript betray a different route of emergence for the copy which Wittgenstein later intended to be the authoritative version of the *Brown Book* This may questionably presuppose Wittgenstein entertained such a division of significance about order when he moved on to earlier formulations of the *PI*?
top line (commencing “Let us ask the question:…”), at the head of the page, to indicate that this line does not run on from the last sentence of the previous page.

**An extension to the published Brown Book**

There is an important issue that arises when contrasting the published ending of the *Brown Book* and Skinner’s manuscript. The page where the published *Brown Book* text ends, in the corresponding point in Skinner’s manuscript, the following unwieldy expression occurs (see Plate 3):

“ended here the printed version” [sic].

First, this comment is written in pencil, such pencil writing as Wittgenstein used in his writing everywhere else in all the Skinner manuscripts. It does not quite seem certain to be Wittgenstein’s writing, though it might be. It is such a short expression, and in small handwriting that here might be some doubt about this attribution. Yet the writing of the “of” sees clearly and ringed in pencil is characteristically Wittgenstein’s. The unusual style of the letters: ‘d’, ‘f’, ‘p’ and ‘t’, and can be seen in various examples in the Appendices and throughout his manuscripts.7

Secondly, could the quoted expression, “ended here the printed version”, be construed as the result of tired English literalising and betraying a German (Austrian) inner voice: “Hier ist geended”.8

Thirdly, the expression “printed version” might indicate either a cyclostyled, carbon copy, or even ‘published’ or a typed version. Is it feasible to consider that the expression “ended the printed version” presupposes there was another version – i.e., one with the next 28 pages that follow the ending of Rhees’s published late version, which appears in Skinner manuscripts Book V and through Book VI. Both of these are bound, coloured and marked, in much the same way as are the other Skinner exercise

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7 Wittgenstein varied his style somewhat, particularly in relation to three sorts of size of writing he used, though the examples above appear to be typical of all three styles.

8 I have checked the handwriting of other like people and it is certainly not any of the following: Ambrose, Masterman, MacDonald, Anscombe, Geach, Goodstein, Lewy, Moore, Denis Paul, Rhees, Skinner, von Wright, and Wisdom.
Books (I to IV) that make up his Brown Book. In physical form and colour they are also parallel with the large ‘C’ exercise lecture books series written throughout in Wittgenstein’s handwriting, which cover the same period as the Blue and Brown Books.

The last page of the Brown Book in Skinner’s manuscript is, over the next page, succeeded by a 28 page sequence, which in its entirety is not in any other version. This is listed above as ‘Add.ms.a.407/2’ entitled ‘COMMUNICATION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE’. It also cites some numbers attached to remarks in the Brown Book, thus binding the two manuscripts together in some way as yet to be ascertained. (See Plate 4 for the first page of this extension to the Brown Book.)

**Dictation**

In his tenure of the Senior Research Fellowship in Trinity, Wittgenstein was required to lecture in English. For him this quickly became dictation aimed at composing books.

Wittgenstein needed amanuenses who were in unity with his mental and oral states, much as an amanuensis for an ailing composer. So the audience body-count rose quickly, and the audience fell away – to two, while Goodstein wended his way to Reading.

Only once in the Brown Book does Wittgenstein mention ‘dictation’ (in Remark 66). Within a few lines, unusually, Skinner is in a frenzy of revision, as if Wittgenstein hangs over him like Beethoven scratching out a dedication to a fake empress of words (see Plate 5). Miss Ambrose did not care to be a pianola. She could not learn to understand. Perhaps at this point she left for Moore. She may have claimed that dictation of the Brown Book ceased forthwith when she made an exit. Contrariwise, the Brown Book was finished in her absence. Only Skinner was left, living, as one, within Wittgenstein’s will – at home in dictation, on East Road where it seems much of the Skinner archive was finalised with Wittgenstein.

It was only later, that Wittgenstein, in his diary, wished Skinner dead (whilst immediately rueing it), and Skinner’s body complied. The period of dictation had ended as Wittgenstein absorbed the act of amanuensis into his being, at some cost to Skinner. Goodstein was a distant intimate, yet bounded to this union, silently holding Skinner’s archival heart to and
within himself – silent about it to the death: unable to impart it to its republic, engulfed as he was in a *Tractatus* chess ending. (See Plate 6.)

**Literature**


**Appendix**

Letter [13] refers to Goodstein’s securing a post at Reading University. Wittgenstein was a referee, and the following letter indicates other attempts at assistance:

*Letter [14]*

[25. 9. 1934]
Monday morning.

Dear Ludwig,

I have just got your letter about Goodstein. The only good Mathematical Testimonial he can get is from Ramsey. …I thought your testimonial could tell them that you thought he would be very keen on explaining things thoroughly to his pupils, and would be good at teaching elementary subjects. I suggested he should get a testimonial from Ursell… I also suggested Verblunsky, but Goodstein did not seem very keen. …He has a letter from Littlewood who only says that he attended a course of his lectures and that he read the answers to his questions in the Tripos. I also suggested Besicovitch, as Goodstein had attended a lot of his lectures. But Goodstein preferred Littlewood, as he had not answered any of Besicovitch's questions in the Tripos. ..Ramsey has given him a very good testimonial. (so Goodstein writes me) – I am very sorry I can't be with you on the 4th of October. …

Thank you for everything.

With love,
Illustrations

Plate 1. Wittgenstein Skinner Archives.

Plate 2. Brown Book page 1 with Wittgenstein revisions.
Communication of personal experience.

B looks at traffic lights and reports to A what colour shows by calling out to him alternately the words ‘red’ and ‘green’ when he saw red or green when he saw green, etc. (This last sentence opposes the instructor’s saying ‘red’ when he saw red to say, his saying ‘rouge’ or ‘moo’ when he saw red. The sentence therefore did not say. The instructor told the pupil what he saw as opposed to telling him a lie.) The condition for B’s learning the game was, of course, his reacting in the desired way. In other words, had B not reacted by saying the words, or reacted by saying them at random, the game would not have come off. I am assuming that B after some training in every case said the word the teacher wished him to say (the word which the teacher himself would have said). Isn’t this a case of the communication of personal experience?

As No. 1. After B has passed the training, we let him look at the traffic lights through various kinds of media. Wherever he looks through the medium of glass he says ‘red’ when the medium he says ‘green’, and vice versa. Other media produce other regular changes of this sort in his reactions but not in the normal person. The question arises: ‘If he looks through the medium so and so, does he see what we see or...”
a clear case of certain actions, those of the hammer of the piano being guided by the pattern of the holes in the piano roll. We could use the expression "the piano is reading off the record made by the perforations in the roll" and we might call pattern of such perforations complex signs or sentences. We approach the similar classes opposing their function in a piano roll to the function which similar devices have in mechanisms of a different type, considering that of a combination lock. In a combination lock the movement of a lock is caused by a particular combination of the movement of a kind, but we should not say the lock was guided by these. You see here the connection between the idea of being guided and the idea of being able to read new combinations of signs. Now for we should say that the piano can read any pattern of perforations of a particular kind, it is not built for one particular time or a set of tunes (like a musical box), whereas the lock of a combination lock reacts to a predetermined pattern of the key-bit only which is predetermined in the construction of the lock.

E.g. the combination of notches and teeth which form a key-bit. The lock of a lock is caused to slide by this particular combination. But we should not say that the movement of the lock was guided by the way in which we had combined the teeth and notches. I.e., we should not say that the lock moved according...

Plate 5. Remark 66.

Im Jahre 1929 notierte Wittgenstein im MS 106, 4:

Es ist merkwürdig welche Erleichterung es mir ist manches in einer geheimen Schrift nieder zu schreiben was ich nicht gerne lesbar schreiben möchte.¹

Ausgehend von dieser Notiz und weiteren Bemerkungen und im Hinblick auf Wittgensteins Schweigen über bestimmte Bereiche in der Philosophie, möchte ich in diesem Beitrag der Frage nachgehen, ob Wittgenstein in der Verschlüsselung von Texten eine Möglichkeit sah, über Dinge zu sprechen bzw. zu schreiben, über die er eigentlich schweigen wollte. Dies betrifft sowohl philosophische als auch persönliche, existentielle Fragen, deren Verbalisierung, so scheint es, er dem oberflächlichen „Schnellleser“ vor- enthalten wollte. Für diese Annahme spricht eine Eintragung vom 9.2.1937 im MS 157a:

Es ist ein großer Unterschied zwischen den Wirkungen einer Schrift die man leicht & fließend lesen kann & einer die man schreiben aber nicht leicht ents-ziffern/lesen kann. Man schließt, in ihr die Gedanken ein, wie in einer Schat-tulle.

Ob, und wenn ja, welche Gedanken Wittgenstein mittels Verschlüsselung bewahren, schützen, ja verschließen wollte, soll sich aus den folgenden Untersuchungen zeigen.

Chronologisch betrachtet, sind uns erste Aufzeichnungen in Code aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs bekannt, doch wie auch McGuinness mutmaßt, spricht die relativ einfache Handhabung des Code² dafür, dass Wittgenstein schon früher von diesem Gebrauch machte. Wie ein Brief seiner Schwester Helene zeigt, dürfte der Code innerhalb der Familie Witt-

¹ Im Folgenden sind codierte Stellen kursiv gesetzt.
² Dieser besteht mehr oder weniger in der Umkehrung des Alphabets: a = z, b = y etc. (Als kleine Abweichung sei der Buchstabe r erwähnt, der sowohl i als auch j bedeutet).
genstein, vermutlich unter den Geschwistern, als eine Art Spielerei mit Schrift verwendet worden sein.


Im Hinblick auf die Frage, ob formal und semantisch interne Analogien unter diesen Stellen bestehen und ob eine Zuordnung zu bestimmten
Aspekten unter einer gemeinsamen kulturgeschichtlichen Perspektive zulässig und sinnvoll ist – ob demnach die Annahme einer eigenen Textsorte in Wittgensteins Werk gerechtfertigt ist –, sei auf folgende Kriterien hingewiesen:

A) Inhalt: Hier sind persönliche, tagebuchartige Aufzeichnungen, Bemerkungen ethischen und religiösen Inhalts sowie kulturgeschichtliche und politische Reflexionen anzuführen.

B) Stil: In stilistischer Hinsicht lassen sich folgende Merkmale feststellen, die den Unterschied zu den Aufzeichnungen in Normalschrift aufweisen:
   a) ein erzählender bzw. narrativer Ton, der die autobiographischen Aufzeichnungen kennzeichnet.
   b) ein lyrischer Stil, der sich bei spontan auftretenden, poetisch anmutenden Bemerkungen inmitten des in nüchternem Ton geführten philosophischen Diskurses zeigt.
   c) ein sehr persönlicher, leidenschaftlicher Ton, der sich insbesondere in den Eintragungen religiösen und ethischen Inhalts beobachten lässt.
   d) ein Stil in der Art von Gebeten, häufig in der „Möge“- Form: „Möge Gott mir helfen“ etc.
   e) ein monologischer Charakter: nicht nur die autobiographischen Notizen, sondern auch solche über ethisch-religiöse und kulturelle Themen in codierter Schrift sind von monologischem Charakter bestimmt und heben sich – gleich Selbstgesprächen – vom dialogischen, häufig an ein fiktives Du gerichteten, in normaler Schrift gehaltenen Diskurs, ab.


1. Tagebücher


In seinem Tagebuch der Dreißigerjahre kam er mehrmals auf die Musik zu sprechen, die in seinem Leben – wie in seiner Philosophie – eine zentrale Stelle einnahm. So hegte er u.a. den Wunsch, durch die Musik sein Leben ausdrücken zu können (DB, 9f.), und zu M. O’ C. Drury soll er bemerkt haben, dass es ihm unmöglich sei, in seinem Buch (den Philosophischen Untersuchungen) nur ein einziges Wort zu sagen über alles das, was die Musik für ihn in seinem Leben bedeutet habe (Rhees 1992, 120) – ein Versagen, das er mit dem Unverständensein seines Werkes in Verbindung brachte.

Aus zahlreichen Bemerkungen Wittgensteins wird der Zusammenhang von Leben, Sprache, Kunst, Philosophie und moralischen Werten deutlich. Wie er selbst festhielt:

Die Denkbewegung in meinem Philosophieren müßte sich in der Geschichte meines Geistes, seiner Moralbegriffe & dem Verständnis meiner Lage wiederfinden lassen (DB, 125r).

1.1. Tagebücher 1914-1916


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Verschlüsselung in Wittgensteins Nachlass


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6 7.7.1916. In den philosophischen Tagebüchern wird dieser Gedanke erst am 15.10.1916 und in etwas abgeänderter Form festgehalten: „Was man sich nicht denken kann, darüber kann man auch nicht reden. Im *Tractatus*, 5.61 heißt es dann: „Was wir nicht denken können, das können wir nicht denken; wir können also auch nicht sagen, was wir nicht denken können.“ – Allerdings bemerkt Wittgenstein am 22.11.1914, dass er an einer Stelle wieder etwas auszudrücken versuche, „was sich nicht ausdrücken läßt“.
berührten, doch auch in seine philosophischen Gedankengänge aufgenommen werden, sind die des Lebens in der Gegenwart, nicht in der Zeit (8.7.16), sowie seine Reflexionen über die Rechtfertigung eines glücklichen Lebens „der Not der Welt zum Trotz“, das er des weiteren im Guten und im Schönen gewährleistet sieht.


Die Auffassung vom Leben in der Gegenwart ohne Furcht vor dem Tode (die er als „Zeichen eines falschen, d.h. schlechten Lebens“ sieht) entspricht auch seiner Bemerkung „Die Welt des Glücklichen ist eine andere als die des Unglücklichen“ (TLP, 6.43), worüber er im Zuge seiner Auseinandersetzung über „gut“ und „böse“ reflektiert.

Die gelassene Haltung gegenüber den „Äußerlichkeiten“ des Lebens hofft Wittgenstein durch eine verstärkte Hinwendung zum Geistigen zu erreichen, wie auch durch das spinozistisch anmutende Sich-ergeben in Gott und das Schicksal. Alle diese Aspekte bestimmen sowohl die in verschlüsselter Schrift wie die in Normalschrift verfassten philosophischen
Eintragungen, die bekannterweise die Vorarbeit zur Logisch-philosophischen Abhandlung bildeten.


Am darauffolgenden Tag schreibt er im philosophischen Teil, dass er wieder einmal etwas auszudrücken versuche, „was sich nicht ausdrücken läßt“. Am selben Tag heißt es im verschlüsselten Teil: „Das erlösende Wort nicht ausgesprochen. Gestern lag es mir einmal ganz auf der Zunge. Dann aber gleitet es wieder zurück. - - -“

Im philosophischen Teil der Tagebücher kommt der Begriff des erlösenden Wortes erst am 20.1.15 vor und steht als Frage nach einer Reihe logischer Gedankengänge: „Das erlösende Wort - ?!“ Am 3.6.15, als er sich intensiv mit der Tautologie von Sätzen auseinandersetzt, schreibt er die Bemerkung „Das erlösende Wort ist übrigens hier noch nicht gesprochen“ in Klammern.


Die schließlich im Tractatus sozusagen zur „Essenz“ komprimierten Sätze sollten daher aus dem Geist der ihnen vorausgegangenen Tagebücher gelesen werden.8 Diese wiederum enthalten wesentliche Aspekte, die meines Erachtens aus den codierten Eintragungen dieser Zeit entwickelt worden sind. Sie geben Wittgensteins ganz persönliche Sicht auf verschiedene Themen wieder, vor allem hinsichtlich existentieller Fragen sowohl des Individuums als auch des Menschen an sich in seinem sozialen

7 Vgl.: „Die Aufgabe der Philosophie ist es, das erlösende Wort zu finden. Das erlösende Wort ist die Lösung eines philosophischen Problems“ (MS 107, 114). Vgl. auch: „Der Philosoph trachtet das erlösende Wort zu finden, das ist das Wort das uns endlich erlaubt das zu fassen was bis jetzt immer ungrenzfähig unser Bewußtsein belastet hat“ (MS 110, 17).
8 Vgl. auch Schulte 2001, 211.

1.2. Tagebücher 1930-1932/1936-1937 (Denkbewegungen)

Ein Beispiel sei angeführt, wo Wittgenstein bei der Schwierigkeit rationaler Erklärungen an die Möglichkeit des Beschreibens denkt, dabei von normaler zu verschlüsselter Schrift wechselt, sobald es um das persönliche Empfinden seiner geistigen Überbeanspruchung geht: „Nicht erklären! – Beschreiben! Unterwirf dein Herz & sei nicht böß, dass du so leiden

Auf den Unterschied zwischen persönlichen Äußerungen religiöser Art und jenen, für Andere bestimmte, also allgemeine, an Theorien grenzende, hat er selbst hingewiesen: „Es ist ein Ding zu Gott zu reden & ein anderes, von Gott zu Anderen zu reden“ (DB, 174).


2. Codierte Bemerkungen ethischen und religiösen Inhalts


⁹ Vgl. Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief.


3. Über den Nachlass verstreute Bemerkungen

Obwohl eine Vielzahl dieser Aufzeichnungen in den *Vermischten Bemerkungen* publiziert sind, so geschah dies anderen Kriterien gemäß, d.h. vorwiegend nach inhaltlichen, und dies im speziellen nach Themen kulturgeschichtlicher Art. Zudem befinden sich in den *Vermischten Bemerkungen* auch zahlreiche, in Normalschrift verfasste Stellen, während eine beträchtliche Menge weiterer verschlüsselter Stellen aus dem Nachlass fehlt.


An anderer Stelle, im MS 146, allerdings in Normalschrift und demnach in vergleichbar nüchternem, vom Lyrischen sich abhebenden Ton – als eine Art Fazit über seine philosophische Arbeit und daher Information für all jene, die sich mit seiner Philosophie befassen – heißt es: "Ich glaube meine Stellung zur Philosophie dadurch zusammengefaßt zu haben indem ich sagte: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten."


und zugleich demütigem Ton gehaltenen Gebete, zumeist mit der aus den
Kriegstagebüchern bekannten „Möge-Form“, schrieb er in Code: „Möge
Gott es verhüten!“ (MS 108, 38; 25.12.1929); „Gott, halte mein Ideal zu-
recht!“ (MS 107, 161; 11.10.1929). Oder, später: „Möchte mir Gott Rein-
heit & Wahrheit schicken“ (MS 108, 47; 28.12.29, 47).

Es scheint, dass hier der Code als Mittel diente, um sein von ehr-
fürchtiger Distanz geprägtes Verhältnis zu Gott auszudrücken, und dabei
das in normaler Sprache nicht Artikulierbare – die Unsinnigkeit ethischer
und religiöser Ausdrücke – zu verbergen. Und wenn auch zahlreiche Re-
flexionen über religiösen Glauben in Normalschrift festgehalten sind, geht
Wittgenstein zum Code über, sobald sein Ton persönlich und leidenschaft-
lach wird:

Wenn ich aber wirklich erlöst werden soll, - so brauche ich Gewissheit – nicht
Weisheit, Träume, Spekulation – und diese Gewissheit ist der Glaube. Und der
Glaube ist Glaube an das, was mein Herz, meine Seele braucht, nicht mein
spekulierender Verstand, Denn meine Seele, mit ihren Leidenschaften, gleich-
sam mit ihrem Fleisch & Blut muss erlöst werden, nicht mein abstrakter Geist
(MS 120; 12.12.1937).

Während seines langen einsamen Aufenthalts in Norwegen in den Jahren
1936 und 1937 schreibt er längere Passagen in Code, insbesondere was
deine persönliche Lage betrifft, womit sich einer der von ihm angeführten
Gründe für das Tagebuchschreiben bestätigt – nämlich als Ersatz für einen
Menschen, dem er sich anvertrauen könnte. Er berichtet über seine Ängste,
dem Wahnsinn zu verfallen, seinen Zustand äußerster Verzweiflung. Häu-
fig bezichtigt er sich der Unanständigkeit, Eitelkeit, des Mangels an Wahr-
heitsliebe und der Feigheit. Wenn sich seine Gedankengänge von seiner
persönlichen Lage zu allgemeinen Problemen des Lebens erstrecken, än-
dert sich sein Ton, d.h. von einem leidenschaftlichen zu einem eher näch-
ter, wie er uns aus den philosophischen Tagebüchern 1914-16 bekannt
ist. Der monologische Charakter weicht einem dialogischen:

Die Lösung des Problems, das Du im Leben siehst, ist eine Art zu leben, die
das Problemhafte zum Verschwinden bringt. Dass das Leben problematisch ist,
heisst, dass Dein Leben nicht in die Form des Lebens passt. Du musst dann
dein Leben verändern, & passt es in die Form, dann verschwindet das Prob-
lematische […]“ (MS 118, 17r. 27.8.1937).
Oft berichtet er in Code über seine philosophische Arbeit, so dass wir ein lebhaftes Bild der Beweggründe und der Art seiner zahlreichen Änderungen, Streichungen etc. erhalten.

Er beklagt seine Unfähigkeit, klar zu denken und seine philosophischen Untersuchungen übersichtlich darzustellen, und befürchtet einen allmählichen, aber völligen Verlust seines Verstandes, ein Schwinden seiner Geisteskraft (1.10.1940). In der Schilderung des Zustands vom Nachlassen philosophischer Denkkraft verwendet er Metaphern wie „Öde“, „Winter“, „Wüste“ und dergleichen. Das Hauptproblem seiner Verzweiflung sieht er jedoch in seiner Vereinsamung. Häufig macht er sich nun Gedanken über die Liebe, die er als das Wichtigste im Leben sieht, als einen „seldenen Edelstein“ (MS 132, 77; 29.9.1946), als „die Perle von grossem Wert“ (MS 133, 8r; 26.10.1946), als „ein Glück. Vielleicht ein Glück mit Schmerzen, aber ein Glück“ (ibid.).

Konklusion


Trotz offenbarer Inkonsequenz scheint der Code hinsichtlich seiner Bemerkung „Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt“ (TLP, 5.6) ihm als Medium gedient zu haben, um über die Grenzen seiner Sprache im Sinne der artikulierbaren, verbalisierbaren Welt hinaus-
zugehen – ein Wagnis, bei dem ihm allerdings die Unsinnigkeit des zur Sprache Gebrachten bewusst geworden ist.

Im Hinblick auf seine Bemerkung über die innerhalb der Grenzen seiner Sprache geäußerten Sätze im *Tractatus* – dass man diese, wenn man ihn verstehe, am Ende als unsinnig erkenne (TLP, 6.54) –, könnten die verschlüsselten, ethische und religiöse Fragen betreffenden Bemerkungen aber auch als zum wesentlichen, nicht geschriebenen Teil seines Werks\(^\text{11}\)gehörend gedacht sein.

**Literatur**


\(^{11}\) Vgl. dazu Wittgensteins Brief an Ludwig von Ficker [Anf. Nov. 1919], in dem er schrieb, dass sein Werk aus zwei Teilen bestehe: „aus dem, der hier vorliegt, und aus alledem, was ich nicht geschrieben habe. Und gerade dieser zweite Teil ist der Wichtige“. 


Beyond the World, Beyond Significant Language

Nuno Venturinha, Lisbon

As is well known, Wittgenstein withdrew from philosophy after the completion of his *Tractatus*, only resuming work on it when he returned to Cambridge at the beginning of 1929. Then he began to write MS105, the first of a series of “volumes”. From 2 to 15 February, following the method used in his 1914-17 notebooks (MSS101-103), he wrote down remarks dealing with philosophy on the right-hand pages and personal remarks on the left-hand ones, but the latter were no longer written in code. From 15 February onwards, however, he left the rest of the left-hand pages blank. These pages he later filled up when he had finished “Volume II”, MS106, which shared the structure of MS105, and then started to write “Volume III”, MS107, in the conventional way as he did with the remaining volumes. In these, the personal remarks appear interspersed, sometimes written in code and sometimes in normal script, but some of the coded remarks are also philosophical in nature. A nice example of this is provided by two remarks of 10 and 15 November 1929 in the third volume. The first sentence of the former was un-coded, but Wittgenstein crossed it out, rewriting it in code. However, he then added the second sentence in normal script again. The whole paragraph reads as follows:

What is Good is Divine too. That, strangely enough, sums up my ethics. (MS107, 192; CV, 5e)

The second remark, written without any code, says:

You cannot lead people to the good; you can only lead them to some place or other; the good lies outside the space of facts. (MS107, 196; CV, 5e)

These thoughts are not fortuitous; they are closely related to the preparation of Wittgenstein’s famous “Lecture on Ethics”, given to the Heretics
Society in Cambridge on 17 November.\textsuperscript{1} This lecture is extremely important for the understanding of Wittgenstein’s conception of ethics because it is the only public text after the \textit{Tractatus} that focuses on this. If it is true that such a topic is recurrent in his manuscripts, it cannot be overlooked that neither Wittgenstein’s university lectures nor his typescripts – where he summarized his work for possible publication – bear explicit analyses of it. Why then did Wittgenstein disregard in his “Lecture on Ethics” the silence he proposed in the conclusion of the \textit{Tractatus}? Should we take the “Lecture on Ethics” as another example of “irony”, to follow the “new Wittgensteinians”, who read the \textit{Tractatus} as an ironic dialectic which \textit{ethically} aims to liberate the reader from all the “laying down of philosophical requirements”, using – except in its “frame”, the preface and the three concluding remarks – only apparent significant propositions intended to be recognized at the end as “mere nonsense”, “plain nonsense”?\textsuperscript{2} Or, as Ray Monk (1990, 276-277) put it, did Wittgenstein simply “use the opportunity to try and correct the most prevalent and serious misunderstanding

\textsuperscript{1} There are three versions of it, MSS139a and b, and TS207, the latter being made, according to Brian McGuinness (2002, 157, n. 36), by G. E. M. Anscombe on the basis of MS139b and then published by Rush Rhees in 1965. McGuinness (WVC, 92, n. 60) conjectures that it may have been a German original. However, that is unlikely first of all because there are two English versions in manuscript and secondly because Wittgenstein gave MS139b to his sister Margarete Stonborough, in all probability the \textit{letzter Hand} version. For that reason, it seems impossible that TS207 had been prepared by Anscombe based on MS139b since the latter was only rediscovered in 1992 among the Nachlass of Rudolf and Elisabeth Koder to whom Margarete had offered this and other texts shortly after Wittgenstein’s death (see Koder 1993). In my opinion, TS207 was prepared by Wittgenstein himself and read at the lecture. Additional evidence is given not only by a note on the top of the first page of TS207 saying “Manuscript von Dr. Ludwig Wittgenstein”, probably inserted by Schlick or Waismann with whom the lecture was discussed in 1929-30, but also by a letter from Margarete to Wittgenstein in which she writes: “I was very pleased with your letter. And I am in particular looking forward to your lecture. Something to look forward to. A great joy. […] And I thank you very much for the manuscript, I could not easily imagine a greater joy.” (I have slightly amended Ilse Somavilla’s translation in LE 2007, 244. The phrase “Something to look forward to” appears in English in the original, first published in FB, 123.)

\textsuperscript{2} I am here borrowing expressions from Diamond 1991, 20, and 2000, 149ff. See also, among other texts, Diamond 1991, ch. 6, as well as Conant 2002.
of the *Tractatus*: the idea that it is a work written in a positivist, anti-metaphysical spirit”?”\(^3\) Let us look at the lecture.

Wittgenstein begins by distinguishing between “trivial or relative sense” and “ethical or absolute sense”, trying to show that any expression used to define what is at issue in ethics is, *mutatis mutandis*, also used to express simple states of affairs (cf. MS139b, 4 (TS 207, 2-3 (LE, 38)), and cp. MS139a, 4). He writes:

If for instance I say that this is a *good* chair this means that the chair serves a certain predetermined purpose and the word good here has only meaning so far as this purpose has been previously fixed upon. In fact the word good in the relative sense simply means coming up to a certain predetermined standard. (MS 139b, 4-5 (TS 207, 3 (LE, 38)); cp. MS139a, 5)

In fact, we often say that something is good or bad without ascribing to it an ethical or absolute value. As Wittgenstein points out, the condition for something being said to be good (or bad) is only its “coming up [or not] to a certain predetermined standard”. Obviously this does not happen only with artefacts, which are by their nature *instrumental*, but also with living beings, including man himself; it all depends on the *work* to be performed, which is of course arbitrary. There must be therefore an *overlapping* of the ethical or the absolute. Wittgenstein actually asks if, unlike what can be the case in a functional performance, which is external, we could approve of someone who recognizes he had behaved *badly* in this or that situation and at the same time does not want to improve himself at all. The example Wittgenstein gives is the following:

Supposing that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said “well you play pretty badly” and suppose I answered “I know, I’m playing badly but I don’t want to play any better”.[,] All, [all] the other man could say would be “Ah then that’s all right”. But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said “You’re behaving like a beast” and then I were to say “I know I behave badly, but then I don’t want to behave any better”.[,] Would [could] the man then say “Ah, then that’s all right”?\(^3\)

\(^3\) Monk’s initial words were not chosen incidentally. Cp. MS139b, 1-2 (TS207, 1 (LE, 37)), as well as MS139a, 1-2.
Certainly not; he would say “well [Well], you ought to want to behave better”. (MS139b, 5-6 (TS207, 3 (LE, 38-39)); cp. MS139a, 5-6)\(^4\)

At this point we see that our words touch a sphere which is irreducible to facts, overlapping them. That is to say, there is an event which does not exhaust itself in that event. The problem is: how to describe such an experience? As a matter of fact, what we call ethics immediately vanishes when we objectify the case, i.e. when we express it linguistically, even if it seems that there is no alternative way of expressing it. Wittgenstein puts it extremely forcefully when referring to the possible description of a murder. He remarks:

If for instance [...] we read the description of a murder<,> with all its details physical and psychological the mere description of these facts will contain nothing which we could call an ethical judgement proposition. The murder will be on exactly the same level as any other event, for instance the falling of a stone. Certainly the reading of this description might cause us pain or rage or any other emotion[,] or we might read about the pain or rage caused by this murder in other people when they heard of it, but there will simply be facts, facts<,> and facts but no Ethics. – (MS139b, 8 (TS207, 4-5 (LE, 39-40)); cp. MS139a, 8-9)\(^5\)

The upshot is then obvious: being indescribable, ethics can be no science so that “if it is anything, is supernatural” (cf. MS139b, 9 (TS207, 5 (LE, 40)), and cp. MS139a, 9-10). This idea can also be found in the last entry of 10 November, which comes after the remark quoted in the opening of this paper where Wittgenstein states, in code, that “[o]nly something supernatural can express the Supernatural” (MS107, 192: CV, 5e). Thus is a

\(^4\) In quoting from the Nachlass, I have added to the Normalized transcription offered by the Bergen Electronic Edition some features of the Diplomatic transcription, namely deleted text and indication of insertions. I use square brackets to indicate additions or alterations and angle brackets to indicate suppressions in the typewritten version.

\(^5\) In one of the Vienna Circle conversations from 5 January 1930, recorded by Friedrich Waismann, commenting on his “Lecture on Ethics”, Wittgenstein puts the question in the following way: “In ethics our expressions have a double meaning: a psychological one of which you can speak and a non-psychological one [...]. Everything I describe is within the world. An ethical proposition never occurs in the complete description of the world, nor even when I am describing a murderer. What is ethical is not a state of affairs.” (WVC, 92-93)
view like Cora Diamond’s right after all, with an ethical proposition being for Wittgenstein nothing but “piggly wiggle tiggle” (cf. Diamond 2000, 153ff.)? Or has this “Supernatural” really something to do with us and therefore with what we say? Let us take a closer look at the lecture.

In order to be precise about what ethics involves, Wittgenstein presents some experiences of his own, beginning with the one he calls his “experience par excellence”, pointing out parenthetically that “this is an entirely personal matter and others would find other examples more striking” (cf. MS139b, 10-11 (TS207, 6 (LE, 41))). He says:

I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it I wonder at the existence of the world. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as “how extraordinary that anything should exist” or “how extraordinary that the world should exist”.

And he goes on to say:

I will mention another experience straight away which I also know and which others of you might be acquainted with: it is, what one might call, the experience of feeling absolutely safe. I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say “I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens”.

(MS139b, 11 (TS207, 6 (LE, 41)); cp. MS139a, 12)

Wittgenstein would give a third example, that of “feeling guilty”, which is described by the phrase that God disapproves of our conduct” (cf. MS139b, 14 (TS207, 8 (LE, 42)), and cp. MS139a, 15-16), but he concentrates his commentary on the first two. What he points out immediately is that “the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense”, that “[i]f I say ‘I wonder at the existence of the world’ I am misus-

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6 As McGuinness (2002, 157, n. 36) rightly argued, the appearance of the phrase “for excellence” in TS207 is surely due to a typing mistake. Cp. MS139a, 11-12. Cp. in addition the following considerations recorded byWaismann from a conversation held on 17 December 1930, in which, after criticizing Moritz Schlick’s conception of ethics, Wittgenstein reflects on the concept of “value”: “What is ethical cannot be taught. If I could explain the essence of the ethical only by means of a theory, then what is ethical would be of no value whatsoever. | At the end of my lecture on ethics I spoke in the first person. I think that this is something very essential. Here there is nothing to be stated any more; all I can do is to step forth as an individual and speak in the first person. | For me a theory is without value. A theory gives me nothing.” (WVC, 117)
Wittgenstein’s diagnosis is based, as in the *Tractatus*, on the bipolarity of the proposition, which requires that for any statement its contrary can also be projected – something that we cannot do in this case. That is only possible in those cases where the falsehood of what we imagine is actually conceivable. What would it be for us to wonder at the *non-existence* of the world? That cannot be thought indeed. The same also holds true for the statement that we may be “safe whatever happens”. Wittgenstein makes the point clear in this passage:

> To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me<,> and therefore it’s nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. Again this is a misuse of the word “safe” as the other example was a misuse of the word “existence” or “wondering”. (MS139b, 13 (TS207, 7 (LE, 42)))

Nevertheless, an ethical *sense* remains, exteriorizing what is expressed. We may ask: how do we find this out if the propositions are nonsensical? And the answer is, precisely: through language, through the limits it imposes which we constantly run up against. After introducing the notion of “miracle”, examining its “relative” and “absolute” sense, Wittgenstein (re)describes “the experience of wondering at the existence of the world” in terms of “seeing the world as a miracle”, adding that “the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself” (cf. MS139b, 17 (TS 207, 9 (LE, pp. 43-44)), and cp. MS139a, 18-19). This “deep sense” does not reduce itself to any propositional content because,

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7 Cp. as well WVC, 93 (5.1.1930): “Astonishment at the fact of the world. Every attempt to express it leads to nonsense.”

8 Cp. MS139a, 14, where Wittgenstein hesitates between “impossible” and “improbable”.

9 Cf. MS139b, 16-17 (TS207, 9 (LE, 43)), and cp. MS139a, 17-18, a passage which includes at the end the following specification: “In the relative sense [the term miracle] simply [means] a hitherto unknown kind of event. Well that’s a trivial meaning. But when we are tempted to use it in what I would like to call a deep meaning then it means we want it to mean that we wonder at it not because of its rarity of what has happened, the event, but because what has happened has happened whatever has happened.”
Wittgenstein insists, “all we say about the absolute miraculous remains nonsense” (cf. MS139b, 17 (TS207, 10 (LE, 44)), and cp. MS139a, 19); that is, we cannot turn round the paradoxicality at stake simply by ascribing a meaning to what is nonsensical, just waiting for the day when we will succeed “in finding the correct logical analysis of what we mean by our ethical and religious expressions”.  

Diamond and her followers are thus perfectly right in arguing that nonsense is **nonsense**, with the allegories we create corresponding to **nothing**. What they did not recognize was that the **linguistic tension** which such expressions give rise to is the manifestation of ethics as the unsayable exteriorization of the **self** – something that does not happen with “piggly wiggle tiggle”, which, not being **agrammatical**, does not produce any **effect**.  

Wittgenstein’s lecture is on ethics, and that is why we understand it. Diamond would go so far as to argue that in reality we remain under the illusion that we understand it, an illusion which Witt-  

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10 This passage deserves to be quoted in full: “Now the answer to all this will seem perfectly clear to many of you. You will say: Well, if certain experiences constantly tempt us to attribute a quality to them which we call absolute or ethical value and importance, this simply shews [shows] that by these words we don’t mean nonsense, that after all what we mean by saying that an experience has absolute value is just a fact like other facts and that all our difficulties it comes to is<,> that we have not yet succeeded in finding the correct logical analysis of what we mean by our ethical and religious expressions. –” (MS139b, 17-18 (TS 207, 10 (LE, 44)); cp. MS139a, 19-20).

11 A use of language may be **agrammatical** if, even adopting (apparently) meaningful words, it violates, so to speak, grammar or logical syntax (e.g. “Socrates is identical” or “Chairman Mao is rare”, to borrow examples from the Tractatus, §§5.473 and 5.4733, and from Dummett 1981, 50-51, respectively), but also if, more than a violation, it produces a real grammatical dissolution which naturally carries with it meaningless expressions. Both cases are different from “piggly wiggle tiggle” in which, besides the meaningless character of its constituent parts, there is no latent grammar as there is, for example, in Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” in *Through the Looking-Glass* – a poem from which Wittgenstein quoted, in his very first lecture, part of the first verse (“’Twas brillig and the slithy toves/ Did gyre and gimble in the wabe”) – something that, although it is “nonsense”, he says, “can be analysed into subject and predicate and parts of speech” (cf. WL, 3 (20.1.1930)). The sort of dissolution I have drawn attention to can actually be better identified in Antonin Artaud’s remarkable “anti-grammatical attempt” to render the first verse of “Jabberwocky” (1979, 140).
Wittgenstein *ethically* tries to cure us of – a notorious contradiction, which, however, would be necessary to keep until we cease to *imagine* a *content* for *that*. What Wittgenstein elucidates is that the only way in which it makes sense to talk about ethics is one that is *for me* and that once I have reached such a state I cannot meaningfully say anything of what I am feeling. Nonsense is therefore essential to ethics. To keep on asking about its sense, obviously revealing its nonsense, so that we may get rid of the “false imagination of philosophy” (cf. Diamond 2000, 169) is ethically worthless. There is no *false* imagination; what there is, and will keep on being as long as humanity exists, is *imagination*, in a flash of *finitude*. Ethics has solely to do with that *feeling*, “[t]he feeling of the world as a limited whole”, i.e. a “mystical feeling”, as Wittgenstein put it in §6.45(2) of the *Tractatus*. The final lines of the lecture where Wittgenstein summarizes his point are clear enough:

> My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely<,> hopeless.–

> Ethics, so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable[,] can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it. (MS139b, 18-19 (TS207, 10 (LE, 44)); cp. MS139a, 20-21)

Let me then put this alongside Wittgenstein’s commentary on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and/or *What is Metaphysics?* – a text which derives from the inaugural public lecture given by Heidegger in Freiburg on 24 July 1929 and published in that year – in a conversation from 30 December 1929 recorded by Waismann. He is reported to have said:

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12 With respect to the possible prevalence of *sense* in “our ethical and religious expressions”, namely the ones taken into consideration, Wittgenstein remarks: “[...] these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but [...] their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language.” (MS139b, 18 (TS207, 10 (LE, 44)); cp. MS139a, 20)
To be sure, I can imagine what Heidegger means by being and anxiety. Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language. Think for example of the astonishment that anything at all exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer whatsoever. Anything we might say is a priori bound to be mere nonsense. Nevertheless we do run up against the limits of language. Kierkegaard too saw that there is this running up against something and he referred to it in a fairly similar way (as running up against paradox). This running up against the limits of language is ethics. (WVC, 68)
There are two complementary notes from Waismann inserted after the sentence “Nevertheless we do run up against the limits of language”. The first evokes, almost literally, §6.45(2) of the *Tractatus*, stating that “[f]eeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical”,\(^{14}\) and the other the second ethical experience described in the “Lecture on Ethics”, namely that “‘[n]othing can happen to me’, [that] whatever may happen, for me it is without significance” (WVC, 68, n. I). In this context, the second part of Wittgenstein’s commentary on Heidegger is worth quoting:

I think it is definitely important to put an end to all the clap trap about ethics – whether intuitive knowledge exists, whether values exist, whether the good is definable. In ethics we are always making the attempt to say something that cannot be said, something that does not and never will touch the essence of the matter. [...] But the inclination, the running up against something, *indicate something*. St. Augustine knew that already when he said: What, you swine, you want not to talk nonsense! Go ahead and talk nonsense, it does not matter! (WVC, 68-69)\(^{15}\)

Richard Rorty – whose philosophical view is in many aspects closely related to Diamond’s – has claimed that if “[t]he early Wittgenstein had defined the mystical as ‘the sense of the world as a limited whole’”, translating here the word *Gefühl* as “sense”, “the latter Wittgenstein triumphed

\[^{14}\]In the *Tractatus* it is said: “The contemplation of the world sub specie aeterni is its contemplation as a limited whole. | The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling.”

\[^{15}\]Cp. WVC, 93 (5.1.1930): “Man has an inclination to run against the limits of language. This running against them signalizes ethics.” Cp. as well WVC, 117-118 (17.12.1930), especially Wittgenstein’s answer to Waismann’s question “Is the existence of the world connected with what is ethical?” which runs as follows: “Men have felt that there is a connection and they have expressed it thus: God the Father created the world, the Son of God (or the Word that comes from God) is that which is ethical. That the Godhead is thought of as divided and, again, as one being indicates that there is a connection here.”
over his younger, more Schopenhauerian self by no longer feeling the need to be mystical, no longer needing to set himself over against the world as ‘the unsayable limit of the world’” (1991, 50). This image of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy is theoretically based, representing the “mystical” for Rorty a will to embrace the whole of reality, as something fixed. His idea is that “[a]s [Wittgenstein] gradually became reconciled to the fact that he would never see the world as a limited whole, he gradually dropped the notion of the ‘limits of language’”, which “turned the Tractatus distinction between saying and showing into the distinction between assertions and the social practices which gave meaning to assertions” (1991, 64). The pragmatism Rorty has ascribed to the later Wittgenstein – and correlatively to the early Heidegger – is another attempt to reject the (standard) anti-realist interpretation, which grew out of Michael Dummett’s work, in favour of a complete theoretical abandonment, that is, of a therapy. But it is not, as Rorty believed, the rejection of a realist view, as well as of any other representationalism, no longer “feeling the need to be mystical” and eliminating the saying/showing distinction, that will determine Wittgenstein’s post-1929 methodology. Contrary to what Peter Hacker also claims, namely that “[a]fter the ‘Lecture on Ethics’ of 1929 Wittgenstein wrote nothing further on ethics, save for occasional asides”, inasmuch as “the doctrine of the ineffability of absolute value [had been] abandoned” (2001, 167), the re-evaluation of ethics at the end of that year must be taken prospectively, with Wittgenstein’s elucidatory work relying precisely on that point of view, as is clearly seen in his manuscripts. An analysis of these, however, would take me well beyond the scope of this paper.*

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Literature


