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Wittgenstein: Representation and Therapy

By Joseph F. McDonald

Thesis presented to the Department
of Philosophy of the University of
Ottawa as partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy



Joseph F. McDonald, Ottawa, Canada, 1993



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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the role of the concept of therapy in Wittgenstein's philosophy by way of examining his views on representation. My contention is that the importance of these concepts in his philosophy has been seriously underestimated, and their scope unappreciated. Therapy, in my view, is not a leitmotif of his later philosophy exclusively. Nor is his interest in representation restricted to his early philosophy. As I shall show, these concepts play an interrelated role in both periods of Wittgenstein's philosophical life. Understanding this role is central to a proper view of his philosophy.

Wittgenstein's conception of representation is fundamental to an understanding of his earlier remarks concerning the origin of philosophical problems. "The reason these problems are posed", Wittgenstein says, "is that the logic of our language is misunderstood".¹ But Wittgenstein never explicitly tells us exactly how the logic of our language is misunderstood. Is it misunderstood because of a particular approach that philosophers take toward language? Or is it misunderstood in a piecemeal fashion, concerning individual logical problems? The examples of philosophical confusion that Wittgenstein gives seem to sustain the latter position, that philosophers have misunderstood individual logical problems. He writes, for instance,

¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 3 (hereafter cited as *Tractatus*).

Thus the word "is" figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; "exist" figures as an intransitive verb like "go", and "identical" as an adjective; we speak of something, but also of something's happening.

In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them).²

On the other hand, the very fact that he thinks that he has found "the final solution of the problems", in other words, a solution to all the problems of philosophy, strongly suggests that the misunderstanding philosophers have is a matter of a particular approach that they take towards language.³

This option gains further support when we note that philosophical propositions and questions are apparently of a single kind.

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language.⁴

The trouble is that Wittgenstein never explicitly states what the general misunderstanding on the part of philosophers is. What is characteristic about the approach philosophers take toward language that results in their propositions being not false but nonsensical?

²Ibid., 3.323, 3.324.

³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴Ibid., 4.003.

A significant part of the answer lies in understanding Wittgenstein's conception of representation. For Wittgenstein saw that philosophical questions often arise as a result of confusing what he calls "forms of representation" with things. Philosophers often think that their questions and propositions are about things when they are really about the form by which things are represented. Their fundamental confusion lies in treating as a representative, what is really part of the form of representation.

Indeed in the *Tractatus* (and in the earlier *Notebooks* 1914-16) Wittgenstein expresses a version of this view in what he calls his fundamental idea:

My fundamental idea is that the "logical constants" are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of the facts.⁵

Logical constants such as "or", "and", "if...then...", "not", etc., are part of the language, part of the way of representing things. They do not represent things themselves, but merely provide us with a way to represent other things.

Surprisingly, this way of understanding philosophical confusion remained fairly well intact in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. That is, Wittgenstein still maintained that philosophical problems often arise from the attempt to represent our ways of representing things. Indeed, far from being weakened

⁵*Ibid.*, 4.0312. Also, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks* 1914-16, eds. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961) p. 37 (hereafter cited as *Notebooks*).

in any way, this understanding of philosophical confusion radically deepened. So much so, in fact, that he came to see a manifestation of this confusion operating at the centre of the *Tractatus* itself. In other words, Wittgenstein saw that he had betrayed his own fundamental idea.

According to the later Wittgenstein, the *Tractatus* was partly right, partly wrong. He was right to say that forms of representation must not be treated as things. That was Russell's and Frege's mistake; they mistook logical constants for representatives, for names of logical objects or complexes. But how exactly are we to understand forms of representation? Are they, for instance, to be understood abstractly and independently of the role they play in our lives? And does it make sense to speak of the form of representation, say, of a proposition? Wittgenstein came to see that it did not, and that the apparent general features of forms of representation that he saw in the *Tractatus* were not a result of investigation, but a requirement of his approach. That approach simply assumed that the possibility of representation, and in general, the possibility of language, were issues that can be determined prior to an examination of the actual uses of language. This assumption partly arose because he had assumed that language functioned in one way, namely, to convey information. Later, when he came to appreciate the motley of language uses, the so-called form of representation became as varied as these uses.

From this later perspective, Wittgenstein saw that he had

earlier unwittingly mistaken a form of representation for a thing. He had taken the forms by which we convey information to be the paradigm case, a paradigm to which all other kinds of propositions had to conform. This realization represented a deepening of Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophical confusion in that he now saw that the preconceived requirement that he mistook in the *Tractatus* for a result of investigation was a paradigm of philosophical confusion. Philosophers, Wittgenstein thought, were chasing after their own preconceived requirement, as he had been doing in the *Tractatus*. The idea that there was a general formal structure of representation, at the basis of all representation, was a projection of the philosopher's (and his former self's) approach to things.

Wittgenstein always insisted that philosophy was not a theoretical enterprise. It is easy to see why he would say this given his conception of philosophical problems originating in the confusing of forms of representation for things. For philosophers only think they are asking quasi-scientific questions about the world. But in fact they are confused. What appears to be about the world is really about their way of talking about it. Philosophy must aim to show the confused character of these questions and showing this isn't a theoretical enterprise.

Even though the *Tractatus* undoubtedly contains certain theoretical tendencies, it is nonetheless incorrect to characterize the account of language and the world in this work as theoretical. It has become customary, for instance, to try to reconcile the

supposed theoretical claims of the *Tractatus* with his remark that anyone who understands him will eventually recognize his remarks as nonsensical.⁶ But this remark is perfectly consistent with the anti-theoretical intentions of the book. Those who feel the need to reconcile it with the core of his remarks about language and the world fail to see the anti-theoretical background informing Wittgenstein's account. Without this background, emphasizing the theoretical looking features that the *Tractatus* supposedly exhibits distorts our view of that book and makes it appear far less continuous with the later work than is actually the case. We must always remember that the major impulse of the *Tractatus*, like that of *Philosophical Investigations*, is to show that philosophy (what Wittgenstein sometimes calls "logic") must be distinguished from the kind of theoretical enterprise modelled on science and part of showing this involves seeing that forms of representations must be distinguished from things.⁷

For Wittgenstein, then, it is the way philosophers look at things that matters; it is the particular way in which they approach language that creates the confusions. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein characterizes his opposition to this theoretical approach on the part of philosophers as "therapy". By this he is referring to the attempt to dispel philosophical

⁶*Tractatus*, 6.54

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) (hereafter cited as *Investigations*).

confusion, not by providing solutions to the problems, but by making the concerns that engender the problems disappear. As is often the case in psycho therapy, the patient's "problem" is only a perceived one. The therapist's goal is not to provide a solution--how could it be, the problem being spurious?--rather the goal is to put things in such a way that the problem simply disappears.

In the Investigations, philosophical therapy takes the form of assembling reminders (sometimes trivial ones) about the uses of language with the goal of developing a "perspicuous representation" or an overview of the use of our words from which the "problems" simply do not arise.* For instance, philosophers might be perplexed as to the meaning of a word, say "pain", and hope that, by concentrating on the experience they have of it when pinching themselves, the nature of pain will be revealed. Wittgenstein's therapeutic response is to agree that pinching oneself on the arm is an example of a painful experience, and is undeniably a case of what we call "being in pain", but that there are also many other cases in which we would say that one is in pain as well. That is, Wittgenstein wants to remind the philosopher that there are many ways of talking about pain in our language. The hope is that by being reminded of these other ways they will gain an overview of the word's use such that they will think it misleading and arbitrary to concentrate merely on this use when determining the word's meaning. The hope is that by keeping these ways in mind,

*See Investigations, 122.

confusions regarding pain will disappear.

This therapeutic motivation is the key to understanding Wittgenstein's intentions in the *Tractatus* no less than in the *Investigations* and the similar views on representation in these two great works makes this clear. As I shall show, the *Tractatus* aims at providing an overview of the workings of language, a kind of "perspicuous representation", the attaining of which will result in the complete disappearance of the problems and questions. Rather than a theory about language or the world, it is more an overview of what we call language and what we call the world. Such an overview clarifies philosophical questions and propositions, enabling philosophers to see what it is that they are confusedly trying to express and why it is that these things cannot be expressed that way.

Against the background of Wittgenstein's concern with representation early and late, the therapeutic intent of the *Tractatus* stands out clearly. Once we distinguish between forms of representation and the things represented, we see that the role of philosophy cannot be explanatory and foundational, but must instead be descriptive and critical. The "logic of the language" doesn't need a theory to account for it; it doesn't need us at all; "logic must look after itself".⁹ In particular, the overview of the workings of language that Wittgenstein presents is not an attempt to fill-in something that is missing in our understanding of

⁹*Tractatus*, 5.473. This view was expressed as well in the opening remark of the notebooks that Wittgenstein used while composing the *Tractatus*. See *Notebooks*, p. 1.

language and the world. ("In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order".¹⁰) On the contrary, the presentation of an overview of the workings of language only makes sense because of the existence of a pervasive tendency on the part of philosophers to think that something is missing in language. The overview would have no purpose if we philosophers didn't consistently misunderstand the logic of the language.

Since philosophical propositions are nonsensical, the concerns which engender them cannot be eliminated by arguing that a certain philosophical proposition is false. On the contrary, says Wittgenstein,

Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts.
 Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.
 A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.
 Philosophy does not result in "philosophical propositions", but rather in the clarification of propositions.
 Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries.¹¹

"An activity, not a body of doctrine"--this brings out clearly the roots of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as therapeutic. The remarks of the *Tractatus* do not represent a theory of language; they are not trying to say that language is such and such a thing,

¹⁰*Tractatus*, 5.5563.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 4.112.

that a proposition means such and such, or that the world consists of such and such. Rather, in the face of those who misunderstand the logic of the language by treating forms of representation for things, Wittgenstein intends his remarks about language and the world to be understood as clarifications, as descriptions of the forms of language, designed to remove misunderstanding.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's clarifications and descriptions are aimed at the confused remarks of an imaginary interlocutor. The interlocutor's role is not to represent particular philosophical theories, but rather the "Weltanschauung" informing such theories, and Wittgenstein's clarifying remarks are ultimately aimed at the preconditions for philosophical theories, not at any particular theory. Likewise in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's remarks are aimed at the "Weltanschauung" informing philosophical theories, not at any particular theory itself. And though there is no readily apparent interlocutor giving expression to this Weltanschauung, it would be a fundamental interpretive mistake to think that Wittgenstein does not have an interlocutor in mind. In fact, the interlocutor is none other than us, with our tendency to approach language and the world from the wrong logical point of view.

What I am suggesting is that, just as in the *Investigations*, where Wittgenstein is "inside the head" of the interlocutor, and using the interlocutor to give expression to certain fundamental philosophical tendencies of philosophers, so too in the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein "in the head" of the philosopher and fully aware of

the philosopher's general orientation and approach to things. It is this general "perspective" or *Weltanschauung* that we, as philosophers, are unable to distance ourselves from. And it is against the background of this perspective, that the remarks of the *Tractatus* play their clarifying and critical role. In effect, to understand the remarks of the *Tractatus* is to reconstruct the *Weltanschauung* that we philosophers have hitherto been unable to see as a *Weltanschauung*. To understand the remarks of the *Tractatus* is to understand this *weltanschauung*; to understand it is to understand that we have been fundamentally confused about our approach to things; and to understand this is to understand that the remarks of the *Tractatus* have no other role than to point this out.

There is, I hasten to add, an important difference between Wittgenstein's two main works in regard to the development of therapy. In the *Investigations*, therapy is piecemeal, aimed at differing manifestations of the "illness" (e.g., the confusing of forms of representation for things in individual cases). As he says, "there is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies". In the *Tractatus*, on the other hand, the overview of language is done on the grand scale of laying out the logic of the language all at once. This difference is tied to the level of generality entailed in his differing conception of forms of representation. That is, it is a consequence of his assumption in the *Tractatus* that it makes sense to speak of forms of representation at a general level and that by

setting the record straight at this level he can set straight and expose the philosophical Weltanschauung all at once.

It follows that it is crucially important that we not interpret Wittgenstein's remarks about forms of representation and language as if these were straightforward remarks about how things are "in the world". To interpret his remarks that way is to place him in the absurd position of the theatre manager who runs onto the stage to warn the audience of a fire, only to be taken as part of the play. The louder the theatre manager shouts, the louder the audience roars in applause.¹² Similarly, if the whole thrust of Wittgenstein's remarks about forms of representation and language are therapeutic in intent, i.e., are intended to get the philosophical audience away from approaching language "theoretically", then it would represent a fundamental misunderstanding to take these remarks as if they were themselves theoretical remarks about things in the world.

This misunderstanding to which I am claiming Wittgenstein was also subject in the *Tractatus*, is reflected in many interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy now defended. To put the point boldly, my claim is that any interpretation which sees Wittgenstein as defending a thesis about language and the world is off-base.

¹²In an unpublished manuscript, M. O'C. Drury, a student and friend of Wittgenstein, used this analogy to characterize Wittgenstein's position vis-à-vis the philosophical establishment. see Rush Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. xi.

There is no argument of the *Tractatus* as one interpretation has it¹³ any more than there is an argument against the possibility of a "private language" in the *Investigations*.¹⁴ The whole idea of Wittgenstein's philosophy as argumentative (in the sense of arriving at a positive conclusion) misses the point; his remarks are intended as therapeutic, to undermine the assumption that there is something to be argued about in philosophy. Indeed, "if one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them."¹⁵

Likewise, those who question whether the *Tractatus* has a realist conception of objects or not fail to appreciate that the whole spectrum of argumentative alternatives, from realism to nominalism, is misconceived. For, whatever objects ultimately turn out to be, this much is certain: their role must be understood in terms of undermining philosophical theorizing, not in terms of a theoretical explanation of language and the world. Only against this background can we get a proper perspective of the theoretical

¹³See Richard McDonough, *The Argument of the Tractatus* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

¹⁴If what we mean by "argument" are critical remarks that Wittgenstein makes against the interlocutor's propensity to speak of a language that "another person cannot understand" I have no objection. If, however, one means that Wittgenstein has an argument against the interlocutor's argument, as if Wittgenstein were simply defending his philosophical view over and against the interlocutor's, then I have a serious objection. In my view, the interlocutor does not have a view at all, but rather is expressing a confusion. A fortiori, Wittgenstein's remarks are aimed at exposing the confusion, not finding something wrong with the view.

¹⁵*Investigations*, 128.

preconceptions that are involved in his notion of objects. We shall see that these preconceptions stem from certain implicit assumptions of his view; they are not the motivating force behind his notion of objects.

The overlooking of the therapeutic intention of Wittgenstein's remarks plays havoc in interpretations of the later work as well. For instance, much of the discussion of Wittgenstein's account of rule-following betrays this misunderstanding. Kripke's view that Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following constitute a sceptical problem of meaning is just one, albeit an especially notorious, example of this misunderstanding. Kripke's view that there are no facts for meaning to consist in, leads him to conclude that "meaning vanishes". But for Wittgenstein, language, like logic, takes care of itself so that if there is a problem about the meaning of language, this can only be the result of the way philosophers look at things. In other words, Wittgenstein's point is not that there are no facts for meaning to consist in but rather that the location of the problem of meaning is not "in the world", but in the way philosophers look at it.

Once Wittgenstein's philosophy is misinterpreted as providing a solution to the "problem of meaning", or as a solution to what rule-following consists in, his remarks begin to take on a theoretical life of their own. For instance, Wittgenstein's reference to "forms of life", to "language games", to "context", "custom" and "community" often appear to constitute Wittgenstein's "solution" to "the problem of meaning". But these terms play a

role in describing the language aimed at undermining an approach based on finding solutions in philosophy.

This mistake also underlies Norman Malcolm's account of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following. I shall show that Malcolm misinterprets Wittgenstein's attempt at dissolving philosophical problems as an attempt to answer them since he interprets Wittgenstein's idea of community agreement as a solution to the "philosophical puzzlement" raised by Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following. To repeat, Wittgenstein was trying to show that such puzzlement stemmed from the particular way philosophers look at language, not from a problem about rules and language themselves.

Backer and Hacker's analysis of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following is perhaps more sophisticated than Kripke's and Malcolm's, but they too fail to pay sufficient attention to the therapeutic role of Wittgenstein's philosophy. In particular, Baker and Hacker persistently interpret Wittgenstein's "grammatical remarks" outside of the therapeutic context in which they belong. As a result, their emphasis on "internal relations", which is indeed a key to understanding Wittgenstein's thought, is transformed into yet another philosophical theory.

In the first chapter, I present some of Wittgenstein's key views on representation and discuss their implications for the epistemological tradition. My aim is to demonstrate how these views play a therapeutic role and hence represent a far more radical break with that tradition than is traditionally assumed.

Indeed, as I show in chapter two, Wittgenstein's views represent a far greater break than does Russell's realist conception of the proposition, a conception which is traditionally regarded as "revolutionary". In chapter three, I show how the key ideas of representation and therapy, which are present in the *Tractatus*, are central to representative works of his later philosophy as well. In chapter four, I argue that the therapeutic aspect of Wittgenstein's "later" philosophy is typically overlooked by important interpreters. In chapters five and six, I return to Wittgenstein's early philosophy to see how reading the *Tractatus* as a therapeutic work can shed light on perennially difficult issues in that book. Finally, in chapter seven, I focus on the remarks of *On Certainty* and ponder the suggestion that they are substantially similar to Wittgenstein's very earliest philosophical remarks.

ONE

THE TRACTATUS AND THE LINGUISTIC TURN

I presume that it will be easily granted me,
that there are such ideas in men's minds:
every one is conscious of them in himself; and
men's words and actions will satisfy him that
they are in others.

(Locke, An Essay concerning Human
Understanding)

1. The Cartesian framework

Wittgenstein's early philosophy can be helpfully seen in the context of a reaction against the realist conception of a proposition that was developed by Frege, Russell and Moore at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. However, to appreciate Wittgenstein's challenge to the assumptions underlying this conception, we must take a step back and broadly survey the philosophical landscape in which that conception arose. For the adoption of the realist conception of a proposition represented the first crack in a philosophical framework that had shaped the orientation of philosophical discussion since the time of Descartes. By getting clear about the essentials of this framework we can see what it was about the new realist conception of the proposition that Wittgenstein embraced, and what about it that he thought was fundamentally misguided.

The philosophical framework that had dominated discussion ever since Descartes, and was overthrown--at least from the point of view of the history of ideas if not from the point of view of

intellectual history'--by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, may be broadly understood as epistemological. By "epistemological", I mean anything having (ostensibly) to do with knowledge, of what it is to know something, of the limits of knowledge (Kant) and of whether we can know anything at all (i.e., scepticism)".² By contrast, an important strain of twentieth century analytic philosophy, in the wake of the work of Frege, Russell and Moore, and more importantly the *Tractatus*, has been concerned with questions of meaning, of what we must mean in order to claim to know something.

Let us call the framework which I have broadly characterized as epistemological, the Cartesian Framework, and let us agree to call philosophers that employ this framework Cartesians.³ One way in which we can discern what is essential about this framework is by asking ourselves what would count as something that could be known for those, such as Descartes, who employ it. It is important

²A.C. Grayling observes that the content and direction of contemporary philosophy is not shaped by Wittgenstein's thought and in fact is more influenced by Russell's and Frege's. This may well be true but is quite independent of the issue of Wittgenstein's place in the history of ideas. See A.C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), chapter four.

³Ian Hacking argues that epistemology is actually a 19th century notion and that strictly speaking neither Descartes nor Locke should be considered epistemologists; for they did not conceive of the study of knowledge as an autonomous discipline. So in what follows I am committing what Hacking calls "a harmless anachronism". See Ian Hacking, *Why does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 166-67.

⁴By "Cartesian" I include philosophers working in the epistemological tradition roughly between the time of Descartes and Wittgenstein (and beyond).

to emphasize that I am not asking what it is that is claimed to be known from the point of view of those working from within the Cartesian Framework. There were many varied answers to that question, and answering it would require a survey of epistemological positions as varied as Descartes', Locke's and Berkeley's. What I am asking is a more fundamental question about what kinds of statements (and questions) count as things that could be known from the vantage point of the Cartesian Framework. In other words, for the Cartesian, what would it make sense to say could be known? For it is striking that the Cartesian would count some things as knowledge that from the vantage point of Wittgenstein's revolutionary view would certainly not count as knowledge at all.

Let me give an example of a statement that does not count as a statement of knowledge from Wittgenstein's perspective, but which the Cartesian would certainly count as one, were it to be justified. I choose my example from among those apparently "unproblematic" and "innocent" statements that Descartes uses to begin his *Meditations* and which serve to describe the setting for his famous method of doubt. (I avoid, for the moment, the strictly "metaphysical" statements that Descartes makes concerning the cogito, which I also think do not count as statements of knowledge for Wittgenstein; later I shall suggest that such statements are the consequence of an initial orientation that Descartes takes to things.) It seems to me that what is more important than anything else is to get clear about the context in which Descartes employs

his method of doubt before we begin employing the method itself.

Descartes begins, as everyone will remember, by describing the room that he is in in apparently "unproblematic" terms. Sitting in his chair, he remarks "I am here, seated by the fire, wearing a winter dressing gown, holding this paper in my hands".⁴ He continues, in the familiar style of questioning that characterises much of the epistemological tradition, by going on to doubt whether he really is in the room, sitting in his chair, and whether he is actually seated by the fire, wearing a winter dressing gown and holding a paper in his hands.

I am not interested in asking where this doubt leads him or whether he managed to escape its consequences except in so far as it helps us to understand the kind of reflective and questioning orientation that Descartes takes towards his immediate situation. In other words, I am interested in Descartes' approach in so far as it typifies what many philosophers do when they sit in their chairs, in their offices, and reflect upon the table or pen that happens to present itself to them.⁵ My interest is in what this orientation consists in and what we mean when we describe our immediate environment in the manner of Descartes. Thus I am not interested in whether these putative beliefs that we entertain are

⁴René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1951), p. 18.

⁵Examples of the philosophical orientation I have in mind can be found in countless books on philosophy. Two classic examples can be found in Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Open University Press, 1912) as well as in H.H. Price's *Perception* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1973).

indeed known, which is what Descartes is concerned with.

Descartes says that "he is here, seated by the fire". And he asks us to consider whether he can doubt this. His answer is that he can, that it makes sense to doubt it. Descartes is saying "I am here, seated by the fire, but I could be wrong about this". The fundamental question we must ask is whether it makes sense to say one could be wrong about believing one is seated by the fire, that one could doubt it?

So long as it is kept in mind that it is the sense of Descartes' statement that is in question, it should no longer seem odd to say that statements such as "I am here, seated by the fire" are for Descartes potential knowledge claims. The reason why it may initially have seemed odd to say that Descartes would have counted these statements as knowledge claims is that, in the absence of an all perfect God, statements such as these were precisely what Descartes, employing his method of doubt, was intent on questioning. But we must remember that for Descartes the statement "I am here, seated by the fire" is one that he would affirm were it not for the possibility that an evil genius might have been deluding him into thinking that he was sitting in his chair, or that he was dreaming, etc, when in fact he was not. In other words, this statement counts, or is assumed to be at least potentially a statement of knowledge. All that Descartes' method of doubt denies is that we are justified in asserting this statement, not that the statement would count as a statement of knowledge. In fact, by denying that we are justified in asserting

this statement, Descartes unquestionably assumes that that statement is something that it makes sense to deny (and thus assert). Descartes may deny that his statement can be known, but in so doing he affirms that it is the kind of statement that it makes sense to think one could doubt, know or not know.

Philosophers, from Descartes through the British empiricists and Kant to Russell, have characteristically asked such questions as "Are we justified in thinking that x?", where "x" holds a place for one of any number of statements that we would like to affirm but cannot since it is unclear that it falls within the limits of our knowledge. But in asking such questions, these philosophers unquestionably assume that it makes sense to ask about justifying such statements. In other words, they assume that these can be justified and questioned. And it is that assumption that we are interested in when we examine the Cartesian Framework.

Surprisingly, from Wittgenstein's perspective, Descartes' statement is not even potentially a statement of knowledge, since in the context in which Descartes utters it no information is being given. In order to see this, it is useful to consider contexts where Descartes' statement can play the role of providing information. Imagine, for instance, that we are in a room when the lights go out. Someone asks out loud about the whereabouts of others who happen to be sitting down at the time when this happens. Perhaps this person asks this of the others in order not to trip over them. We can imagine someone responding "I am here, seated by the fire". (Assume that the fire is down to a dim glow.) Or, to

take another example, if, while studying, I fall into a deep dream and then, upon suddenly waking up, I ask myself, as if startled, "where am I?" I might say to myself "I am here, seated by the fire". In these familiar cases we know what the point of uttering the sentence is, and we know how they are informative either to others or to ourselves. And, in each case, it makes sense to doubt whether the utterance is true; upon waking, for instance, I might check to see if other things in my room are as I have always known them to be, thus justifying to myself that it was indeed true that I knew where I was, that "I was here". We thus know how to go about testing whether our statement is true, e.g., by checking out the familiar things in our room.⁶

In contrast with such uses it is not at all clear what is the point of Descartes' statements "I am here, seated by the fire" when, that is, he utters it while simply sitting in his chair and not dreaming, and not having the lights going out on him, or any comparable thing happening to him. We want to say to Descartes: "What is your purpose in uttering that statement here and now?"; "What would it mean to deny your statement, and thus to assert it?"; "What is your point?"

One might raise a protest against this line of criticism by

⁶Wittgenstein actually discusses the remark "I am here" in *On Certainty*. He says "the words 'I am here' have a meaning only in certain contexts, and not when I say them to someone who is sitting in front of me and sees me clearly,--and not because they are superfluous, but because their meaning is not determined by the situation, yet stands in need of such determination". See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. D. Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), remark 348 (hereafter cited as *On Certainty*).

insisting that Descartes' utterance does have a point after all. "Of course Descartes' utterance has a point", one might object, "for he is describing his room. His statement is descriptively informative." But if Descartes is describing his room, what is this description for? Clearly, Descartes is not describing his room for someone else. For he is explicit that there is no one else in his room. Perhaps, then, he is bored and simply playing a game, and describing his room to himself, say, in order to pass the day? That would be a way of making sense of his utterances. For there is nothing problematic about someone making up a game which involves the describing of one's room. But is Descartes playing a game in the opening remarks of the *Meditations*? Moreover, are we playing a game when we, in a similar moment of Cartesian reflection, describe the room that we are in straight off like that? Clearly not. Philosophy is a serious business, and when we (philosophers) describe our room, in the manner of Descartes, we think we are revealing something fundamental; we are not playing games.⁷ But what is it that we, following Descartes, think that we are revealing by this characteristic type of Cartesian

⁷Nor do we indicate that we are playing a philosophical language game. It would be perfectly acceptable for Descartes to indicate that he was now "doing philosophy", which would indicate to us that his words are about to be used in a nonstandard way. The trouble is, however, that Descartes simply "describes" his room, without flagging this nonstandard usage to us. It is his assumption that he is not doing anything out of the ordinary that is troubling. In remark 467 of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein allows for a philosophical language game: "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again 'I know that that's a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy'."

reflection?

What I am trying to say is that from Wittgenstein's perspective there is no longer any possibility of envisaging things in the way that the Cartesian envisages them. For him, we can no longer count as statements of knowledge what were so easily assumed as statements of knowledge for those employing the Cartesian framework. For, on Wittgenstein's view, we cannot make sense of how statements, such as Descartes', can be providing information, as Descartes seems to think. But if we cannot make sense of such statements as informative ones, and hence as statements of knowledge, then what are we to say about the status of such statements? Is Descartes describing nothing at all? And are we describing nothing at all?

The conclusion that Descartes is describing nothing at all does not seem at all plausible since there has to be something right about his saying that he is seated in the chair and near the fire when he is indeed seated in the chair and near the fire. And indeed, were someone to barge in on Descartes and express surprise to find him in the room, we would not think twice were Descartes to respond that he had been there for some time and that he had been seated near the fire. That is, far from there being something wrong in our thinking that Descartes knows he is in the room and seated by the fire, it is obvious that Descartes knows these things. That is not in dispute. The question is whether Descartes's statement "I am here, seated by the fire" is informative, and whether it helps us to see what he knows.

For Wittgenstein--and this brings us to the crucial point--these apparent statements of knowledge that Descartes is so intent on denying (or affirming) are very problematic. In fact, for him, they are really misconstrued statements about our language. For that reason what Descartes' says can be known and thus doubted or affirmed cannot be said to make sense, let alone known, doubted or affirmed. For, on Wittgenstein's view, it makes no sense to doubt or affirm or justify in the manner of Descartes the use of one's own language. On the contrary, knowing something only makes sense once the use of the language has been presupposed. These insights, which we shall now go on to develop, constitute the essence of Wittgenstein's "linguistic turn".

2. Cartesian confusion

For Wittgenstein, Descartes' statement "I am here, seated by the fire" reflects a deep misunderstanding about the functioning of language. Descartes, on Wittgenstein's view, confuses statements about the rules for sentences for statements about the world. Let me show this through a discussion of an imaginary scenario.

Imagine a situation in which we are teaching a foreign student our language. We want to teach the student the expression "I am seated by the fire". One way in which we might facilitate the learning of this expression is by pointing at the situation of our sitting near the fire while insisting that this situation is what the sentence "I am seated by the fire" means. We might say to the student "this situation (while pointing to our being seated near

the fire) is what we mean when we use the sentence "I am seated by the fire". In this imaginary situation, we are teaching the student a rule for the use of a sentence.

It is important to see that when we teach the student a rule for the use of a sentence, we are doing something completely different from using that sentence to assert something. I may assert the expression "I am seated by the fire" in order to inform someone of my whereabouts in the room. In that situation, another can question whether I am justified in asserting it; they can determine, for instance, whether I am lying. But in order to question me, the other person must already know what the expression "I am seated by the fire" means; the meaning of the expression, in other words, must already be presupposed. For in order for another person to say to me that I am using the expression incorrectly, he or she must already know what the expression means. But when I teach the student a rule for the use of a sentence, there is no question yet of evaluating or questioning the use of that sentence or of asking whether we are justified in asserting it. For that sentence does not have a use until I establish one through the teaching. (I am imagining the teaching here as if the teacher is setting up a connection between the expression and the facts in the world.) The main point is that in teaching an expression in the language we are not asserting anything in the sense of being justified on the basis of the evidence, but rather setting up the connections that must be presupposed in order for someone to assert something on the basis of evidence.

With this scenario in mind, we can make some headway into understanding Descartes' utterance, "I am here, seated by the fire", as a misconstrued statement about the use of our language, as opposed to an assertion about his immediate situation, as he supposes. In other words, given that we cannot make sense of his utterance as being an informative one, we can still make sense of Descartes's utterance if we interpret him as reminding us of the rule for the use of the expression "I am here, seated by the fire". Of course, the real Descartes was alone when he was seated by the fire, and was not teaching anyone. But the point of imagining the teaching scenario is to show that we can understand Descartes' statement about being near the fire as a statement about how the sentence "I am here, seated by the fire" is used in our language, that we can imagine Descartes as saying what someone in a position of teaching another the use of an expression would say, (even though there is no one there to teach it to). The first step, then, in making sense of Descartes' statement is to see him as making a remark about the use of the expression "I am seated by the fire". In short, we can begin to understand his sentence as a sentence about the use of our language.

We are not out of the woods yet, however. For if we construe Descartes' utterance as a statement about the use of our language, about the use of the expression "I am seated by the fire", how can we account for his insistence that his being seated near the fire is something that he knows in the sense that it is something that he can affirm or doubt or justify? Another way of putting this is

to say that it is difficult to see how Descartes could be reminding us about the use of our expressions and yet at the same time pretending that it is a justified (or unjustified) statement about his situation, namely, that he is seated by the fire. Our dilemma is as follows: we cannot construe Descartes's statement as a statement of knowledge, a statement about his situation, because we cannot make out how he could be informing us of anything. So it must be a statement about the use of expressions in our language. But if it is a statement about the use of expressions in our language, then why does Descartes insist that his statement is one that can be doubted, or justified, in short, known?

Wittgenstein's solution to this dilemma is as profound as it is simple: Descartes is confused! Descartes' confusion consists in his mistreating statements about linguistic usage as statements about the world, about situations.* In so doing, Descartes fails to distinguish between knowledge statements proper, such as the statement "I am seated by the fire" when the lights go out, and, what we might call, "pseudo-knowledge statements" such as the statement "I am seated by the fire" when one is simply sitting near the fire, and doing nothing else. Descartes, we see, has no conception of what counts as a genuinely informative proposition since he moves back and forth between informative propositions

*Compare: "A philosopher who protests, 'We know there's a chair over there!' is simply describing a game. But he seems to be saying that I am moved by a feeling of unshakeable conviction if I say to someone: 'fetch me that chair'". Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness," trans. P. Winch, *Philosophia* vol. 6, Nos. 3-4, p. 413.

proper and "propositions" about linguistic properties, i.e., misconstrued propositions about the rules for the use of words. In short, by placing such importance on such "pseudo-knowledge" statements, Descartes fails to recognize the hidden linguistic aspect of his remarks. He has a failed conception of language and hence a failed conception of the relationship between language and the world. This failed conception, which can be clearly seen in the apparently innocent remark we have been considering, is at the heart of the whole Cartesian Framework.

Thus the classical epistemological question "Are we justified in thinking x?", where "x", in this case, holds a place for "I am here, seated by the fire" betrays a fundamental confusion. We should not try, as Descartes and classical epistemologists do, to answer the question straight off. Instead, says Wittgenstein, we should interrogate what we mean by the expression "I am here, seated by the fire". Most of all, we must not assume, as Descartes and so many others in the tradition readily assume, that such an expression makes sense. What Descartes thinks requires justifying is not a statement about the world, but rather a senseless remark, one manufactured by a philosophical misunderstanding about language. (Indeed, what the Cartesians think they know directly does not count as knowledge at all, whereas what is thought to be most uncertain, and in Descartes' case, requires a non-deceiving God as a guarantor, is the sort of thing that we can know about.)

3. Internal Relations and the turning point in philosophy

Many of us are first introduced to philosophy by being asked questions similar to Descartes' concerning such things as whether, on the basis of what we can presently see, we really are seated by the fire. "Of course we are justified in thinking that", we typically want to say, "we can see that we are, can't we?" We are then reminded that seeing it only shows that we have an experience of the table, an idea of it. But how do we know that our idea is true? Do we really know that we are seated by the fire? After all we often see wrongly. How can we be so sure about what we know?

The puzzle such questions raise concern a "gap" which opens up between our idea that we are seated by the fire and reality. We believe that we are seated by the fire, but the only thing we initially have to go on is our idea of it. The puzzle has to do with how we bridge this gap. We need to find a way to justify whether our idea is true, to see whether we really are seated by the fire. The alternative to bridging the gap, we are quick to learn, is scepticism. That is, we either bridge the gap or admit that we don't know what we think we know.

Wittgenstein's insight into the formal properties of sentences radically challenged this Cartesian form of philosophical questioning by exposing the senselessness of the Cartesian use of ideas. Indeed to some his insight seemed to have introduced an irrevocable "turning point" in the whole of philosophy. Thus we hear Schlick, a member of the Vienna Circle, and a founder of logical positivism, saying "I am convinced that we now find

ourselves at an altogether decisive turning point in philosophy, and that we are objectively justified in considering that an end has come to the fruitless conflict of systems". "Certainly", he goes on to say, "many will for centuries continue to wander further along the traditional paths", but "in the end they will come to resemble actors who continue to play for some time before noticing that the audience has slowly departed".⁹

Schlick attributes the turning point to the opening up of certain paths in logic. "The paths have their origin in logic. Leibniz dimly saw their beginning. Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege have opened up important stretches in the last decades, but Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922) is the first to have pushed forward to the decisive turning point."¹⁰ What was Wittgenstein's insight that convinced Schlick and the Vienna Circle that the end of traditional philosophy was at hand?¹¹

We can get some idea of what this insight amounts to if we examine what I have called the gap between ideas and reality at the

⁹Moritz Schlick, "The Turning Point in Philosophy" in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 49.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹There are actually two questions here: there is the question of what Wittgenstein was saying and there is the question of what Schlick and the Vienna Circle took Wittgenstein to be saying. I think that Schlick misunderstood Wittgenstein on a fundamental issue, namely, whether Wittgenstein was presenting a theory of syntactic rules, a misunderstanding that was to have important consequences in terms of the development of analytic philosophy (and which contributed, I might add, to the serious gulf which soon arose between continental and analytic philosophy.)

heart of the classical epistemological question. For the Cartesian, we must either bridge that gap, which means providing a theory of knowledge, or face scepticism. But according to the linguistic views derived from Wittgenstein, the gap between Cartesian ideas and reality is nothing less than an illusion. For the appearance of the gap depends on misconstruing the functioning of language. There is no gap and the classical epistemologist's alternatives of either providing a theory of knowledge or facing scepticism are fundamentally pointless.

In contrast with Descartes and the epistemological tradition that followed him, Wittgenstein saw that language and the world was linked in a much more direct, immediate way than had been supposed until that time. Wittgenstein spoke of this direct, immediate connection between language and the world in terms of "internal relations" in the *Tractatus*.¹² Language was internally related to

¹²In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein makes several references to the idea of an internal, essential relationship between language and the world:

A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound waves all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world. (4.014)

A sentence communicates a situation to us, and so it must be essentially connected with the situation. (4.03)

In the *Notebooks*, he says,

Language stands in internal relations to the world. (pp. 42-43)

The internal relation between the sentence and its reference, the method of symbolizing--is

the world."¹³ Classical epistemologists viewed language merely as a medium to convey our thoughts or ideas about the world, as if we already know things about the world "in our heads" and then use language to convey our thoughts.¹⁴ But for Wittgenstein, language plays a much more significant role than that. For him, to understand a sentence, for instance, is not to understand an idea we have of the world, but to understand the situation described by the sentence. Thus, to use Descartes' statement, to understand the sentence "I am seated by the fire" is to know immediately what it is to be seated by the fire; it is not to have an idea of that situation. What this means for Wittgenstein, but not for Descartes, is that to understand the sentence just is to understand the situation; there is no intermediary idea required.

The notion of ideas or thoughts in the mind of a subject is

the system of co-ordinates which projects the situation into the sentence. The sentence corresponds to the fundamental co-ordinates. (p. 20).

¹³Wittgenstein's notion of internal relations is different from Bradley's idea of internal relations which was criticised by Russell and Moore. At stake for Russell and Moore in Bradley's conception was the issue whether the world was holistic or atomistic. But, for Wittgenstein, the recognition of the internal relation between language and the world would undermine the whole debate between holism and atomism.

What Wittgenstein has in mind when he refers to internal relations is similar to his later notion of grammar. As we shall see, when we describe the grammar or use of a proposition, we describe its internal relations.

¹⁴This has been dubbed the "telementational" view of language by Roy Harris in *The Language Myth* (London: Duckworth, 1981). This idea is discussed in Gordon Backer and Peter M.S. Hacker in *Language, Sense and Nonsense* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 17.

central to the Cartesian framework, and reflects the misconceived view of language that we have been talking about. Indeed, Descartes' view that ideas are not objective (Platonic) entities but rather subjective entities--thoughts in the mind of a subject--is seen as marking the break between scholastic and modern philosophy.¹⁵ Language, according to philosophers following in the footsteps of this "new way of ideas", is, for the most part, secondary and subservient to ideas. As I said, language is a mere vehicle that allows subjects to convey ideas from one subjective sphere to another.¹⁶ We can think of the relative importance of ideas to language in terms of the relationship between thoughts and a pencil one uses to write down these thoughts; the pencil is purely peripheral, secondary, inessential, whereas the thoughts are what is crucial. Language was thought by Cartesian philosophers to

¹⁵For a short discussion of this topic, see J.O. Urmson's article, "Ideas" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967), vol. 3, p. 119.

¹⁶The idea of language as the medium for conveying thoughts goes back to Aristotle;

Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbol of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images.

See Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 40.

It is worth noting that for Locke, as we can see in the quotation given at the beginning of this chapter, the question of whether we can presume that others have ideas doesn't seem to present a philosophical problem.

be inessential, as a pencil is inessential to the thoughts that one writes down.¹⁷

In terms of Wittgenstein's idea of internal relations, the Cartesian's emphasis on ideas and on the understanding of the relationship between language and the world via these ideas is fundamentally confused. As I mentioned, at the centre of the confusion is the failure to see the internal relation between sentences, such as "I am seated by the fire", and the situations which are described, i.e. in this example, that of being seated by the fire.

To see this, let us return to our introductory philosophy example. Typically, we are told by our instructor that though we may think that we are seated by the fire, we may nevertheless be mistaken. Perhaps, says the instructor, we only have an idea of being seated by the fire. The question is: are we are justified in thinking that our idea is true? Notice that there is nothing said about language here. Indeed, since language is not important for Cartesians, we could have just as well have posed our question differently as, "Are we justified in saying that 'I am seated by the fire'?" For the Cartesian, either way of putting the question is the same; whether we are justified in thinking something or

¹⁷M. Schlick said, "The whole history of philosophy might have taken a very different course if the minds of the great thinkers had been more deeply impressed by the remarkable fact that there is such a thing as language". Quoted in Max Black "Some Problems Connected with Language" in *Essays on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, ed. Irving M. Copi and Robert W. Beard (New York: Hafner Press, 1973), p. 96.

saying such and such is neither here nor there. Here again we see that language for the Cartesian is thus presumed to be transparent as far as thought is concerned and if anything is a hindrance to understanding our ideas.¹⁸

The Cartesian asks "Are we justified in saying 'I am seated by the fire'?" or "Is my idea true?". But given Wittgenstein's notion of an internal relation, let us ask "What does the sentence 'I am seated by the fire' mean in that question?" Here it is helpful to recall the scenario of our teaching the foreign student the language. By stipulating to the student that the sentence "I am seated by the fire" describes the situation of my being seated by the fire, we set up the connection between language and a situation. To teach the student the meaning of the sentence is, in effect, to present him or her with a rule for using the sentence "I am seated by the fire". That is, we give the student a linguistic rule for applying that sentence to a definite state of affairs.

When we substitute the rule for the sentence "I am seated by the fire" in the sentence of the Cartesian's question, it becomes clear how much that question is deeply confused. For the rule says

¹⁸Ian Hacking shows that in the period of the "new way of ideas" the object was to remove the deleterious influence of language. Thus Berkeley says,

So long as I confine my thought to my own ideas, divested of words, I do not see how I can easily be mistaken. The objects I consider, I clearly and adequately know. I cannot be deceived in thinking I have an idea which I have not.

See Hacking, *Why does Language Matter to Philosophy?*, p. 40.

"Use 'I am seated by the fire' for what we normally call 'being seated by the fire'". But the Cartesian's question is, "Given what we normally call 'someone being seated by the fire' are we justified in saying 'I am seated by the fire'?" To which the answer is: "of course we are 'justified' in saying 'I am seated by the fire' in that instance, since that is how we apply the rule!" Actually, it would be better not to speak of justification here at all, since justification implies an appeal to evidence, and in this case there is no question of evidence. For what the Cartesian is trying to justify is a linguistic rule looked at from the wrong point of view.

Wittgenstein's insight into the internal relations between language and what it is about thus radically undermines the classical epistemologist's question and it is easy to see why it would be taken to represent a "turning point" in philosophy. Instead of the Cartesian recognizing that his being seated by the fire--what he takes to be the given element of experience, namely, the idea--is what the sentence, "I am seated by the fire" represents, the Cartesian asks whether that given element, the idea, can be justified and whether it is true. The classical epistemologist would like to say, in effect, "This is true: when I have an idea of being seated by the fire, I am justified in saying that 'I am seated by the fire'". By contrast, the linguistic philosopher will respond, "What you are trying to justify, what you call the idea, determines the application for the rule for the sentence 'I am seated by the fire'."

There is thus no possibility of trying to bridge a gap between ideas and reality because the gap is illusory and the "reality" set over and against the "idea" is a fiction. For what is called the "idea" is not something that it even makes sense to justify, since when it is properly understood as a rule, it represents the condition for justification. The classical epistemologist is involved in the absurdity of trying to justify what is stipulated by the rules of the language. It makes no sense to justify what is stipulated by a linguistic rule. On the contrary, what the rule stipulates must already be in place in order for any talk of justification to make sense. The whole idea of theory of knowledge, of the attempt to see whether our "ideas" are really true, and of what our "ideas" are about, is absurd. As Schlick says,

If we but once attain the insight that the meaning of every proposition can be determined only by means of the given, we can no longer conceive of the possibility of another opinion [of the given] for we see that we have discovered simply the conditions under which opinions in general can be formulated.¹⁹

In sum, the Cartesians, on Wittgenstein's view, have confused statements about the rules for sentences, about language, for statements about "the world". The result is that the so-called gap between "ideas" and "reality" that is at the heart of classical epistemology, and which requires a theory of knowledge to bridge, is already bridged through the formal properties of sentences, by

¹⁹Moritz Schlick, "Positivism and Realism" in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1959), p. 88.

the sentence conceived of as a rule. Moreover, it becomes clear that we would do better not to call Cartesian "ideas" ideas at all, since they denote what "things look like" when linguistic rules are misconstrued, namely, confusions.

4. The new way of "ideas"

Ideas, in the Cartesian tradition, are thought to be epistemologically basic but needing to have their truth established. As a Cartesian, I may have an idea that I am seated by the fire, and I may wonder whether that idea corresponds to anything in reality or not. It is easy to see, given this orientation, how such philosophical issues as the question of idealism and realism, empiricism and rationalism might develop.

As we have seen, from Wittgenstein's perspective, it is pointless to debate these questions. The lesson he teaches us is that before we can ask whether an idea corresponds to reality or not, we must have a clear idea of what an idea is. John Locke's remark, which is perhaps the locus classicus of the "new way of ideas", that an idea "is a term which serves to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks" is too vague. For, to make sense of his view, we must first decide what an object of our understanding is before we can understand what is meant by an idea.²⁰ But that is just the problem. As we have seen, what Descartes takes as the innocent object of his

²⁰John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in The Empiricists* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1974), p. 9.

understanding, namely his "idea" that he is seated by the fire, is in fact deeply problematic. It would be better to use the phrase "Cartesian ideas" or "ideas" so as not to confuse them with ideas proper.

Rather than entering into the debates concerning Cartesian ideas, and rather than assuming the Cartesian stance of accepting these ideas to be epistemologically basic but in need of justification, what we need to see is whether Wittgenstein's perspective can shed light on why Cartesians would be misled into thinking of "ideas" in that way. That is, given Wittgenstein's perspective, what leads the Cartesian into positing Cartesian ideas as epistemologically basic but needing justification.

Let us look at the first component. Why does the Cartesian think of Cartesian ideas as epistemologically primary? Why is Locke led to say, for instance, that "I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such ideas in men's minds: every one is conscious of them in himself; and men's words and actions will satisfy him that they are in others"?²¹ Why do these "ideas" seem so certain that we cannot be mistaken about them, but must presume them?

The answer lies in the overlooked linguistic aspect alluded to in the last section. The epistemological certainty that the Cartesian assumes is characteristic of "ideas" is not a special property of them. Rather, what appears to be a special epistemic

²¹John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in The Empiricists* (Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1974), p. 9.

property is derived from overlooking language's internal, formal connection with the world. The certainty that the Cartesian sees in "ideas" is derived ultimately from the stipulated use of our language. For instance, that the sentence "I am seated by the fire" describes the situation of my being seated by the fire is a grammatical truism about our language. When the sentence is misconstrued as an assertion, this grammatical truism takes on the appearance of a special property of the "idea". The epistemological primacy of "ideas" in Cartesian reflection is derived from misconstruing the logical or grammatical certainty of our language.

The second component of Cartesian ideas, namely that their correspondence stands in need of justification, is also easily accounted for on Wittgenstein's view. The failure to see the hidden linguistic component of Cartesian ideas makes it appear as if "ideas" are something that we can know about and justify. For example, Descartes' failure to see that his "idea" of being seated by the fire is really about his talk about his situation makes "ideas" appear as an objective phenomenon, as a quasi-scientific phenomena. In asking whether his "idea" of his being seated by the fire is justified, he feels that he is in the position of the scientist who questions whether his or her knowledge of a particular phenomena is justified. He feels that his job is to determine whether his idea of the phenomenon corresponds to the way things are.

But Cartesian ideas are not subject to scientific

investigation, contrary to what the Cartesians would have us believe. They only seem to be. The preoccupation of the Cartesian tradition with "ideas" is in reality a preoccupation with a confusion resulting from a failure to recognize language's internal, formal relationship to the world. For Wittgenstein, Cartesian ideas are products of a misunderstanding of the functioning of language.²² Consequently, they are not the kind of thing that we can even talk about, contrary to the fundamental assumption of the Cartesian. From the point of view of Wittgenstein's linguistic reorientation, it makes no sense to refer to an "idea" and ask whether we are justified in knowing "it" to be true. For in doing so, we are already committing ourselves to treating Cartesian ideas as having a reality independent of us, as opposed to being partly produced by us, by our having misunderstood the functioning of language. The ultimate datum of Cartesian reflection, the Cartesian "idea", is really a chimera for Wittgenstein, and the "new way of ideas" turns out not to involve real ideas at all.

²²For Wittgenstein, it is not so much that ideas considered as a representative percept (or image) are confused with ideas as the object of conceptual thought, nor that they constitute a confusion between explanation and justification, but rather that as an object of reflection, the Cartesian idea is an illusory entity resulting from a failure to understand the logic of the language. For the first of these positions, see Urmson, "Ideas", p. 119. For the second position, see R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 148.

5. Epistemology and critique

I shall examine some of the ways that Wittgenstein developed this linguistic insight in more detail shortly, but I think we can now get a general idea of the significance of the reorientation in philosophical reflection that Wittgenstein was implementing. Epistemology, the central preoccupation of philosophy since Descartes, was dethroned, since at most it dealt in a confused way with contingent matters of what we know about things. For whether we know something is a question that applies only in areas where it makes sense to say something could be known. And, as we have seen, much of what was formerly thought to make sense no longer makes sense after Wittgenstein. The pseudo-scientific "questions" of epistemology express our misunderstanding about language and its relation to the world.

Epistemological questions, if they have any sense at all, must be about what we know. That is, they must be, if they are not nonsense, questions about how, for instance, the mind functions when sentences are understood or spoken.²³ Classical

²³Wittgenstein later came to see, however, that what he thought was merely a psychological or empirical matter, was in fact assumed to be so only because of a philosophical prejudice that he held. An example of this prejudice is furnished in a letter that he wrote in 1919 to Russell in response to questions Russell had about the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein says "I don't know what the constituents of a thought are but I know that it must have such constituents which correspond to the words of language. Again the kind of relation of the constituents of the thought and of the pictured fact is irrelevant. It would be a matter of psychology to find out". The whole idea that "thinking is a mental process" was unclear to him at the time and a good deal of his later philosophy was devoted to clearing up the confusion. The 1919 letter is printed in *Notebooks*, p. 130.

epistemological questions, such as "Am I justified in thinking that I am seated by the fire?", must be understood as questions concerning the psychology of cognition. Such questions are empirical and about how, as a matter of fact, we are able to recognize, say, perceptual signs and are able to process them mentally. The important point is that the question has none of the special "foundational" status that the Cartesian thinks it has.

It is important to emphasize, however, that though Wittgenstein says that epistemological questions, if they are not nonsense, are questions of psychology, he does not reduce philosophy to psychology and thus to science as many contemporary philosophers do. On the contrary, he maintains that "psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science".²⁴ Thus, whereas many contemporary philosophers reduce philosophy to questions of psychology, Wittgenstein insists that psychology has nothing to do with philosophy.

Wittgenstein's refusal to treat philosophy as psychology is not a shortcoming. It does not rest on a mistaken theory of meaning or a faulty conception of analysis. His claim that traditional philosophical questions are either about language or about psychology does not illegitimately assume that questions about language can be separated from questions of psychology. Many contemporary philosophers think otherwise, insisting that all

²⁴Tractatus, 4.1121.

questions of language are in effect questions of psychology.²⁵ Wittgenstein, according to these philosophers, is simply mistaken in thinking that philosophy consists in the logical analysis of a separate realm of meaning which is not subject to empirical, psychological investigation. Once this mistake is exposed, however, it becomes evident, or so it appears, that Wittgenstein had no business saying that "psychology is no more related to philosophy than any other natural science".

There is a difficulty with this view, however, for it attributes to Wittgenstein an interest in providing a theory of meaning and analysis that is not, at least on the surface, to be found in the *Tractatus*. One would expect that, if Wittgenstein had such a conception of philosophy and had such a theory of meaning, he would refer to these ideas in the text. But nowhere in the *Tractatus* does he ever speak of his "theory of meaning"; indeed the word "theory" mainly appears in reference to views he challenges such as the "theory of knowledge", the "theory of types", and the "theory of classes".²⁶ Nor, surprising as it may seem, is the term "analysis" ever mentioned when he reflects upon his conception of philosophy. To be sure, analysis plays an important role in the

²⁵This is one of the consequences of Quine's critique of the analytic/synthetic distinction. Quine argues in effect that it is illegitimate to separate off a purely non-empirical linguistic realm from an empirical synthetic realm. See W.V.O. Quine "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 20-46.

²⁶Only once does Wittgenstein appear to speak of theory in a positive sense, namely when he refers to "the theory of probability" at 4.464 in the *Tractatus*.

Tractatus, but that role is never used to characterize his conception of philosophy.

What Wittgenstein does say in the Tractatus is that "all philosophy is critique of language" and that "philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts" and that "without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct".²⁷ Moreover, he insists that "philosophy is not a body of doctrine, but an activity" and that "philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions' but in the clarification of propositions".²⁸ Not analysis, but critique; not theory, but the activity of clarification: these are the ideas that Wittgenstein uses to characterize his philosophy. There is no suggestion that he is seeking a "science" of the proposition in the manner of A.J. Ayer. On the contrary, the suggestion is that he is seeking clarification of what it would mean to think such a thing.

If we take Wittgenstein at his word, it becomes clear that what is behind Wittgenstein's remark that psychology has nothing to do with philosophy is not a faulty theory of meaning and an illegitimate conception of analysis. The basis of his remark that "philosophy is not one of the natural sciences" and "psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science", is not a conception of philosophy as the analysis of an (illegitimately) separate, non-empirical realm of language and meaning, but a conception of philosophy as a critical activity. In

²⁷Ibid., 4.111, 4.112, 4.1121.

²⁸Ibid., 4.112.

short, if we stick with what Wittgenstein says, it becomes clear that he refuses to agree with the view of many contemporary philosophers, that philosophy is psychology, because he recognizes a separate role for philosophy as critique.

It is, in fact, this aspect of his reorientation of philosophy in terms of critique that has been almost completely overlooked by present-day philosophers. To see this more clearly, let me return to the point in Wittgenstein's discussion with the Cartesian where he apparently makes what these contemporary philosophers regard as an illicit assumption concerning meaning and analysis. The Cartesian asks "Am I justified in thinking that I am seated by the fire?" Wittgenstein raises the question of clarification of whether this question is about language or about psychology. At this point, our contemporary philosopher interjects "How is it that you are justified in separating questions of language and meaning from empirical issues such as psychology?", "How can you speak of the analysis of the meaning of sentences without any reference to psychology?" and "What theory of meaning grounds your contention that the Cartesian's question might be one of language alone?" Summarized, the question that our contemporary philosopher raises is: What justifies Wittgenstein's theory about the "analyticity" or meaning of a proposition?

But why **must** Wittgenstein have a theory of meaning in order to raise a critical point of clarification about the Cartesian's apparently confused question? When the Cartesian refers to being seated by the fire and asks "Am I justified in thinking that I

really am here, seated by the fire?", and Wittgenstein responds "but being seated by the fire is what we mean by the sentence 'I am here, seated by the fire'", why must we infer that Wittgenstein has a theory of meaning that justifies that that sentence represents that situation? Are our contemporary philosophers simply assuming that in order to understand Wittgenstein's critical remark we must know how such a remark might be justified? Is there no way we can understand Wittgenstein's interrogation of the Cartesian's question without specifying a theory of meaning that backs it up?

This whole issue boils down to the question of the status of Wittgenstein's critical remark to the Cartesian that a proposition means such and such a situation. In the context of a critique, this proposition dissolves the puzzle of justification that the Cartesian finds so intractable. That is, it shows the Cartesian the reason why it makes no sense to justify his "ideas" even though he feels they must be justifiable. As we saw, what the Cartesian calls "ideas" are not the sort of things to be justified, but rather comprise the standard for justification (i.e., what our expressions mean); no wonder that the Cartesian worries that they cannot be justified and that nevertheless there is something about them that is certain. But the moment we forget the critical role of Wittgenstein's remark, and instead raise the "question" about what justifies that remark, we presume that there must be more to the remark than what is given by its role as a criticism. At first glance, the only answer that one can give to the question "What justifies Wittgenstein's critical remark about propositions meaning

such and such?" is whether in fact the Cartesian's puzzle is alleviated. But what the contemporary philosophers wants to ask by that question is whether that remark is justified in a more fundamental sense than that. They want to know what Wittgenstein's critical insight into language is independently of its role as criticism.

Clearly, if we accept the sense of the contemporary philosopher's question, and become puzzled ourselves as to what "justifies" our saying that a proposition means such and such a situation, it is easy to see that our next step will be to find a theory of meaning which will supply the necessary justification. Since we know (apparently) that something must justify the meaning of our propositions, what more natural place to look for this justification than in either the stimulus-response character of language acquisition or, if that won't do, in the mentalistic aspect of our cognition.²⁹ In short, the most natural place to look for the justification of the meaning of our propositions is to psychology. On this train of thought, philosophy becomes psychology in the sense that it is the theoretical study of the meaning of propositions, a study which is thought to be "foundational" with regard to the rest of our culture.³⁰

²⁹For a good example of the "mentalistic" view see Noam Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). For a good example of the behaviouristic account see W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The M.I.T. Press, 1960), chapter two.

³⁰In this sense, "cognitive psychology" takes on the foundational role that Descartes envisaged for epistemology. Instead of discovering the foundations of knowledge, cognitive

This whole enterprise depends on raising a question as to the justification of Wittgenstein's critical remark that a proposition means such and such a situation." It depends on the assumption

psychology discovers the foundations of meaningful discourse.

"In an interesting exchange that Wittgenstein had with members of the Vienna Circle concerning the question of meaning, Schlick asked Wittgenstein "But how do I know that precisely these rules are valid and no others? Can I not be wrong?" Far from answering this question, Wittgenstein's response indicates that he thought Schlick's question was confused. He says, "In this matter it is always as follows. Everything we do consists in trying to find the liberating word. In grammar you cannot discover anything." What Schlick did not realize is that Wittgenstein's appeal to rules was essentially tied to its "liberating" function, that it could not be separated from its therapeutic role of exposing philosophical confusion. Indeed, to think that an appeal to rules is a matter of "discovering anything", is to take the first steps towards a theory of meaning. Schlick, however, eventually caught on to Wittgenstein's point. For instance, in an article from which I have already quoted, and which was written a few years after the exchange with Wittgenstein, he writes,

Hence it would be quite mistaken to see, somehow, in what we have a "theory of meaning" (in Anglo-Saxon countries this insight, that the meaning of a proposition is determined wholly and alone by its verification in the given, is often called the "experimental theory of meaning"). What precedes every formulation of a theory cannot itself be a theory.

It is an interesting historical question how these seminal ideas about rules, meaning and verification that were being discussed by the Vienna Circle were disseminated and how they were transformed (and distorted) and made eventually to serve the kind of positivist theory of meaning that Quine was to attack. My feeling is that Quine criticized the dogmas of empiricism (positivism), while the genuine article remained--and to a large degree still remains--unappreciated. For the conversation between Wittgenstein and Schlick see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, conversations recorded by F. Waismann, ed. B. McGuinness, trans. J. Schulte and B. McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 77 (hereafter cited as *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*). For the quotation from Schlick see his "Positivism and Realism," p. 88.

that in order to see the point as acceptable, there must be more to it than what is given by its role as criticism. More generally, the enterprise depends on the assumption that the question of the justification of the meaning of a proposition requires more than what the proposition in fact says when it is used to assert something. But what is this "more"? Can we make sense of it?

Wittgenstein, as we shall see in the next chapter, thought that it was as unclear to ask "What justifies our saying that the proposition means such and such a situation?" as it was for the Cartesian to ask "What justifies that my idea of being seated by the fire is true?" In the Cartesian case, the assumption was that the "ideas" that required justification were things that it made sense to justify. But, as we saw, since it is a fundamental misunderstanding to think that one can talk about "ideas", the idea of philosophy as a theoretical discipline, modelled on science, and concerned with justification, becomes absurd. A similar criticism can be made against contemporary philosophers who are interested in what justifies the meaning of a proposition; what is meant by "proposition" is simply assumed to be something that it makes sense to justify. But if this conception of the proposition can be shown to be misconstrued from the very beginning, and understood to involve a misunderstanding of the language, then the "question" being asked can also be shown to be illusory. A fortiori, the theoretical enterprise of philosophy as psychology, which rests upon the viability of that question, must be held in doubt.

Wittgenstein did not hold that "psychology is no more related

to philosophy than any other natural science" because he had a mistaken view that philosophy involves the non-empirical analysis of the meaning of propositions. On the contrary, he thought that such a theoretical analysis of the meaning of propositions involved the same fundamental assumptions as the Cartesian's. Philosophy has nothing to do with psychology because philosophy involves the critique of language and such a critique applies no less to contemporary psychological theory of "meaning" than to Cartesian theorists of "knowledge".

The conception of philosophy as the analysis of the meaning of propositions lies not with Wittgenstein but with Frege, Russell and Moore, and contemporary theory of meaning is their legacy. The truly revolutionary aspects of Wittgenstein's "linguistic turn", in terms of the demise of epistemology and the conception of philosophy as critique, have been overlooked.³² On the other hand, Wittgenstein's conception was not possible without the ground breaking work of Frege, Russell and Moore. For though Wittgenstein inaugurated the demise of Cartesian philosophy, the cracks in the

³²Thus A.J. Ayer says that "philosophy is wholly critical" and explains this in terms of providing definitions in use, definitions which, among other things, "define material things in terms of sense contents". Like many others who were influenced by Wittgenstein, Ayer's notion of philosophy as critical is in the service of theory. In Ayer's case, it is in the service of a phenomenalist theory of language. Wittgenstein's notion of critique, as we shall see, is much more radical. See A.J. Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), p. 48 & p. 59. For a good critical discussion of this point, see Michael Williams, "The Elimination of Metaphysics" in *Fact, Science, and Morality*, ed. G. Macdonald and C. Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 12.

Cartesian framework were already opening before Wittgenstein came upon the scene. We can see the cracks beginning to open up in the conception of the proposition that was being developed at the turn of the century by Frege, Russell and Moore. It was their development of an anti-psychologistic conception of a proposition which represented for Wittgenstein an important step forward in philosophy as well as a fundamental confusion. By emphasizing the content of the proposition at the expense of any psychological aspects involved in asserting that content, Moore and Russell in England, and especially Frege in German, contributed significantly to the displacement of the Cartesian framework as the central concern of philosophy in favour of questions of language, meaning and analysis. Wittgenstein welcomed this important advance. On the other hand, as we shall see, he felt that they had fundamentally misconceived the nature of this "content". Not only did this generate platonic "mystery mongering", as it became mysterious to think that there could be things like relations and universals and "thoughts" subsisting underneath the ordinary objects of our experience, but it also led these philosophers to misconceive the nature of philosophy as a theoretical discipline (as opposed to one of critique and clarification). This latter idea, I suggest, is far more consequential, though almost completely overlooked.

TWO

THE NEW WAY OF "PROPOSITIONS"

The first truism to which I wish to draw your attention--and I hope you will agree with me that these things that I call truisms are so obvious that it is almost laughable to mention them--is that the world contains facts...

(Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*)

1. The anti-psychologistic conception of a proposition

The preoccupation with Cartesian ideas, which was part of the mainstay of the philosophical tradition from Descartes to the end of the nineteenth century, was actually a preoccupation with an illusory entity resulting from a failure to recognize language's formal, internal relationship to the world. Many philosophers think, however, that this preoccupation with ideas ended with the conception of the proposition developed by Frege, Russell and Moore around the turn of the century.¹ Henceforth, it is argued, philosophy's concern, at least in what has traditionally been called analytic philosophy, shifted from an interest in ideas towards an interest in propositions and their meaning.

However, the shift instigated by Frege, Russell and Moore,

¹Michael Dummett argues this point. See his "Frege" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1967), vol. 3, pp. 225-226.

It is often thought that in the English speaking world G.E. Moore's purging of the psychologistic residue in Bradley's notion of judgment first launched the turn away from ideas in favour of the realist conception of the proposition. For a full discussion of this issue, see P. Hylton's *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 131-143.

though important, was a relatively minor one in comparison with that of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. For these anti-psychologistic philosophers, just like the philosophers of the "new way of ideas", failed to appreciate the formal internal relationship between language and the world.² In what follows, I shall concentrate on Russell as the representative philosopher of what I shall call, the "new way of propositions", though what I have to say applies equally well to Frege and Moore.

The crucial idea behind the "new way of propositions" was to recognize that what is essential in an idea is what the idea is about, its content, as opposed to anything having to do with the way in which that content is represented to our minds. In other words, what was important about ideas was not that they were thought by a mind but that they were about something. As we saw,

²Michael Dummett says that the central view of analytic philosophy, that thought is to be understood via considerations of language, was first given embryonic expression in Frege's *Grundlagen*. But when we consider what Frege meant by "language", we should not rejoice, as Dummett does, about restoring bragging rights to Frege as the founder of analytic philosophy; rather we should lament. For Frege's conception of language reflects a total lack of recognition of the importance of the formal, internal relationship between language and the world that we have seen is so central to the *Tractatus*. That analytic philosophy inherited Frege's original conception, if true, only reflects badly on analytic philosophy.

It is a mistake to engage Dummett in a debate over who is the founder of analytic philosophy. For the hidden premise of this debate is that mainstream analytic philosophy is something worth fighting over. Rather what is more important is to show how Frege's conception of a proposition rather belongs to classical epistemology than represents a break with it. For then it will become apparent how far the *Tractatus* represents a major shift from what has gone before, and how little Frege's work does. See Michael Dummett, "The Origins of Analytical Philosophy (Part 1)," *Lingua E Stile*, vol. XXIII, n. 1, (March 1988).

for the classical epistemologists, such as a Descartes or a Locke, when I ask what justifies my believing that my idea truly represents reality, I am holding a subjective relationship to the "idea". The subject is confronted by a "veil of ideas", and many of the central problems revolved around the issue of whether, how and what these ideas represented. Russell, Frege and Moore challenged this view, though to different degrees. For them, ideas were about something, and whether a mind perceived them was neither here nor there. They have a status independent of our knowledge of them. And their truth was determinable independently of how we perceived them. For them, what is essential about an idea is what it is about.

By severing the relation with a subject, and by concentrating on the content of the idea, Russell bypassed a whole series of questions which seemed crucial to the Cartesian epistemological tradition. In particular, the question which dominated this tradition, "What are we justified in saying we know?", began to be displaced by the question "What do our propositions mean?" This displacement was made possible once the framework of a subject cut off from the world, confronting a "veil of ideas", was rejected. Once the subjective component of an idea was considered inessential, what came into view was the content of the idea on its own, so to speak. The "I" became less important.

Russell, it must be noted, fell in between these two movements of thought. His development of the anti-psychologistic conception of the proposition was significant in terms of heralding in the new

interest in meaning, but his conception took shape in the context of classical epistemological worries; his realist theory of meaning takes shape within the confines of an epistemological concern with determining what the subject can be acquainted with.³ Indeed, it is the absence (for the most part) of epistemological issues in Frege's works that represents an important difference between Frege and Russell. Frege is more of a "pure" theorist of meaning than Russell is, and this undoubtedly attracted Wittgenstein to him.⁴

Notwithstanding Russell's ambivalent position regarding the new way of propositions, let me focus on that aspect of his conception of the idea that marks the break with the epistemological tradition that had gone before. As I said, the break comes with Russell's insistence that what is essential about the idea has to do with what it is about, not with how we perceive it. This results in a shift in focus towards what they called "propositions", towards an account of the content of our idea, and away from questions of "What can we know?"

I said above that the change Russell helped to implement, from looking at ideas in terms of psychic entities to ideas in terms of what those ideas are about, enabled philosophy to bypass a whole series of problems central to the epistemological tradition. I should have also added that this shift contributed to, as well as

³For more on this see R.M. Sainsbury, *Russell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), chapter 2.

⁴For the distinction between "pure" and "impure" philosophy of language see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 257-58.

being influenced by, new ways of studying thought via considerations involving language. For one, the focus on the content of ideas contributed to new reflections on the different possible linguistic forms by which we convey our thoughts. To take one example, if we reflect on the content of the proposition "The present king of France is bald" without any psychologistic interest, the denoting function of that proposition comes into clear view. Our interest shifts to thinking of the proposition as identifiable by virtue of its form as a denoting phrase. And questions concerning the different kinds of forms of expressions, and how they connect with one another, follow not far behind.

What I am saying is that by focusing on the objective content of our ideas, considerations of language came to the fore in ways that could not have previously been imagined. Another example is Frege's functional conception of language, based on the pattern of algebraic functions, and the consequent development of the predicate calculus. Such a view of language was part and parcel of the anti-psychologistic conception of the proposition that was beginning to take shape.

This shift towards the objective content of ideas and towards considerations of language was unquestionably important for the development of analytic philosophy, but its real significance lay in the fact that it cleared the ground and made possible the views expressed in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. These anti-psychologistic philosophers may have brought considerations of language to the forefront of philosophical reflection, but they fell far short of

recognizing the radical significance of what they had accomplished.

Indeed, from Wittgenstein's perspective, the realist philosophers remained locked into a fundamental assumption that they shared with the Cartesians. For whether one treats ideas as psychological phenomena or as objective contents is neither here nor there so long as the crucial assumption, what is meant by "idea" or "proposition", is not clear. Russell may have helped to change the focus of philosophical interest from questions concerning what we can know to questions concerning the meaning of a proposition, but what he meant by "proposition" in this new focus was confused. Like the Cartesian's relation to ideas, his basic confusion lies in assuming that what he called a proposition was clear and "unproblematic". But as I shall show, he failed to see that what he called a proposition was a reification resulting from the way he had misunderstood the workings of language. Despite the new interest in language that the realist philosophers had inspired over the Cartesian preoccupation with ideas, Russell and the realist philosophers had fundamentally failed to see language's real significance. And by failing to see it, they "tripped" over language in much the same way as the Cartesian had done.

2. Reification and the propositional sign

For Wittgenstein, what is essential about a proposition is not, as Russell and the realists had supposed, what the proposition is about, but rather concerns a sign in its projective relationship to the world. Wittgenstein says,

I call the sign with which we express a thought a propositional sign.--And a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world.⁵

The idea that a proposition is a propositional sign that is projected is important. For it necessitates a change in the whole way we look at the question of the meaning of a proposition, a question which is so central to Russell and the realists. That is, if by "proposition" one means "a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world", then the question of meaning has to do with clarifying or elucidating the propositional sign in its relation to the world. Here it is helpful to think of our example in chapter one of teaching the foreigner the meaning of the expression "I am seated by the fire". Teaching is a form of stipulation and when we teach an expression, we are setting up the connection between the sign and what it is about. Similarly, the question of the meaning of a propositional sign is a question about the use of that sign or about the set-up between the sign and the world.

If we do not see that a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world, if we do not keep in mind that a proposition (taken as a propositional sign) has a use, we will end up confusing properties which belong to the propositional sign with what belongs to what the propositional sign is about. We will then be subject to the illusion that a proposition corresponds to something, as if there were something lying behind

⁵Tractatus, 3.12.

it. Given this confusion, the question of the meaning of a proposition will not be a matter of the elucidation of the propositional sign and its connection to the world. Instead, it will be about what the proposition's supposed correspondence consists in. But what gives the illusion that the proposition denotes *anything*, and that understanding the meaning of a proposition consists in understanding what is denoted, is the fact that the proposition as conceived as a sign has been overlooked.⁶

This confusion is similar to the Cartesian's failure to recognize that what they call an "idea" is in fact a linguistic rule treated as an empirical object of investigation, as a quasi-scientific phenomenon. For Wittgenstein, this kind of confusion is at the heart of Russell's approach to the proposition. As we shall see, he takes the form of a proposition to be objective, which in turn leads him to a confused conception of the meaning of a proposition and the role of philosophers in their questioning relation to it. But for Wittgenstein the form of a proposition belongs to the proposition as a sign in its projective relation to the world.

We saw briefly how the proposition "The present king of France

⁶Propositional signs have a use, but not uses. It is one of the main messages of the *Tractatus* that the meaning of the proposition is its use. See *Tractatus*, 3.326, 3.327, 3.328 and 6.211. Russell and the realist philosophers overlook this aspect of propositional signs. A distinguishing characteristic of Wittgenstein's later work, therefore, is not the use conception of meaning, but rather that a proposition has many uses. It is the plural function of language that tends to be overlooked in the early philosophy, not the idea that language, like a tool, is used to tell us about the world.

is bald" appears to have a denoting form; it says that there is a thing that is the one and only King of France and is bald.⁷ For Russell, there are other forms of propositions besides denoting ones such as "Socrates is human", which is of the subject/predicate form, and "Desdemona loves Cassio" which is of the relational form. Russell thought throughout his philosophy that propositions have different forms in the same way that there are different forms of animals in the zoo and he thought it was the business of philosophers to make inventories of these forms.⁸

For Russell forms, such as the denoting form of "The present King of France is bald" are logically ultimate and undefinable; it is simply the case that there just are these forms. Moreover, for him, the meaning of a proposition is bound up with analyzing these

⁷In the proposition "The present King of France is bald", the expression "The present King of France" appears to denote something, but according to Russell's theory of descriptions, does not. At present, I am using that proposition as a denoting proposition. That is, I am approaching it in the way Russell would have approached it in *The Principles of Mathematics*, a work which is prior to his development of the theory of descriptions. Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1938).

⁸Thus we find Russell saying,

I think one might describe philosophical logic, the philosophical portion of logic which is the portion that I am concerned with in these lectures since Christmas (1917), as an inventory, or if you like a more humble word, a "zoo" containing all the different forms that facts may have.

Russell thinks that it is the job of philosophy to describe the atomic, propositional forms of the world, for they describe the atomic facts of the world. See Bertrand Russell *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R.C. Marsh (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1956) pp. 217-18.

forms. To analyze the meaning of a proposition involves a process of abstraction whereby one replaces variables for all constants (except logical constants) in a proposition (i.e., replace x for Socrates in the expression "Socrates is a man") until one is left simply with the logical constants and the variables. The logical constants are (at the time of *The Principles of Mathematics*) "implication, the relation of a term to the class of which it is a member, the notion of such that, the notion of relation, and such further notions as may be involved in the general notion of propositions of the same form".⁹ These further notions are "propositional function, class, denoting and any or every term".¹⁰ Thus, for Russell, if our proposition is "if Socrates is a Greek, Socrates is a man" the analysis would be "If a and b are classes, and a is contained in b, then 'x is an a' implies 'x is a b'".¹¹ Here we are left solely with variables, namely a, b and x, as well as logical constants involving "class", "contained in" and "implication".

For Russell, these logical constants were considered to comprise the ultimate constituents, the atomic forms, of the general form of a proposition. It is the business of philosophers to display these indefinable, ultimate forms:

⁹Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, p. 3.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 106. Also see John Passmore *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966) p. 218.

¹¹I borrow the example from Peter M.S. Hacker's *Insight and Illusion*, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 35.

The discussion of indefinables--which forms the chief part of philosophical logic--is the endeavour to see clearly, and to make others see clearly, the entities concerned, in order that the mind may have that kind of acquaintance with them which it has with redness or the taste of a pineapple. The indefinables are obtained primarily as the necessary residue in a process of analysis.¹²

The indefinable forms of propositions are also called by Russell "logical objects" and we have "logical experience" or "acquaintance with logical objects".¹³

Every proposition (which is not already atomic) is a complex of atomic forms, and philosophy must find these forms. Besides the indefinable atomic forms of a proposition, we also have, says Russell, logical experience of the connectives between forms when they connected to make up a complex. Russell says,

Besides the forms of atomic complexes, there are many other logical objects which are involved in the formation of non-atomic complexes. Such words as or, not, all, some plainly involve logical notions; and since we can use such words intelligently, we must be acquainted with the logical objects involved.¹⁴

Thus, for Russell, we have logical experience of the logical constants which designate the ultimate forms of a proposition as well as the manner in which they connect up, through the use of the logical connectives (i.e. "or", "and", "if...then...", etc.) to form the proposition as a whole.

¹²Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, p. xv.

¹³These remarks are found in Russell's *Theory of Knowledge*, the 1913 Manuscript quoted in Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, p. 36.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 37.

When Russell asks about the meaning of the proposition he is therefore asking about the logical objects which the proposition is about. In *The Principles of Mathematics*, the relation between the proposition and the logical objects or logical constants or forms was conceived crudely in terms of a naming relation in which the grammatical form of the proposition mirrored the logical form. Later, when he could not bring himself to accept that there are objects directly named by such phrases as "the present king of France", he conceived of the naming relation in a more sophisticated fashion. Through his theory of definite descriptions he showed that denoting phrases such as "the present king of France" do not denote objects--which would otherwise have been problematical since there is no present king of France--but need to be analyzed into descriptions, the constituents with which one is acquainted.

It is important to remember that Russell's theory of descriptions represents a defence of the realist conception of meaning by avoiding what otherwise would seem to be an implausible consequence of non-naming names. But for Wittgenstein, such a defence was futile. Russell's whole way of approaching propositions had to be abandoned. In particular, Russell had radically misunderstood the nature of a proposition, its primitive constituents, the atomic forms as well as the logical connectives, and as a consequence of this had misunderstood the nature of the

philosopher's enterprise.¹⁵

For Wittgenstein, Russell's fundamental mistake lies in failing to see that a proposition is a sign in a sign system, that it is part of a notation, a propositional notation. He failed to see that a proposition represents a way of representing things. By failing to see this, he fell into the error I mentioned earlier of mistaking properties which belong to the sign system for what belongs to what the sign system is depicting.

Russell thought that a proposition such as "Desdemona loves Cassio" involves a relational form. The relational form "xRy" is a form subsisting in an eternal Platonic realm with which we are acquainted. But once it is recognized that a proposition is a propositional sign, and that it is part of a sign system, a notation, it becomes clear that the relational form "xRy" is part of that symbolism, part of the propositional sign system, not what that sign system is about.¹⁶ Russell had confused the form "xRy"

¹⁵As we shall see, this does not mean that Wittgenstein did not admire Russell's theory of descriptions. In fact, Wittgenstein links Russell's insight that grammatical form need not mirror logical form to his idea of "critique of language". *Tractatus*, 4.0031. Thus Russell's theory assumes first-class importance for Wittgenstein, even if he felt that Russell badly misunderstood the true significance of his theory. Also, see Wittgenstein's 1913 letter to Russell in *Notebooks*, p. 128. He says, "Your Theory of Descriptions is quite undoubtedly right, even if the individual signs in it are quite different from what you believe".

¹⁶In one of his very earliest letters (in 1912) to Russell Wittgenstein says "I had a long discussion with Frege about our theory of symbolism of which, I think, he roughly understood the general outline". *Notebooks*, p. 121. But Russell never had a theory of symbolism in the sense that Wittgenstein means it in the *Tractatus*. Perhaps Wittgenstein was being overly optimistic about Russell's understanding of his ideas at the time. There is indeed evidence that Wittgenstein thought that Russell (and Moore)

of our propositional sign system, which helps us to say such things as "Desdemona loves Cassio", for a property of "the world". In Wittgenstein's eyes, he had confused the form of the sign for a thing in the world.

This becomes clearer when we consider how Russell would approach propositions about relations in our visual field. To say that our telephone is to the right of our coffee cup, for instance, seems to be analyzable, on Russell's account, into the form "xRy" and we must be acquainted with this form in order to understand a relational sentence about these objects. But the relational complexity that Russell thinks he is analyzing is not a constituent of "the world", but rather is what appears when the linguistic form "xRy" is projected on to it in Wittgenstein's sense. Relational complexity in our visual field is linguistic complexity for Wittgenstein. But for Russell it represents a fundamental constituent of the world.¹⁷

understood more at the time than they actually did. He was, for instance, **extremely** disappointed, perhaps even incredulous, that Russell and Moore did not understand his "Notes on Logic" and his "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway". He says, for instance, in a letter to Russell, "I should never have believed that the stuff I dictated to Moore in Norway six years ago would have passed over you so completely without trace". See R. Monk's *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 161. Wittgenstein's "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway" and "Notes on Logic" are printed in *Notebooks*. In citing a page reference to either of these texts I shall simply cite *Notebooks*, followed by the number of the page.

¹⁷There are many dark sayings in the *Notebooks* which indicate that Wittgenstein's analysis of the visual field is in terms of the logical/linguistic net we use to represent reality. For instance, he says, "the complexity of spatial object is a logical complexity". See *Notebooks*, p. 62.

An analogy based on maps is of help here. Imagine two maps, one which is complex and has all of the side roads and individual structures (such as houses and farms) indicated on it, the other which is simpler and has only the major roads indicated. Now we can convey directions using either of these two maps. Sometimes the simpler map is more useful than the complex one when we are trying to show someone the general area that they want to go to. At other times the complex map is needed when we want to show someone the directions to an individual house.

Now let us ask ourselves, does the possibility of describing the world (i.e. giving directions) using a map of a given form tell us something about the way the world is? We want to say: "Yes, certainly when I use my map to say that the farmer X's house is on county road Y, I am telling us something about how the world is". The level of complexity of our map is attributed to the world, to the way the world is, so that any directions that we might give using our map will have the same degree of complexity. But is this degree of complexity a part of the way the world is, or is it a part of our description of the world, part of the particular form that we are using to describe it? If we had used the simpler map to give directions, and we were asked the same question, namely, "Does the possibility of describing the world using this map tell us something about the world?", we would have undoubtedly answered in a similar vein, that indeed, when we use that map to say that one area is over here and another over there, we are saying something about the world. But again, is the degree of simplicity

of our map part of the way the world is, or is it part of our description of it?

Clearly, since the maps are optional alternatives--since we could have used one map over the other--the possibility of being able to describe the world with a given map tells us nothing about the way the world is; it doesn't tell us how complex the world is, for example. What it does tell us about the world is that it can be described by a particular form of a particular degree of complexity. That is, the possibility of describing the world by a particular map, say maps A and B, but not, say, by a "map" that doesn't have any lines indicating roads, tells us something about the world, namely, that it can be described by certain maps and not others.

When we approach the map as if its possibility tells us something about the world, we are attributing to "the world" properties which belong to the map, as a form of description (e.g. complexity). Russell approaches the forms of a proposition in a similar way. That is, he approaches the forms of a proposition as we would a map when we think that it tells us something about the world. But just as the map is optional, so too are the forms of propositions. Russell's relational form " xRy " does not tell us anything about the world, but rather belongs to the form of describing it. Russell fails to see that that form doesn't tell us anything about the world since he fails to see the significance of " xRy " as being part of a symbolic notation.

The forms then that Russell feels are presupposed in order for

us to understand a proposition, are not properties of the world, but part of how we describe it. It is fundamentally misleading to speak as Russell does of these forms as a "condition of understanding". We must be "acquainted" with the forms only in the sense that we must know how to use that form of the language in order to understand what is being said.¹⁸ Like the optional form of the map, the so-called relational form, "xRy", is not a theoretical precondition of sense, but part of the language, part of the way we represent things.

It is important to note, however, that though the maps may be optional, and that though Russell's propositional forms are part of the symbolism, this does not mean that they are arbitrary in every sense of the word. We may say that the map may be optional but it is not arbitrary in the sense that any map will do. Though it is true that the possibility of being able to represent things by means of the map, by means of "xRy", tells us nothing about the world, the fact that the world can be described more completely or more simply by a particular net does tell us something about the world. For Wittgenstein, as I mentioned, it tells us that we can describe the world using this particular map, this particular form of description. It is important to recognize this for a number of crucial reasons.

First, if we do not see that the forms of description are

¹⁸Russell says in *The Problems of Philosophy* "Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted". Russell has thus confused a logical issue for a psychological one. See *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912) p. 32.

optional but not arbitrary, we will be tempted to think that forms of description are instrumental in the sense that the world doesn't having anything to do with limiting what forms of description we choose. So recognizing that the forms are not arbitrary in the sense I have indicated blocks the path to interpreting Wittgenstein as an idealist.¹⁹

Second, it is important to recognize that the forms of description are optional but not arbitrary in the sense indicated if we are to understand Wittgenstein's radical divergence from Russell concerning the status of logic. For Wittgenstein, logic is not something that depends on us, something that we must discover as in science, but rather is something that "takes care of itself".²⁰ We should not say, "the fact that we can describe the world by a given form of description tells us about the world". Rather, we should say "that the world can be described using a particular form of description tells us that we can describe it using this particular form". And this means that the logical form of a description is something that we are, so to speak, witnesses to, something we can only describe, not something that we can justify or theorize about. As Wittgenstein says,

¹⁹As we shall see, this is true also of his later philosophy. Grammar is arbitrary in the sense that the world does not back it up. But it is not arbitrary in the sense that in order to describe grammar one must refer to the world being the way it is.

²⁰See *Tractatus*, 5.473 and *Notebooks*, p. 2.

Logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself.²¹

Third, if we do not think of logic as "taking care of itself", as something that "shows" itself in the nature of the signs themselves, then we have no hope of understanding what Wittgenstein means by the general form of a proposition, an idea which is central to the *Tractatus*. Unlike Russell, who thinks that forms of propositions are "in the world", Wittgenstein, as we have seen, thinks that the possibility of describing the world using a particular form does not tell us anything about the world. That is, logical form is not discoverable by reflecting on our notation, as Russell unwittingly thinks, but rather by sifting out what is essential or inessential about the notation in so far as it represents a sense. In a way, what is logically essential about a notational sign is what is in common with any other sign that can represent the same sense.²² This means that what is characteristic about a particular notation is exactly what gets in the way of our understanding its logical form. This is partly behind Wittgenstein's remark that,

A particular mode of signifying may be unimportant but it is always important that it is a possible mode of signifying. And that is generally so in philosophy: again and again the individual case turns out to be

²¹*Tractatus*, 6.124.

²²Wittgenstein says "what is essential in a symbol is what all symbols that can serve the same purpose have in common". *Tractatus*, 3.341. Notice the emphasis on "purpose" or use. The sense of a symbol, Wittgenstein is saying, is tied to its use.

unimportant, but the possibility of each individual case discloses something about the essence of the world.²³

The general form of a proposition cannot be a general logical "fact in the world" as Russell thought. It is not something to be represented but rather a rule of representation by which we translate each notational expression into another.

3. Forms of representation

I have been arguing that Russell's realist conception of the proposition was not as great a shift away from the Cartesian epistemological tradition as one might be led to believe. Just as Descartes approached ideas from the wrong logical/linguistic point of view, so too had Russell approached propositions. Like the Cartesian's, Russell's view rests on confusing what the sentence is about for a situation in the world. In other words both views failed to keep clear what belongs to language from what belongs to the world. Both views failed to see Wittgenstein's fundamental insight that language was internally related to the world.

What Wittgenstein is in effect saying to Russell is that he has failed to see the role of sentences as a way by which we represent the world. Sentences convey our thoughts about things. But that does not mean that there are not other ways--other notations--for conveying our thoughts. We can use a map to convey our directions, or a picture language; here we do not use sentences; also we could use a musical score. In short,

²³Ibid., 3.343.

propositional signs constitute a form of representation, but there are other forms.²⁴

We can restate Russell's and the realist's confusion using the terminology of "forms of representation". Russell mistakes (as does the Cartesian) the form of representation of a proposition as if it were itself something to be represented. In other words, he treats forms as if they were constituents of propositions when they are really part of the way in which they help to represent things.

The recognition that language is a form of representation is central to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (as well as to his later philosophy). Indeed, the whole ramifying notion of symbolic representation comes to the forefront of philosophy in that book. And it is worth repeating that along with the insight that propositions are forms of representations comes the insight that there are other possible notations for depicting the world. Even ink pots can have a representational function; that "this ink pot is on this table may express that I sit in this chair".²⁵ Wittgenstein says that written notes "picture" a piece of music, phonetic notation (the alphabet) "pictures" our speech, and that "the possibility of all imagery, of all our pictorial modes of

²⁴Actually, in our language that sentence can have many different uses. For the purposes of illustration I am assuming that it has one use, to pick out the situation under consideration, to convey a thought about these things. This was an assumption that Wittgenstein held in the *Tractatus* and was one that he attacked in the *Investigations*. See *Investigations*, 304.

²⁵*Notebooks*, p. 97.

expression, is contained in the logic of depiction".²⁶ All of these pictures are possible forms of representation. The point of emphasizing this is to underline the importance for Wittgenstein of seeing the question of propositional representation as being at the same time an insight into the more general issue of symbolic representation.²⁷ In other words, to understand the functioning of propositional language, we have to have insight into the general possibility of representation as such. What is essential in a propositional sign is found in whatever is essential in any form of representation; they are all of a kind at a fundamental level.

Once it is recognized that Wittgenstein is interested in the possibility of representation as such, and that he regards particular forms of representation from that vantage point, it becomes easier to understand why the Tractarian terminology is so abstract and lean and with very few examples. It is often remarked that his discussion of "objects", "elementary states of affairs", and their correlates "names" and "elementary propositions" are presented in such abstract terms that we are unable to form an idea of what any of these things are. And we are presented with no examples. Some philosophers have tried to help Wittgenstein out by speculating that what Wittgenstein meant by objects, for instance, were Russellian sense-data with which we are acquainted.²⁸ But

²⁶Tractatus, 4.015.

²⁷Ibid., 3.341 and 3.342.

²⁸For this view see M.B. and J. Hintikka *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), chapter three.

clearly Wittgenstein's interest in the general possibility of representation rules out the possibility that his objects are of a special, metaphysical kind as the Hintikkas suggest.²⁹ On the contrary, "objects" and "elementary propositions", etc., are discussed from the vantage point of any possible form of representation. Tractarian objects can thus be viewed from two perspectives, either as the everyday objects referred to in a particular notation, or as those same objects looked at from the point of view of the question of representation in general. I shall say a little more about objects in chapter five.

Wittgenstein's interest in the general question of symbolic representation and how propositions function in terms of it is expressed in his picture theory. One of the essential points of the picture theory is that any symbolic representation represents by virtue of its logical form of representation;

What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it--correctly or incorrectly--in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality.³⁰

²⁹Of course, there will be objects in any particular form of representation. Thus Wittgenstein, while focusing on the propositional form, will say "In a proposition a name is the representative of an object". *Tractatus*, 3.22. But what counts as an "object" here is viewed from the point of view of the general question of representation. In other words, he is saying that objects are at the basis of all propositional representation because propositions are propositional signs (i.e. part of a sign system) and to understand their function from the vantage point of representation in general we must see their [i.e., propositional signs] relation to the objects that they depict.

³⁰*Tractatus*, 2.18. The italics are mine. That Wittgenstein was interested in the general issue of representation is also supported by the fact that he begins the *Tractatus* by examining the

When we keep in mind that his central theme is the possibility of representation in general, and we examine a particular notation or form of representation from that vantage point, we see more clearly how it becomes possible to confuse forms of representation for things, a confusion at the heart of Russell's approach to the proposition.

The key to understanding how Wittgenstein's views on representation can shed light on Russell's fundamental mistake of confusing forms of representation for things is to take an example of the kind of confusion Russell is under and see how Wittgenstein's remarks can help. This may sound a bit paradoxical since I am saying that we can understand what Russell's confusion is by first taking an example of it and then seeing what Wittgenstein will do with it. But as I shall show in more detail later, if we do not supply an example of Russell's (or another philosopher's) confused way of looking at things, the significance of Wittgenstein's remarks on representation will be lost to us.

issue of objects, pictures, etc., independently of a consideration of any particular form of representation. The topic of propositions does not appear until 3.1 when he says "In a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses", though he mentions propositions in a comment at 2.0211. Also, it should be mentioned, the components of a picture are "elements" not names. The reference to "names" comes in at 3.142 when he says "Only facts can express a sense, a set of names cannot". However, since immediately prior to 3.142 he speaks of a "blend of words" it would appear that "words" and "names" are interchangeable. So when he says at 4.14, "What constitutes a propositional sign is that in it its elements (the words) stand together in a determinate relation to one another", Wittgenstein is intentionally linking a general view of representation which mentions "elements of the picture" with a particular form of representation, namely, the propositional form, whose "elements" are now "names".

Typically philosophers approach Wittgenstein's remarks on representation with an eye to discovering in them the key to Wittgenstein's theory of representation. I believe that this is a fundamental interpretative mistake and that these remarks have no significance outside of breaking the hold of a certain approach philosophers take towards language and the world. What philosophers are looking for in the *Tractatus* is right before their eyes but they cannot see it, since they are committed, unwittingly, to a particular view point.

Thus rather than taking the standard approach of attempting to elucidate Wittgenstein's views on representation and picturing by reference to a chosen notation, I shall first begin with an example of the kind of confusion that I think his remarks were intended to dispel.³¹ The confusion I have in mind has to do with giving written directions to go to a city, say Ottawa. Take the proposition "Toronto is west of Ottawa" and let us ask what this proposition means?

As we saw, Russell would take the meaning of this proposition to be what it about. Thus, he would analyze it down into the relation form "xWy". We have already seen that this is only an apparent relation since in a different notation we can express what "Toronto is west of Ottawa" means without using that propositional notation at all. What I propose to do is fill in some of the details of such a notation by reference to Wittgenstein's remarks

³¹In chapters five and six, I shall look at the standard approach more closely.

on representation.

Consider a map that we have that gives directions to Ottawa. Taking the proposition "Toronto is west of Ottawa" as our unit to be translated, let us use a square to represent Toronto and let us use a circle to represent Ottawa. The objects, then, are the cities of Toronto and Ottawa. By placing a square to the left of a circle we represent the position of Toronto in its spatial relation to Ottawa and thus convey the sense of our original proposition. This is a picture in this notation and it depicts a combination of objects, or a state of affairs. In our map then,

the fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way.³²

Since we could have placed the circle to the left of the square instead of to the right of it, there are evidently other possible configurations as well. And these possible configurations are fixed for the particular notation. Our picture's possible configurations matches the object's possible combinations. Wittgenstein calls these possibilities, the form of representation,

That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that things are so combined with one another.

This connection of the elements of the picture is called its structure, and the possibility of this structure is called the form of representation of the picture

What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner--rightly or falsely--is its

³²Tractatus, 2.15.

form of representation."³³

Now in the face of our (Russell's) confusion of treating what the proposition is about as a situation, and thus of attributing properties which belong to the propositional symbolism to the world, the map serves as what Wittgenstein calls in the *Investigations* "an object of comparison" that "throws light on the facts of our language".³⁴ In particular, it shows us that we have overlooked the proposition as part of a sign system, one which has a particular form of representation. It makes clear that our "xWy" is part of the that form of representation. Finally, it makes perspicuous the fact that when we (Russell) ask questions about "xWy", we are not describing "the world", but our form for talking about it.³⁵

It is important to see that if we treat the map, not as an "object of comparison", but instead as a notation on its own, we are potentially back into the same trouble we were in when we used the propositional sign system to give directions. We think that the possibility of describing the world using the map of whatever complexity tells us something about the way the world is in the way that Russell would have thought that the form of the proposition

³³I think that the Ogden/Ramsey translation is better here. The Pears-McGuinness translation has "pictorial form" in place of "form of representation." See *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden and F.P. Ramsey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1933), 2.15 and 2.17.

³⁴*Investigations*, 130.

³⁵Again, the caveat is that this form is nevertheless a way of describing the world in the way it describes it.

"Toronto is west of Ottawa" tells us something about the objective relations between these objects. In fact, it is almost overwhelming to think that the form of the map represents the way the world really is.³⁶ In one sense, as I have stressed, this is true in so far as the map is a possible mode of signifying. And by saying that the map conveys the world the way it really is we are in effect drawing attention to the fact that it is a possible mode of signifying. The trouble is that we confuse the possible modes of signifying as if they were the only modes of signifying, and then it appears as if we are describing the world itself.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein avoids this danger by conveying his views on representation and picturing independently of any particular notation. Thus, unlike what I have shown above, Wittgenstein speaks of pictures and objects and elementary propositions without appealing to any particular notation; he does not use a map, for instance, to convey his meaning. And indeed, that is exactly what he would have to do if his intention is to

³⁶In a conversation with O.K. Bouwsma, Wittgenstein discussed the question of representation in relation to maps. In order to explain the idea that a map is a sign that is used, Wittgenstein says "Now it's as though everything on the map represents something". He then protests that "representing is not on the map". When Wittgenstein says "Now it's as though...", I think he is alluding to our tendency to look at a map and say that it represents the way things are. Wittgenstein's protest that "representing is not on the map" emphasizes the point that the map's capacity to represent lies with the way the map as a notation is used. The representing is not on the map, since we can represent the same point with a different notation. When we say "Now it's as though...", we are tracing around the form by which we look at things. See O.K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949-1951*, ed. J.L. Craft & R.E. Hustwit (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 24-25.

expose the fundamental confusion of Russell and others in regarding forms of representations as things represented. That is, instead of translating, as I have done, the name "Ottawa" in the propositional language into the sign "circle" in the map notation, Wittgenstein's "model of comparison" must be independent of any notation whatsoever. What is common, for instance, between "Toronto is west of Ottawa" and the sign comprised of the square and the circle in the map notation cannot be presented in another notation. For that other notation must itself have its own form of representation. Indeed, even if we found a notation that all possible expressions of any notation could be translated into, that notation itself would still have a form of representation, and its form could not be itself depicted. This is partly what is behind Wittgenstein's remark that,

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it--logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.³⁷

4. From the logic of propositional relations to the logic of language

By taking "proposition" in the question "What does a proposition mean?" to correspond to something instead of conceiving of it as "a propositional sign in its relationship to the world", Russell mistakes the form of representation of the proposition as

³⁷Tractatus, 4.12.

something that itself is represented. For Wittgenstein, Russell's whole conception of the proposition issues from this fundamental mistake. This has crucial implications for Russell's view of the analysis of a proposition. For he is misled into thinking that his predicate calculus involves analyzing propositions when he is really analyzing the product of his confused way of looking at them. In particular, he is misled into thinking that the logical propositional relations, such as " $\vee$ ", " $\&$ ", etc. are representatives, that they name relations, that they refer to Platonic objects.

One of the great innovations in Russell's new mathematical logic over Aristotelian classical logic was to transform the subject-predicate form of a proposition into a functional form based on algebra. In the old logic, to say "the book is red" was to append the attribute "red" to the substance "book". A difficulty with this view is that sometimes the subject term of our sentences does not have anything referring to it. For instance, the sentence, "the round square does not exist" has a subject term "round square" that does not refer. As I mentioned earlier, Russell circumvented this problem by suggesting that to say "the book is red" is really to assert something involving a complex function. Basically, what we are saying by that sentence is that "the complex function, ' x is a book & x is red & there is nothing else having the properties of x ', is satisfied" or "the complex function, ' x is round & x is square & there is nothing else having the properties of x ', is not satisfied". The important thing to

see is that there is no longer an inference to a substance holding properties, but rather to asserted functions.

By comparing sentences to functions it became apparent to Russell how much metaphysics (in particular, the idea of substance and attributes) was being driven by considerations of language. In classical logic, for instance, the law of noncontradiction, "nothing can be and not be", was thought to describe an ultimate metaphysical truth completely independent of language. From the vantage point of Russell's (and Frege's) conception of propositions as functions however, it became clear that logical laws really represented the relations between these functions. Remember, to say "the book is red" is to say that a certain complex function is satisfied namely "x is a book & x is red & etc". Logic, then, discovers what functions fit together and which functions do not. In other words, Russell makes his focus the logic of propositional relations. In doing so, Russell thinks he is discovering the limits of meaningful discourse and hence of the world.³⁸

I have followed philosophical tradition by occasionally speaking of this view of Russell's logic as Platonistic. And there can be no doubt that this view is substantially correct. However, Russell's Platonism is different than Plato's Platonism in one

³⁸I am using the term "relations" to refer to relations between propositions which is broader than Russell's use of the term and conforms to Wittgenstein's usage. For Russell, relations are important since they show that not all propositions attribute properties to things. He says, "The neglect of prepositions and verbs led to the belief that every proposition can be regarded as attributing a property to a single thing, rather than as expressing a relation between two or more things". See Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 54.

important respect. Russell's view of logical relations is much more "down to earth". In order to describe such things as the relations between functions, considerations of language--e.g., which words refer, what is meant by a second order function--are essential. Classical logic, by contrast, describes logical truths independently of any consideration of language; such logical truths are truly "laid out in a pattern in the heavens". This difference is important because it illustrates again why Frege, Russell and Moore helped clear the ground for Wittgenstein's linguistic turn.

Russell sees, in contrast with classical logic, that the grammatical form of sentences does not necessarily correspond to its logical form and that, for instance, "the book is on the table" does not speak of substances and attributes, but is really an imprecise way of asserting a complex function. Thus Russell is sensitive to the important issue that considerations of language have important implications for what we say about logic. But Russell's conception of the importance of language is primarily negative; grammatical form can mislead us away from the real path of discovering the logic of the world. In what should now appear to be a striking understatement, Russell says in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*,

There is a good deal of importance to philosophy in the theory of symbolism, a good deal more than at one time I thought. I think the importance is almost entirely negative, i.e., the importance lies in the fact that unless you are fairly self-conscious about symbols, unless you are fairly aware of the relation of the symbol to what it symbolizes, you will find yourself attributing to the thing properties which only belong to the

symbol.³⁹

Attributing to the thing what only belongs to the symbol is for Russell an important nuisance; being misled this way gets in the way of discovering the things themselves. Logic, as the theory that discovers the combination and relations between functions, must be on guard against such deceptions.

Wittgenstein generalized Russell's principle that grammatical form need not be logical form, and applied it to Russell's own account of the logic of propositional relations. Russell, it is important to emphasize, takes the relation between functions, which he thinks is perspicuously laid out in his first-order predicate calculus, as "objective", and as ultimate. And in taking these relations as ultimate, Russell lives up to his billing as a Platonizing philosopher. But for Wittgenstein--and this is the crucial point--what appears to Russell to be a theory of the relation of functions is really a description of the **symbolism**. The grammatical form of our sentences has seduced Russell into thinking that he had immediate access to the logical form of language and thus to the logical constituents of the world. But what Russell is theorizing about is really the way in which the **symbols** of his notation combine. Russell thought he was discovering the logic of relations between the logical forms of propositions, when he was really describing the logic of language.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's principal way of showing that Russell was describing language, and not the logical constituents

³⁹Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, p. 185.

of the world, was through the development of a truth-tabular sign language. His basic argument was that since the sign language of truth tables could represent everything that Russell's symbolic notation could represent, any "logical complexes" supposedly corresponding to the proposition in Russell's notation, could be shown to be illusory.⁴⁰ Thus " $p > q$ " in Russell's notation can be replaced by the truth tabular sign,⁴¹

"p		q		"
T		T		T
F		T		T
T		F		
F		F		T

This sign says everything that Russell's sign " $p > q$ " says, and in doing so shows that " $p > q$ " does not describe a real logical relation. Wittgenstein hammers the point home when he says,

Though it seems unimportant, it is in fact significant that the pseudo-relations of logic, such as $\vee$ and $>$, need brackets--unlike real relations.

Indeed, the use of brackets with these apparently primitive signs is itself an indication that they are not the real primitive signs. And surely no one is going to believe that brackets have an independent meaning.⁴²

The parentheses in an expression such as " $(p \vee q) \& r$ " must count as

⁴⁰Actually, Wittgenstein had to accommodate quantified and belief statements such as "A has the thought p" in order to adjust them to the truth tabular language. See *Tractatus* 5.541 for his discussion of belief statements and 5.52 and 5.521 for his discussion of quantifiers. Also see R.J. Fogelin's *Wittgenstein*, 2d ed. (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), chapter five.

⁴¹*Tractatus*, 4.442

⁴²*Ibid.*, 5.461.

part of the symbolism as well and once we develop a notation in which what is meant by that sign can be expressed without our needing it, we will see that the "v" and "&" do not represent anything any more than the parentheses "(" or ")" do.

The significance of this point can be clarified by using a map as an analogy. Imagine a map with point A at the very top of the map and point B somewhere down at the middle of the map. Let us assume that the map has what Wittgenstein calls the right "logical multiplicity".⁴³ That is, the map's elements correspond to the objects in the world we are seeking directions to.

Now sometimes when we read a map, say, in order to establish directions to point C where C is between A and B, we sometimes talk to ourselves. For instance, we say, in order to orientate ourselves around the map, things like "A is to the north of B" and "B is to the south of C". When we do this, however, we often forget that we are now using sentences to convey our thoughts. Whereas before the map's elements were a sign by which the objects of the traveller's world were projected, now the map's elements in turn become the objects to which the words of our sentence get projected. Translating from one notation to another--from a map to a propositional sign system--is crucial for Wittgenstein, since it shows that when we think about a map, and then try to say what we think, we often overlook that we have used one notation to represent the sense of another. Just as

⁴³Ibid., 4.04.

a gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound-waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world

so too do the map and the propositional signs that we use to speak about it.⁴⁴ For Wittgenstein, we must not forget that when we read a map in the way I have described we forget that we are translating from one sign system into another, from the map to propositional signs.

A problem arises, however, with the propositional sign language that could not arise with the map sign language. For in the propositional sign language, I can formulate the proposition "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B". In the map sign language, such a proposition could not even be formulated. It is possible to use a map in a false way by reversing the points A and B on it. But however one uses the map to depict things, a nonsensical formulation on the map is not possible. The symbolism of the map prevents that kind of formulation. For the map has the right "logical multiplicity" with the objects to be measured. Our propositional sign language, on the other hand, has an excessive logical multiplicity for the job at hand.⁴⁵ It is because of this

⁴⁴Ibid., 4.014.

⁴⁵The map analogy as well as the term "excessive multiplicity" can be found in F. Waismann's *Theses*, a work that Wittgenstein and Waismann collaborated on. It was thought to represent a summary of Wittgenstein's ideas in the *Tractatus* as well as of his newer ideas that were being disseminated to the Vienna Circle and elsewhere. Due to Wittgenstein's lack of interest, *Theses* was never published in either Waismann's or Wittgenstein's lifetime. The principles behind it appeared in Waismann's *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, ed. R. Harre (London: Macmillan, 1965). *Theses* is

that we can formulate nonsensical combinations of signs in a propositional sign language.⁴⁶

Imagine for a moment that the (pseudo) sentence "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" troubles us. It is easy to see how this trouble might come about. For the sentence appears to describe an impossible state of affairs, indeed a necessarily impossible state of affairs. We think we need to account for this troublesome state of affairs. It strikes us as a sentence that must be prohibited. And so we try to develop a theory (such as Russell's theory of types) that determines the conditions under which sentences can be considered meaningful and the conditions under which they cannot. Whatever theory we develop, a consequence must be that "A is to the north of B and B is to the north of A" is excluded.

Because our language produces such nonsensical formulations, we think it needs to be reformed. Though it is true that the "tacit conventions" of ordinary language prevent us from getting confused about sentences such as "A is to the north of B and B is to the north of A".⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the risk exists that such

published in *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, pp. 233-261.

⁴⁶When Wittgenstein describes forms of description at *Tractatus* 6.341 and 6.342, he discusses optional nets that we may use to describe the world. He says "it might be that we could describe the surface more accurately with a coarse triangular mesh than with a fine square mesh". Wittgenstein was sensitive to the fact that for certain purposes a more complex language may actually be a hinderance for our descriptions, just as a propositional language raises problematical issues that the map does not.

⁴⁷See *Tractatus*, 4.002.

sentences may confuse us. Since everyday language allows these kinds of sentences, it is regarded as inadequate and as failing in an important respect.⁴⁸ We want to provide a theory of everyday language which can make it more of an ideal language where such confusions are not possible. We blame everyday language for this problem; we say that the theoretical perspective and analysis that we need to take towards it is prompted by the troublesome propositions that it allows.

Notice, however, that we are treating "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" as a proposition of our language. Though we may regard it as a peculiarly troublesome proposition, it is regarded as a proposition nevertheless. Another way of saying this is that in so far as we feel such a proposition needs to be accounted for and prohibited, we assume that "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" is indeed a proposition of our language. In short, we treat the puzzle that it poses as something that arises from everyday language (from "outside" of us) and not

⁴⁸Wittgenstein shared with Russell the assumption that everyday language allows formulations that can lead to confusion. See *Tractatus*, 3.322-3.325. But, unlike Russell, Wittgenstein felt that the possibility of such confusion did not point to a defect of everyday language. Russell thinks that some of the sentences of everyday language describe situations which are not possible given the true metaphysical description of the world. And he wants a theory to rule these sentences out. By contrast, Wittgenstein thinks that "all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order". See *Tractatus*, 5.5563. For him, the confusion that such propositions present are not defects of ordinary language, but rather defects of the way we look at ordinary language. By presenting a language with the exact logical multiplicity, Wittgenstein sheds light on the fact that it is the way we approach ordinary language, the way we forget that it is a sign system, that generates our puzzles about it.

something that arises from the way we look at language.

On Wittgenstein's line of thinking, "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" is not a proposition of our language at all. Rather, it is simply a combination of signs. For Wittgenstein, the mere fact that we can string signs together in a grammatically acceptable way does not mean that one has produced a proposition. Instead, "in order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense".⁴⁹ That is, a proposition must have a use, but the combination of signs "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" does not have one.

This is where the map analogy becomes especially useful. The map is a notation whose symbolism prevents the formulation of such sentences from the very beginning. When we use the map as our form of description, and not everyday language, it becomes clear that the puzzle that we have about "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" arises strictly from the symbolism.⁵⁰ That is, it arises from the fact that we approach everyday language from the

⁴⁹Ibid., 3.326. Also, in this context, see 3.327 and 3.328.

⁵⁰Wittgenstein must have seen this as early as 1913. In a letter to Russell concerning Russell's theory of types, Wittgenstein says,

What I am most certain of is not however the correctness of my present way of analysis, but of the fact that all theory of types must be done away with by a theory of symbolism showing that what seem to be different kinds of things are symbolized by different kinds of symbols which cannot possibly be substituted in one another's places.

Notebooks, p. 122.

wrong logical/linguistic point of view.

The desire to set up prohibitions for the sentences of everyday language is founded precisely on not recognizing that the puzzle such sentences pose arises from misunderstanding the way the language functions. In other words, by not paying attention to our propositional language as a sign system, we end up taking the puzzles that arise from the "excessive logical multiplicity" of our (propositional) language as genuine problems in their own right. The end result is that what is for Wittgenstein simply a by product of the excessive logical multiplicity of the propositional sign system is taken for "what is real", for what is genuine and for what needs to be accounted. And the theoretical "perspective" that we develop towards ordinary language which assumes that it needs to be reformed is taken as "unproblematic". That is, this "perspective", which is founded on precisely not understanding that the puzzles it examines arise from our misconstruing of the language, is taken for granted.⁵¹

⁵¹Mathematicians often feel that they can describe mathematics in a way that is philosophically "unproblematic". They can tell us, for instance, what constitutes a proof in mathematics, about the nature of contradictions, and so on. They typically forget, however, that to use prose to describe what they do mathematically is not to do mathematics. Prose is, as it were, a different calculus. When mathematicians describe their mathematical practice using prose they are using a different form of description with a different logical multiplicity. But there is what I have called a "by product" of using prose when describing mathematics, just as there is a "by product" of using a propositional sign language to describe a map. It is this "by product" that is the real interest of philosophers of mathematics. That is, what they are referring to, when they make assured claims about mathematical objects, is not really mathematics at all, but is really the "by product" of prose, the result of the "excessive multiplicity" of it, when describing mathematics. By reminding mathematicians-turn-

Russell approaches propositions as we in our example confusedly approach "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of b". Consider the proposition "the telephone is to the right of the coffee cup". Russell (at least in his earlier views) would see that proposition, if true, as identical to a fact. What the proposition is about are the objects "telephone" and "coffee cup" and the relation "to the right of". As we have seen Russell sees the relation as an objective property of the world; there just are things like relations. He asks: "What are the constituents of propositions, what are different propositions about?" But what brings his attention to propositions and their constituents in the first place is the prior assumption that objects and relations, as independently existing, Platonic-like entities, do not arise from him, from the way he misunderstands the language. In other words, he fails to see that the approach that he takes towards propositions that leads him to ask "What are the objective constituents of propositions?" is founded on the premise that these

philosophers that prose itself is a calculus, Wittgenstein hopes to show them that what they are trying to say philosophically is nonsense, and that they should give up trying to say it. As Wittgenstein says,

What is caused to disappear by such a critique are names and allusions that occur in the calculus, hence what I wish to call prose. It is very important to distinguish as strictly as possible between the calculus and this kind of prose. Once people have become clear about this distinction, all these questions, such as those about consistency, independence, etc., will be removed.

See Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, p. 149.

constituents are genuine objects. It is premised, that is, on looking at language from the wrong logical/linguistic point of view. Russell approaches propositions from a vantage point which says, as it were. "there is nothing wrong with this perspective. This perspective is not the result of reification. I am adding nothing to the phenomena".

But just as our puzzle about "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B" can be eliminated by describing a notation that has the right logical multiplicity, so too can Russell's theoretical approach to the proposition be challenged by translating his sentence "The telephone is to the right of the coffee cup" into a notation with the exact logical multiplicity. Such a notation would express everything that Russell's sentence expresses, namely that the telephone is to the right of the coffee cup, but in a form which precludes any question about relations being objective. In other words, just as we can use a map to convey directions without the possibility of raising the puzzle concerning "B is to the north of A and A is to the north of B"--since the form precludes it--so too can we use another notation to convey the sense of Russell's sentence with out any of his puzzles about constituent forms, objects and relations arising. When we use this notation to express the sense of the sentence, the "philosophy" (as Russell conceives it) drops out.

5. Analytic philosophy and the "grundgedanke"

Michael Dummett says that analytic philosophy was inaugurated by Frege with his recognition that considerations of language have important consequences for how we view logic and thought. The view is that classical logic started out with logic and thought and then studied language from that perspective. The new view, by contrast, is to start out with language and study thought and logic in terms of it. Dummett may be right that Frege inaugurated analytic philosophy in this sense. But the kind of analytic philosophy that is derived from Fregean view of language and thought is, in my view, hardly worth fighting for. This is not to say that Frege's and Russell's insight that considerations of language have consequences for logic is not important. But it must be seen that they regarded language, like Descartes, as a vehicle, as a medium, through which, once the proper notation was developed, we can discover the ultimate constituents of thought and logic. Language still figures second place to logic and thought in their scheme of things.

I should emphasize that my criticisms of Russell, particularly his fundamental mistake of confusing forms of representations for things, applies equally to Frege. Frege spoke of "a Thought" and identified it with the conceptual content of judgement, or that which exists independently of whether someone thinks the thought or not. His notion of "judgeable content", or "Thought", is thus closely allied to Russell's and Moore's conception of the proposition. And Wittgenstein in fact thought that both positions

were fundamentally flawed for the reason we have been discussing. He puts these reasons (albeit in a different terminology) in the "Notes on Logic" when he criticizes Frege's and Russell's positions as if they were of a piece.

Frege said "propositions are names"; Russell said "propositions correspond to complexes". Both are false; and especially false is the statement "propositions are names of complexes".⁵²

Wittgenstein thought that Frege and Russell had fundamentally missed the essential thing: the "conceptual content" of a proposition is what elucidates the sense of a proposition and for that reason cannot be spoken of or analyzed further in terms of a thing named, in terms of a quasi-scientific phenomenon.⁵³ I shall not discuss the question of propositions as names, though I think it can fit into the view of representation that I have been discussing.⁵⁴

The truly revolutionary view of the importance of language for philosophy came with Wittgenstein's insight that Russell's and Frege's study of logic by means of language had things reversed. It was a mistake to think that they were studying thought; for what

⁵²See *Notebooks*, p. 97.

⁵³For more on this see Gordon P. Backer & Peter M.S. Hacker, *Frege: Logical Excavations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 46-49.

⁵⁴Earlier we saw that Russell treats the meaning of a proposition as something that corresponds to a situation. Another way of saying this is to say that Russell treats propositions as names of situations. For a detailed look at this issue see Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1991), pp. 186-193.

they were studying were the "shadows" of language. For Wittgenstein, the logic that Frege and Russell thought they were discovering through an analysis of language was the product of the way they misconstrued linguistic forms, of the way they treated these forms as quasi-scientific objects. Frege and Russell did not inaugurate this view of the relationship between language and logic; on the contrary, they were very much trapped in the Cartesian's confusion of mistaking linguistic properties for properties of the world.

The view that "philosophical logic" presupposes a confused way of describing the language, that it is a consequence of misconstruing it, is expressed in Wittgenstein's fundamental thought "that the logical constants are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts". When Wittgenstein says that logical constants are not representative, he does not mean that Frege and Russell were mistaken in thinking that the ultimate logical constituents of language and the world were at a deeper level, say, one to be uncovered through the use of a simpler notation as in the truth tabular definitions.⁵⁵ His view

⁵⁵Robert Fogelin says,

The apparent existence of logical terms, logical propositions, and, hence, logical facts presents a fundamental challenge to Wittgenstein's working out of a picture theory of proposition meaning within the framework of his atomistic system. Wittgenstein's solution to this problem involves what I shall call a disappearance theory of logical constants.

Fogelin thinks that the role of the "grundgedanke" is to help in Wittgenstein's "picture theory of proposition meaning". He thus does not see it as encapsulating the rejection of the possibility

is much more radical than that. For such a view assumes that Wittgenstein and Frege and Russell basically shared the same program of getting the right logical notation so as to get past language in order to uncover thought. In other words, the assumption is that they shared the same view that language was a medium and that thought lay underneath or behind it. But Wittgenstein was not simply developing a simpler notation, he was saying that the whole project of theorizing about complexes or logical objects or anything else was misconceived. It was not a particular theory that was misconceived, whether it be that of Frege or Russell, it was rather that the whole idea that there was something "in the world" to refer to, and to theorize about, that was misconceived.⁵⁶

Consider again Russell's view of propositions as expressing functions. Russell was intent on discovering the ultimate relations between functions, for that would show the ultimate constituents of thought (and hence of the world). The symbol " $p \vee q$ ", for instance, represented a logical complex. The complex was

of theorizing in philosophy. See his *Wittgenstein*, p. 42.

⁵⁶In the introduction to the *Tractatus*, Russell speaks of the "amazing simplification of the theory of inference" contained in it, as if Wittgenstein's truth tabular construction of propositions from elementary propositions merely solved a problem, namely, the theory of inference, more successfully than Russell's approach. Undoubtedly, part of the reason why Wittgenstein felt that Russell's introduction contained nothing more than "superficiality and misunderstanding" was because Russell had missed the wider significance and anti-theoretical aim of Wittgenstein's so-called "theory" of inference. For Russell's introductory remark see *Tractatus*, p. xvi. For Wittgenstein's response to Russell see *Notebooks*, p. 132.

objective and independent of us. And the logical constant "v" was representative of the corresponding relation in the complex. Wittgenstein's "grundgedanke" was not to say that the logical complex was simpler than what could be represented by "v", as if a truth tabular definition could uncover the real logical atoms. Rather, by saying that the logical constant "v" did not represent, he meant that the whole idea that there was something "out there", something objective and independent for us to discover, was mistaken. For the "v" is part of the symbolism; it is not something that is represented, but rather is part of the manner in which representation is possible. That is, the "v" belonged to the form of representation, and Russell had confused it with a thing. This was the confusion at the basis of his whole idea that there was a realm of logical complexes to discover and theorize about.

The reason Wittgenstein's idea, that there are no logical constants, is so fundamental is that it implies a shift in our focus towards seeing what was traditionally called logic and thought as a reflection of our symbolism, our language.⁵⁷ When we

⁵⁷Wittgenstein had this idea very early. We find it expressed in the first letter written to Russell in June of 1912. See *Notebooks*, p. 120. This philosophical view may have been derived from Hertz' *The Principles of Mechanics*. Wittgenstein admired this book, and even thought of including a passage from it as the motto for the *Investigations*. Just as Hertz thought that there was no such thing as "force", so Wittgenstein, borrowing from Hertz, thought that there was no such thing as logical constants. Hertz writes,

We have accumulated around the terms "force" and "electricity" more relations than can be completely reconciled amongst themselves. We have an obscure feeling of this and want to have things cleared up. Our confused wish

do logic we are not describing features of a super-scientific world, we are describing our symbolism. This implies further a radical change in our conception of philosophy; philosophy does not discover patterns and forms "in the world", but rather describes the language. Wittgenstein's fundamental idea thus encapsulates the essence of the linguistic turn.⁵⁶

We should now have a clearer idea of why Dummett's view of the

finds expression in the confused question as to the nature of force and electricity. But the answer which we want is not really an answer to this question. It is not by finding out more and fresh relations and connections that it can be answered; but by removing the contradictions existing between those already known, and thus perhaps by reducing their number. When these painful contradictions are removed, the question as to the nature of force will not have been answered; but our minds, no longer vexed, will cease to ask illegitimate questions.

Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics*, trans. D.E. Jones and J.T. Walley (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 7-8.

⁵⁶There are other implications of his fundamental idea which we cannot discuss since it would take us too far off the track. For instance, not only does the "grundgedanke" signify the *reductio ad absurdum* of a super-scientific conception of philosophy, it involves criticism of attitudes at the heart of "the modern conception of the world". Our philosophical attitudes towards ethics, aesthetics, death and the meaning of life are all subject to criticism, thinks Wittgenstein, in so far as we treat these topics as "representatives", as subjects for philosophical reflection. The consequent idea of eliminating philosophical speculation on these topics by saying everything that can be said about philosophical propositions, and thereby exposing the speculative part as nonsense, may be partly behind the motto of his book, "and whatever a man knows, whatever is mere rumbling and roaring that he has heard, can be said in three words". Philosophical speculation is the "mere rumbling and roaring" which becomes recognized as such once the significance of the "grundgedanke" becomes clear. See *Tractatus*, p. 1.

inauguration of analytic philosophy is hardly worth fighting over. There are several generations of philosophers who have followed in Frege's and Russell's footsteps of treating language as a vehicle by which to study thought and logic. But in so far as they remain true to this orientation in philosophy, they remain trapped in the same fundamental confusions regarding "propositions" and "facts". The idea of theorizing about thought and logic, through a theory of propositions and language, rests squarely on a misunderstanding of propositions and facts. In particular, it rests on confusing one's way of talking about things for the things themselves. What puzzles philosophers like Russell about propositions and facts has nothing at all to do with propositions and facts themselves, but rather has to do with their peculiar way of approaching them in the first place. Scientists puzzle over facts; philosophers puzzle over their assumptions about facts and keeping these things straight seems to be the hardest thing there is.

THREE

REPRESENTATION AND THE LATER WITTGENSTEIN

1. Logic and sins

Russell once recounted an after-midnight visit in his room when an intense and obviously disturbed Wittgenstein woke him to discuss philosophy. After watching Wittgenstein pace silently back and forth for more than an hour, Russell finally asked him what he was thinking about; was it about logic or his sins? "Both" was Wittgenstein's reply, and he went back to his pacing.¹ Later, in a letter to von Ficker (a prospective publisher), we learn that there is perhaps more than a grain of truth to Russell's anecdote. For Wittgenstein says that the point of his *Tractatus* was an ethical one.² This, after some seventy pages on logic, and only a few remarks at the end on the topic on ethics itself.

Wittgenstein apparently believed that to think about the problems in one area in philosophy, namely logic, was at the same time to think about the problems in another area, namely, ethics. And in his later philosophy, this *prima facie* odd approach is reflected in the way he composed the remarks leading to *Philosophical Investigations*. For we now know that Wittgenstein originally intended the first 189 remarks of the *Investigations* to be the basis of a study on the foundations of mathematics, not one

¹Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 156.

²See Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 176.

devoted to the philosophical psychology as we now have it.' To many philosophers, who worry about very specific, even technical, problems in philosophy, Wittgenstein's approach must seem strange, even bizarre.

Wittgenstein's approach is perfectly understandable, however, once we understand his therapeutic conception of a philosophical problem and its relation to representation. As we have seen, in the case of the Cartesian as well as in the case of Russell, it is the initial approach that philosophers take towards language and the world that, for Wittgenstein, sets the framework for their questions and problems. That is why the problems of logic and the problems of ethics can be approached from the same vantage point; and that may explain why the problems of logic were the problems of his sins. He saw that the problems, whether logical or ethical, or mathematical or psychological, were created by the same initial approach philosophers took toward language, not by language itself. This approach, which Wittgenstein later characterized as "the decisive move in the conjuring trick", the "one which commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter", occurs right at the very beginning of philosophical thinking, and escapes notice

²Backer and Hacker show that during the composition of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein originally planned to append remarks on mathematics to the first 189 remarks. He changed his mind when his interest switched to philosophical psychology. But the fact that he thought he could substitute such diverse topics in this way helps to establish my view that Wittgenstein's interest lay in the initial entry or general approach philosophers took to the subject matter. See Gordon P. Backer & Peter M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 3.

because it is thought quite innocent.' The "solution" of the problems of philosophy in logic and ethics, mathematics and psychology lies in bringing this apparently innocent way of (mis)understanding the logic of the language in view. For only then will the philosopher "see the world aright".

So far we have seen that the approach common to Russell and the Cartesian is to look at language as a quasi-scientific object of philosophical investigation. But for Wittgenstein, language represents the world and it is a fundamental mistake to confuse the form it takes to do this with the way the world is. Indeed, the form language takes to describe the world must be presupposed in order to say something about the world. For Wittgenstein, a great many philosophical problems arise when language as a form of representation is approached as if it were something to be represented.

2. Wittgenstein, Kant and the nature of a philosophical problem

These ideas about language, representation and the world play an important role not only in Wittgenstein's early philosophy but in his later philosophy as well. That is, he continued to believe that philosophical problems arise because of the approach philosophers take toward language. To see this, it is helpful to keep in mind an analogy which can be found in Kant.

Before introducing the analogy, let me remark that I do not

'Investigations, 308.

consider Wittgenstein to be a Kantian. For one thing, whereas Kant was concerned with a critique of reason Wittgenstein was concerned with a critique of language, and whereas Kant was intent on drawing a priori limits to Knowledge, Wittgenstein was intent on showing the absurdity of drawing such limits.⁵ Nevertheless, Wittgenstein has an important affinity with Kant in his view that the problems faced by philosophers were the consequences of their way of looking at things, not problems in their own right. It is this affinity that I want to draw attention to.

The analogy from Kant that sheds light on Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems is found in Kant's defence of space as an a priori intuition in the "Transcendental Aesthetic".⁶ Kant says that the moment we try to delimit space, the delimitation occurs in space. Since every delimitation we make in space must already presuppose space, it seems that it is impossible to delimit space. At that point, thinks Kant, we have two options. We can take a sceptical position and declare that "since space cannot be delimited, our notion of space is unfounded". Or we can take Kant's famous "transcendental turn" and say that "the fact that we cannot delimit space shows that space is not the kind of thing that can be delimited, that it is not a thing, or a substantive, at all".

⁵For this point see Meredith Williams' "Wittgenstein, Kant, and the 'Metaphysics of Experience'," *Kantstudien*, 1990, vol. 81., p. 76.

⁶Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 69.

Kant is saying that because one cannot determine what space is, one should not draw the sceptical conclusion that our idea of it is ungrounded, uncertain or vacuous. On the contrary, all that this argument shows is that one is looking in the wrong place, i.e., "to the world". Far from being a reflection of the way the world is, Kant wants to say, our idea of space arises from the way we look at it, the way we represent it. By simply asking the question "What is space?", as if it were a property of the noumena, one attributes to the concept of space, a predicate, the possibility that space can be factually determined, whereas in reality it can never be determined that way.

I think it is helpful when reading Wittgenstein to keep Kant's "transcendental turn" in mind. For Wittgenstein, the philosophical question "What does a proposition (word) mean?", like the question Kant was concerned with regarding space, assumes that there is something that it means. Wittgenstein's response to this question, is to show that any philosophical account of the "meaning" of a proposition in terms of this something is inadequate. Like Kant, Wittgenstein shows that what allegedly corresponds to a proposition is in fact what is needed to understand it, just as any delimitation of space, must already presuppose space.

Moreover, also like Kant, Wittgenstein does not intend us to conclude from our inability to give a philosophical account of the meaning of a proposition that there is no account to be found, any more than that we should conclude that it is a fact about space that we will never be able to delimit it. Rather, like Kant,

Wittgenstein's point is that if our account always comes up empty that only goes to show that the problem of accounting for the meaning of a proposition arises from the way philosophers approach the proposition, not from the proposition itself.

We can put this point another way. Wittgenstein is neither presenting a thesis that the meaning of a proposition can be determined nor is he insisting that it cannot be determined. For in order for either of those options to be possible, the meaning of a proposition must be seen as a something; it must make sense to speak of the meaning of a proposition as an "it". But Wittgenstein's point is that the meaning of a proposition is not a thing at all; it is not a representative. What looks like a thing is really a projection of the philosopher's way of looking at things, of the philosopher's way of asking questions.

What I am saying is that the later Wittgenstein thinks, as does Kant in regard to space, that it is an illusion to think that there is anything beyond the proposition itself which is its meaning. He expresses this view in *Culture and Value* when he says that,

the limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence. (This has to do with the Kantian solution of the problem of philosophy).⁷

The reason why Wittgenstein says that one cannot go beyond "simply

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 10 (hereafter cited as *Culture and Value*).

repeating the sentence" is because there is nothing beyond to go to; the illusion that there is something beyond what the sentence says, some deeper fact corresponding to the sentence, arises from the way philosophers approach language, as something to be represented. A great deal of philosophical confusion, in other words, is due to philosophers' desire to go beyond the limits of the language, much as Kant thought that metaphysicians err in trying to go beyond the limits of experience. The crucial insight is to see that there is nothing to go beyond, and that thinking that there is, is itself the illusion.

One of the consequences of thinking that language corresponds to something is that we end up thinking about and questioning what we ourselves have put into things. What we think corresponds to language is in fact our own distorted way of looking at it. Wittgenstein expresses this view in the *Investigations*.

We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it. Impressed by the possibility of a comparison, we think we are perceiving a state of affairs of the highest generality.*

In order to become clearer about this remark it is helpful to refer back to the Kantian point about space and ask what is going wrong when we mistake space for something substantial? As we saw, for Kant, we have failed to see that our idea of space arises, not from the world, but from our way of representing it; space is not a representative. That means that to mistake space as a representative is to take the method of representing it as a thing-

**Investigations*, 114.

in-itself. But this is Wittgenstein's point too in the above remark. When philosophers ask about the meaning of a proposition and treat it as corresponding to something, they mistake the way it represents for a thing-in-itself.

Taking language for a representative has two consequences. First, as Wittgenstein says, philosophers think they see a state of affairs. Secondly, they think this state of affairs is of the highest generality. In terms of our Kantian example, even though our delimitations of space are inadequate, since we always discover that these delimitations presuppose another larger space, still, we feel we know that space **must** be delimited. The problem seems intractable; we can't say what space is, but we know it **must** be delimited. Similarly, with respect to the meaning of a proposition, we can't say what the meaning of a proposition is but we feel it **must** be determinate.

The idea now absorbs us, that the ideal "must" be found in reality. Meanwhile we do not as yet see **how** it occurs there, nor do we understand the nature of this "must". We think it must be in reality; for we think we already see it there."

This intractable dilemma leads Wittgenstein to say that the problem strikes philosophers to be of the "highest generality". For the very thing that tempts philosophers to present another interpretation or account of the meaning of the proposition is also the thing that prevents them from achieving it. The philosopher is on a logical merry-go-round.

'Ibid., 101.

One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.¹⁰

Following Wittgenstein's lead, we can break down the approach that he thinks philosophers often take in the following terms:

- A. Philosophers approach language, or a proposition, as if it corresponded to something, as if it were a quasi-scientific phenomenon. Analogously, this is the assumption that one makes when one thinks that space is a thing in-itself.
- B. When they question their subject matter with this approach they lose sight of the fact that what is troublesome about it comes from them; they project on to the phenomenon, what lies in the way they represent it.
- C. The intractability of the "problems" gives the appearance of a "state of affairs of the highest generality".
- D. But by trying to solve them, by seeking new philosophical solutions to them, one merely repeats the original approach all over again; "one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it".

By approaching language in the above way one unwittingly

¹⁰Ibid., 114. Wittgenstein begins this remark by paraphrasing proposition 4.5 of the *Tractatus*. He says, "'The general form of a proposition is: This is how things are.'--That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself over and over again'. These remarks on representation are thus aimed at what the later Wittgenstein saw as errors in his former view. As we shall see, the kind of mistakes that the early Wittgenstein makes was taken by the later Wittgenstein to be paradigmatic of the kinds of confusion to be found in philosophical discussion in general. I also think that, notwithstanding these mistakes, the later criticisms represent an extension of the main critical thrust of his early philosophy.

commits oneself to a process of endless questioning. We can never arrive at where we want to end up because the problems necessarily recede from us. The only way to get off this logical merry-go-round is by coming to grips with the illicit initial approach one takes towards language.¹¹

This makes it more understandable how a question, such as "What does a proposition mean?" is, for Wittgenstein, illegitimate in that it contains an implicit assumption which bars, in an a priori fashion, what is required to answer it. As in the question "What is space?", it implicitly assumes that all possible answers to it must lie "in the world", and not in something that we, as philosophers, bring to the world when we ask our questions. This point is reflected in step A given above.

By approaching the "problem" of the meaning of a proposition

¹¹Wittgenstein's conceives of philosophy as if we are trying to "catch" ourselves in a mirror, and each time taking our mirror image as proof that we were there all along. Another way of expressing part of this idea was given by Wittgenstein in his lectures to students in the 30's. In the context of a discussion of a popularizing book on science (the type Wittgenstein despised) he asked whether "the thumb-catcher is deluded or not?". What he meant by "the game of thumb catching" is recorded by Rush Rhees in his notes as follows.

I have been talking about the game of "thumb catching". What's wrong with that?--"thumb-catching": holding the right thumb, say, in the left hand, then trying to grasp it with the right hand. The thumb "mysteriously" disappears before it can be grasped.

What I am suggesting is that Wittgenstein understands philosophical confusion like he does the thumb catching game. Representing the form of representation is as futile as attempting to use one's hand to catch one's thumb. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein: Lectures and Conversations* ed. C. Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) p. 27.

as if it arose from the "outside", as it were, we treat it as a quasi-scientific phenomenon. It is assumed that the problems lie "in the world", as if they must lie there. And we make every attempt to "solve" them by inventing a philosophical theory. Here we have step B.

But in reality, that aspect of the problem which makes it look as if it must be in the world is the result of our implicit approach. It is our way of representing things that is being attributed to them, as a property of them. This is step C.

So when philosophers try to solve the problems, they run up against the forms of their language. They try to solve something that is unsolvable. By their own unacknowledged assumption, they place themselves in the position of having to represent the way in which they think about things. This means that no matter what theory they develop about the meaning of a proposition, they will always come up empty handed because they are actually chasing after the frame by which they represent it. This pursuit is unending. For in order to represent one's form of representation, philosophers must presuppose a new form of representation. This new form would again be projected outwards, and the entire process would repeat itself. This is step D.

Wittgenstein's aim, I am arguing, is to get philosophers to see the quasi-scientific approach that they unwittingly take towards language. It is helpful, in order to exemplify Wittgenstein's critique of this approach, to look at an example. Let me begin with his discussion of the word "cube" in the

Investigations. In this discussion, we shall see that Wittgenstein aims to undermine the legitimacy of our philosophical questions; he is not trying to answer them.

Wittgenstein raises the question: what does understanding the word "cube" consist in? At first, one might think that it consists in having a picture of a cube occur in one's mind. Understanding is applying this picture to the object. So that when presented with the object, one says that it is a cube because the object corresponds to the picture in one's mind. The picture "fits" the object. But Wittgenstein writes,

Perhaps you say: "It's quite simple;- if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture."- But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that it is quite easy to imagine a method of projection according to which the picture does fit after all.¹²

So how can understanding consist in having the picture occur before one's mind when one hears the word if that picture can be applied to two different things, one of which is not a cube? Don't we want to say in regard to the latter case that the person hasn't understood? And yet he does have the same picture. "Has it the same meaning both times?", Wittgenstein asks and replies, "I think we shall say not".¹³

But the philosopher is undeterred. Convinced that understanding must consist in some condition occurring in our

¹²Investigations, 139.

¹³Ibid, 140.

minds, we look for another interpretation which can explain it.

Suppose, however, that not merely the picture of the cube, but also the method of projection comes before our mind?--How am I to imagine this?--Perhaps I see before me a scheme showing the method of projection: say a picture of two cubes connected by lines of projection.--But does this really get me any further? Can't I now imagine different applications of this scheme too?¹⁴

Just as we can imagine different applications of the picture of the cube, so too we can imagine different applications of the picture of the cube plus its lines of projections. But what Wittgenstein is trying to expose here is not merely the failure of this particular explanation or interpretation. He is not just arguing against what might be called the inner mind model of understanding.¹⁵ He is trying to expose the assumption that such an explanation or interpretation is required at all. As each interpretation fails, one is tempted to think that another interpretation is "standing behind it" and which will account for what understanding a cube consists in once and for all. It is as if the ideal account is just around the corner. We fail to see that it is the way we ask the question, the way we look at things, which generates this demand for the ideal account in the first place.

As an alternative interpretation, we may suggest that

¹⁴Ibid., 141.

¹⁵Colin McGinn interprets Wittgenstein to be arguing against the inner mind model of understanding. See his *Wittgenstein on Meaning (An Interpretation and Evaluation)* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), chapter one.

understanding consists in the application of our words, and not in having a picture occur in the mind. Wittgenstein considers a "language game" between A and B. When A gives an order to B, B has to write down series of signs according to a certain formation rule. Wittgenstein asks: at what point will we say B understands? Say B copies the figures independently, but not in the right order. And then again he makes mistakes in the order. Or he makes systematic mistakes. Still B hasn't understood. But after a while he continues the series correctly, as we do it. Wittgenstein writes,

Suppose I now ask: "has he understood the system when he continues the series to the hundredth place?"...Has he got the system, if he continues the series correctly so far?—Perhaps you will say here: to have got the system (or, again, to understand it) can't consist in continuing the series up to this or that number; that is only applying one's understanding. The understanding itself is a state which is the source of the correct use.¹⁶

So, though understanding "occurs" somewhere between making systematic mistakes and giving the responses we would give, we do not want to admit that a particular number of responses is the understanding. On the contrary, we want to say that to give a particular number of correct responses is to give an application, an application which is already predetermined in some sense. Something like the picture in our mind, it seems, is the source of the correct use. Wittgenstein writes,

¹⁶Investigations, 146.

What is one really thinking of here? Isn't one thinking of the derivation of a series from its algebraic formula? Or at least of something analogous?--But this is where we were before. The point is, we can think of more than one application of an algebraic formula; and every type of application can in turn be formulated algebraically; but naturally this does not get us any further.--The application is still a criterion of understanding.¹⁷

So we have been driven back into thinking that understanding consists in having a picture or a formula appear before us which we then go on to apply. Unable to sustain the view that understanding consists in having a picture or formula occur to us, we think it must have something to do with the person's behaviour, the application he or she makes of the picture or formula. But this, in turn, proves futile, and we are driven back, once more, to the picture or formula as the source of understanding.¹⁸

Wittgenstein's point in demonstrating this oscillation between the picture on the one hand, and the application on the other, as alternative accounts of understanding is to show that the philosophical question "What does the meaning of a proposition (a

¹⁷Ibid., 146.

¹⁸Wittgenstein anticipates the development of this argument at remark 36 of the Investigations when he says,

And we do here what we do in a host of similar cases: because we cannot specify any one bodily action which we call pointing to the shape (as opposed, for example, to the colour), we say that a spiritual [mental, intellectual] activity corresponds to these words.

Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a spirit.

word) consist in?" is illegitimate. By showing that neither alternative offers a satisfactory account, he tries to portray the philosophical demand as standing by itself, emptied of the possibility of being satisfied. That is, if the demand for an account of meaning and understanding can be shown to persist at the very moment when all alternative accounts seem to fail then we might begin to wonder if there is something peculiar about our demand in the first place. This is the point at which we should begin to wonder whether we are involved in a "misunderstanding".¹⁹

The misunderstanding is to think that the philosophical problem about meaning lies "in the world" as opposed to the way philosophers look at it. By projecting on to the world what lies in the method of representing it, we are unwittingly led to believe that a philosophical explanation is required. Wittgenstein's critique of such explanations of meaning lie in showing that the problems of philosophy are in part the philosopher's own making and the result of their own projections. By showing that their approach to things is arbitrary, even obsessive, Wittgenstein hopes to undermine the philosopher's desire to offer philosophical explanations of them.

¹⁹In chapter four, I shall show that Kripke misinterprets Wittgenstein by failing to comprehend what Wittgenstein means by "misunderstanding" when he discusses the paradox of rule following at 201 of the Investigations.

3. The paradox of ethics

Another instance of how Wittgenstein understands philosophical problems in terms of the initial approach philosophers take towards language can be found in his "A Lecture on Ethics".²⁰ In this lecture, Wittgenstein is concerned with how to deal with a certain ethical paradox. We shall see that Wittgenstein conceived of this paradox, not as a paradox in its own right, but like Kant, as a paradox arising from the way philosophers look at things.

In the lecture, Wittgenstein discusses what we mean in ordinary life when we say that something is good. He elicits two general meanings. First, we say that something is good relative to something else. "He is a good tennis player" may mean that a person is a good player relative to other tennis players that we have seen. Secondly, we say that something is good absolutely. According to Wittgenstein, this is the sense of the word that philosophers try to clarify in ethics.

But, for Wittgenstein, though we may easily recognize an ethical action as absolute in ordinary life, saying what makes it so is not easy. In fact, he maintains that it can't be done at all. For, according to him, any attempt to say what the conditions for an ethical action are makes the judgement relative, and, therefore, not absolute. For instance, if we say "one ought not to steal" and justify it by saying, "because it hurts people's

²⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 1 (January, 1965). Hereafter cited as "A Lecture on Ethics".

feelings" or "it hurts the common good", we make our proposition relative to the value we place on not hurting people or on promoting the common good. Moreover, if I do not care, for instance, about the common good, the proposition that I should not steal will have no effect on me. On the other hand, I might care about the common good more than anything else, and thus have a personal motive to obey the proposition but that still makes my proposition about the common good relative to the value I place on it. It makes the proposition relative, whereas, according to Wittgenstein, ethical propositions, as we seem to understand them in ordinary life are not relative, but if anything seem to be absolute.

Wittgenstein says that the essence of the difference between relative and absolute judgements of value is that "every judgement of relative value is a mere statement of facts and can be put in such a form that it loses all the appearance of a judgement of value".²¹ That is what we do when we say that "one ought not to steal because it hurts the common good". In other words, that is simply an utterance of the fact (which may be debated) that if one doesn't want to hurt people one shouldn't perform such and such an action. The utterance is on the same level as warning a child that eating too many treats will make him or her feel ill. It is simply a statement of a fact.

But, for Wittgenstein, ethical statements are never statements of fact:

²¹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

although all judgement of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgement of absolute value.²²

That is why he holds that one cannot say what the conditions of an ethical proposition are. For any attempt to say what these conditions are inevitably ends up being a description of mere facts, and "no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgement of absolute value."²³ We shall discuss what is meant by "saying" in a moment.

Thus, we have a paradox. We know, in ordinary life, what an ethical statement amounts to. But any attempt to articulate this statement degenerates into a description of facts which we reject as constituting anything amounting to what is ethical about it. It seems that no account of ethics is possible. As Wittgenstein says, we face a "paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value".²⁴

There seem to be two options we can take to meet the paradox. The first is to dispute the claim that we can never describe the "absolute" sense of the ethical statement. Perhaps we simply haven't tried hard enough to characterize what it consists in? The second is what I call "ethical naturalism".²⁵ On this option, we

²²Ibid., p. 6.

²³Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴Ibid., p. 10.

²⁵By "ethical naturalism" I mean to include any view of ethics which holds that an absolutist account is wrong. Thus, positivists such as Schlick are considered naturalists, and emotivists, such as

deny that ethical judgements can be defined at all and instead think the "absolute" sense can be accounted for by some other means, on naturalistic grounds. After all, if every attempt to account for the "absolute" sense of our ethical actions ends being a description of mere facts, that may just indicate that there is no such sense to begin with, that what we call the "absolute sense" is actually something else.

There seems to be a good reason to take the first option, since if it is true that every account we may give of an ethical judgement involves a description of mere facts, then that itself, in a backhanded way, provides the definition that we require. What I mean is that we can define what is ethical about the judgement as that which cannot be described by facts. Granted that this is a negative definition, but it seems to nevertheless point us in the right direction. For the definition does seem to help us separate genuine ethical judgements from those that are mere factual expressions, or expressions of experience.

Consider the following scenario which exemplifies the absolutist approach.²⁶ Imagine that a letter of recommendation that has been written about me has been delivered to me by mistake. Instead of reading the letter, I send it unread to the intended destination. I commend myself for my good deed. I recognize that

Ayer and Carnap, are considered naturalists on my account.

²⁶I have discussed this scenario in the first-person. I have done so in the effort to show how a worry about the conditions for an ethical statement can be at the same time a worry about our own ethical behaviour and our desire to do the right thing.

my action was what we call ethical. And if I commend myself, I must surely know what makes my deed ethical. I should be able to say what makes this ethical action ethical.

But what does it mean to judge that "I've done something good" in this circumstance if not simply that though it was in my interest to read the letter, I acted against my interest? Why do I think that acting against my interest is right? On the face of it, what makes it the right thing is that whereas most other people in the same circumstances might have read the letter, I acted differently from them. But a favourable comparison between how I acted and how others would have acted does not seem to get me any closer to understanding my deed as ethical. For that has just made the attribution of my doing the right thing relative to the value I place on comparing my action with others. And, since, as Wittgenstein reminds us, "all judgments of relative value can be expressed as a statement of fact", that would be no more than to state the fact that, for instance, in order to achieve a certain high regard in comparison with others, I must not do what others would do, i.e., read the letter.

It appears, then, that I had no business commending myself for my action after all. For there is nothing in it which is recognizably ethical. My attempt to describe the conditions of my ethical deed has deteriorated into a description of the relative (in this case, higher) value I place on my action vis-a-vis others. Indeed, far from commending myself for my action, there is more reason to condemn myself for deceiving myself into believing that

I performed that action out of lofty, ethical reasons as opposed to doing it out of a self-interested comparison with others.

Notice the dynamic. We perform what everyone would consider an ethical action. But upon reflecting on it, we realize that there is nothing ethical in it at all. On the contrary, in so far as we have deluded ourselves into thinking that the action was done for "higher" values, when it was really done from self-interested ones, we realize how far removed we are from genuine ethical action. We think there is something ethical in our action, but when we try to find out what it consists in, we cannot find it; in fact, our action is the antithesis of an ethical action. Are we, then, to think that there is nothing ethical about our actions?

We might pause at this point and consider whether we must follow up this "naturalistic" conclusion. For the fact that our attempt to discover what our ethical deed consists in comes up empty might suggest, not that we have been misled into thinking that there is anything ethical about it, but that we are looking at our deed in a particular way, one that leads us to this apparently inevitable conclusion. We shall discuss this option in a moment.

Another way of dealing with the paradoxical situation, however, would be to try again to discover what is ethical about our action. And, as I said earlier, there appears to be a good reason to take this alternative. I now realize that my action was self-interested. But in recognizing this, despite my original self-deception, mustn't I already know what an ethical action would look like by comparison? After all, I am saying that I should be

condemned for disguising my base, self-interested motive for an ethical one. Don't I know, then, what an ethical action amounts to, if only to determine that my former action did not count as one?

Prima facie, this attempt at avoiding the paradox, by disputing the claim that one cannot define or say what an ethical action amounts to, seems successful. Though our account of our action may at first degenerate into a description of mere facts, which, it must be granted, have nothing to do with the "absolute" sense that is used in ethics, still, our recognizing that a description of facts cannot account for ethical actions only serves to emphasize that we are operating with a very definite standard as to what the ethical sense is. It would seem, then, that we need not conclude in a naturalistic way that there is nothing to our ethical action.

This attempt to meet the paradox is only apparently successful however, since the paradox has only shifted to a new level. To see this, we need only ask why it is that I think that by exposing my action to be a self-interested one I have thereby implicitly provided myself with a standard of morality? Why does the fact that I now recognize that my prior action was self-interested, provide me with a standard of morality in any sense? Why should knowing a particular thing count as having any more value than any other facts? Indeed, when you think about it, what I am actually doing is making another favourable comparison of myself with those who would not or could not recognize in the same circumstances that

their actions were motivated by self-interest. "I am better than them"; that is the sentiment that I am trying to express when I dig down deeper into my motivations and recognize that I am capable of recognizing my motivations for what they are while others are not. But so what? Why should the fact that I am able to expose the self-interested basis of my actions bring me any closer to an understanding of morality?

It is no use protesting "But surely recognizing that I recognize that it was out of self-interest that I did the right thing brings me closer to understanding morality?" For "recognizing that I recognize something" is another contingent fact. It involves another favourable comparison with those who fail to recognize that they recognize, and so on. And again, so what?

The option of meeting the paradox by seeking better and better descriptions of what is ethical in our action does not seem to bear fruit. In fact, we seem to be involved in a logical regress. At the moment when we feel that we can grasp what is ethical in our action, it slips from our reach, and transforms itself into a mere statement of fact, and of relative value. What conclusions must we draw in the face of this regress?

Ethical naturalism may seem to be the only option left. For if the sense of an ethical proposition cannot be described at all, then that seems to imply that the "absolute" sense that we attribute to our ordinary ethical actions is really illusory. Wittgenstein writes,

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 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 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.²⁷

Ethical naturalism denies that there is anything to the "absolute" sense of value that we think is expressed in an ethical claim. Instead, ethical naturalism tries to account for the appearance of this sense of our ethical propositions by explaining that it is really nothing more than a sublimated expression of more basic desires, something which can be revealed through a proper analysis of our expressions.

There is, however, the other alternative briefly indicated above. Perhaps what the regress shows is not that one should try again to capture what we think is ethical in our actions; for, as we have seen, such an attempt seems always to end in mere expressions of relative value. But neither does it show that there is no absolute sense to our ethical actions, as the ethical naturalist suggests. Instead, perhaps what the regress shows is that our whole approach toward ethical propositions is fundamentally misguided.

²⁷"A Lecture on Ethics", p. 11. A psychoanalytic or sociological analysis are presumably examples of the kinds of things that Wittgenstein means by "logical analysis". Each tries to account for what we would like to think are our religious or ethical beliefs by showing them to be the result of more basic, naturalistic conditions.

We shall examine in a moment Wittgenstein's characterizations of this misguided approach in ethics. But before we do so, it will be to our advantage to keep in mind our discussions of Kant in light of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical problems. For just as we witnessed the interlocutor's futile attempts in the *Investigations* to ground the meaning of propositions "in the world", so too there is a lesson for us, as we witness the futility of our own attempts to ground the meaning of our ethical actions "in the world". But recall that the lesson that the interlocutor learned in face of a regress of futile attempts to ground the meaning of propositions "in the world", was not that there is no meaning to our propositions. Rather, the lesson was that the interlocutor was looking at propositions in the wrong way. In particular, the lesson was that the interlocutor was looking at the proposition in a quasi-scientific way, and treating it as something to be explained. The decisive insight is realized when the interlocutor begins to question the whole attempt to explain the meaning of the proposition and to question whether there is any thing to refer to, or to theorize about. In the language of the *Tractatus*, the decisive insight occurs when the interlocutor realizes that there is nothing to say, when it is realized that the idea of there being meanings is illusory.

Similarly, with regard to our ethical action, the lesson that Wittgenstein intends us to draw in face of our own regress, and in face of our own attempts to characterize our ethical actions is not the lesson that the naturalist draws, i.e., that there is nothing

to our ethical actions. Rather, the lesson is that we are looking at ethical actions the wrong way. In particular, the lesson, says Wittgenstein, is that we should give up on trying to say what ethical actions consist in. As Wittgenstein says elsewhere,

When you bump against the limits of your own honesty it is as though your thoughts get into a whirlpool, an infinite regress: You can say what you like, it takes you no further.²⁸

"Saying" takes you no further, not because you can never get at the ethical sense, as in ethical naturalism, but because ethics is not the kind of thing to be explained in the first place.²⁹

The ethical paradox lies with those who attempt to say or explain what the conditions of ethical propositions are. Saying "takes you no further" because saying characterizes the approach of seeking an explanation to ethics; and that approach lands one in

²⁸Culture and Value, p. 8.

²⁹The implication in the *Tractatus* that one cannot say what ethics is has appeared to some to be self-refuting. For to make that claim, it seems, is to say something about ethics after all. That is the way Russell interpreted Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Tractatus*; "what causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said". Russell no doubt felt that to say that ethics cannot be described is to describe ethics after all. And thus Russell tried to turn the table on Wittgenstein's claim, arguing that what cannot be described is, after all, describable.

But this is a mistaken interpretation. For Wittgenstein is not saying that "one cannot speak about ethics" in a manner that could be disputed. In other words, it does not represent "information" about ethics; the remark is not intended to be argumentative, as Russell assumes. Rather than being a claim about "the world", his remarks about ethics stand to the side of any statement about what ethics is or is not. Instead, such remarks deride the whole attempt to say what ethics is or what it is not. It is addressed to philosophers, with their misguided tendency to explain everything. For Russell's remark, see *Tractatus*, p. xxi.

paradox.³⁰ In other words, the ethical paradox lies with those who approach ethics in a quasi-scientific way which presumes that ethics is something to be discovered, talked about, theorized about, said.

The idea that "saying takes you no further" was earlier expressed in Wittgenstein's remark that,

the limit of language is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence. (This has to do with the Kantian solution of the problem of philosophy).³¹

On Wittgenstein's view, it is an illusion to think that there is anything more to the sentence than what it says. For him, this illusion is found in ethical theorizing as well. We feel that there must be something behind our ethical statements, something which accounts for them, something to which they correspond. But each attempt to say what this something is ends in a description of mere facts. But what be questioned is the illusion that there is something behind our judgements in the first place. It must be seen that it is the way we approach ethical judgements that creates the illusion of something to be explained.

This point comes out more clearly in Wittgenstein's discussion

³⁰It is important to notice that on Wittgenstein's view in ordinary life we simply make ethical statements, without also saying (in the requisite sense) what the conditions are for making them. Often this distinction is overlooked so that Wittgenstein looks like he is denying any value to religious or ethical talk. But he is only objecting to a particular way of approaching ethical and religious propositions, not to these propositions themselves.

³¹Culture and Value, p. 10.

of miracles in "A Lecture on Ethics". It seems to be certain that there is no such thing as a miracle. Unlike ethics, where we at least hold out the hope of describing its essential features, we feel that there is no such hope with regard to miracles. It seems to be a scientific fact that there is no such thing as a miracle. We know that what is called a "miracle" is nothing other than a name of some natural phenomena not yet explained. Any other way of thinking about miracles leads to superstition.

But does the fact that we can never find a miracle prove that there are no miracles? That is what we seem to want to say. We want to say that there is no evidence for miracles in the world and for that reason we are justified in thinking that there are none. But this reasoning contains an implicit assumption which guides us to these apparently inevitable conclusions. The assumption is that miracles are the kind of thing that require justifying, explaining and finding evidence for. That is, the assumption is that the way to look at a miracle is the same as the way to look at a scientific fact, as something that requires a justification by appeal to evidence. In other words the assumption is that miracles, like propositions, have something corresponding to them, something that accounts for them.

But it is not that science has proved that there are no miracles. "The truth is", says Wittgenstein, "that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle".³² And ethics, like miracles, "so far as it springs from

³²"A Lecture on Ethics", p. 11.

the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolutely valuable, can be no science".³³ The point is that by approaching miracles in a quasi-scientific manner, we impose conditions on miracles that they cannot possibly fulfil. When they do not fulfil them, we "blame" the miracle, so to speak; we deny that there is anything miraculous to them. It never occurs to us to question the way we think about miracles, as things to be represented and explained.

For Wittgenstein, we approach miracles from the wrong point of view. Given this approach, we become trapped in an argumentative framework that restricts our thinking about miracles into two basic alternatives. Either we must explain miracles (or ethics), or we must admit that they cannot be explained, that they must be accounted for on purely naturalistic grounds. But the possibility that it is our way of looking at things that makes ethical actions and miracles appear to require explaining in the first place, never occurs to us.³⁴

Another way of saying this is that philosophers constantly confuse ethical actions--the kinds of actions that we recognize in ordinary life on a daily basis when we are not philosophically prejudiced--with these same actions looked at from a particular, philosophical-cum-scientific point of view. The consequence is that what philosophers think they are explaining is really the form

³³Ibid., p. 12.

³⁴To say that it makes no sense to assert philosophically that "there are miracles" or "there are no miracles" says nothing about the question of whether I believe in miracles in ordinary life.

which our ethical behaviour takes. Ethics, contrary to our strongest inclinations, is not "in the world". Rather, as Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus*, "ethics is transcendental".²⁵ And what philosophers think they are explaining, is in fact the logic of ethical language, the form of our ethical behaviour, what we call an ethical action.

To see this more clearly consider that when Socrates asks "What is justice?" in *The Republic*, he typically focuses on an exemplary example of an ethical action in order to tease out what makes the example ethical, to see what grounds it. Wittgenstein thinks, by contrast, that in doing this the "conjuring trick" has already been committed. By looking through the exemplary example, in seeking its ground, Socrates ignores everything about the action that helps us identify the action as ethical. The circumstances surrounding the action represent the way we identify ethical actions; they represent the form that determines correct ethical behaviour. In trying to provide a foundation to the action, Socrates ends up treating the way we represent and identify ethics as something to be itself represented. In other words, Socrates take the form by which we identify ethical actions in everyday life, as itself something that is ethical. It is this form, looked upon from a quasi-scientific point of view, that is the real object of Socrates's explanations.

Of course, ethical philosophers, such as Socrates, are not explaining anything at all. For what appears to be something to be

²⁵*Tractatus*, 6.421.

explained is the result of trying to go beyond the forms of the language and trying to say something more than what can be expressed by the ethical judgements alone. What appears to be an ethical judgement to be explained is really part of the way we represent ethical judgements to ourself, part of the form that they take. Philosophers who try to explain ethics are running "against the boundaries of language".³⁶

4. Metaphysics or nonsense

It is important to see that there have been two fundamentally different ways of responding to Wittgenstein's views on ethics. On the one hand, there is the view of the logical positivists who think that for Wittgenstein ethical propositions are nonsense.³⁷ On the other hand, there is the view, notably taken by Malcolm, that ethics is metaphysical, but that our language is incapable of grasping it; "Wittgenstein did not reject the metaphysical; rather,

³⁶"A Lecture on Ethics", p. 12. Similar remarks were expressed by Wittgenstein in his conversations with members of the Vienna Circle. See Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, pp. 92-93.

³⁷A.J. Ayer thinks that so-called ethical propositions are not factual ones and are therefore nonsense. And so he tries to account for the appearance of their "absolute" sense in another way. It is interesting to note that Ayer disagrees with the empiricists in trying to account for absolute sense naturalistically. On the contrary, he agrees that ethical statements are "necessary" and not contingent, but that they are necessary because they are not cognitive, but rather emotive. See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Dover, New York, 1946), chapter six.

he rejected the possibility of stating the metaphysical".³⁸ Depending on what aspects of Wittgenstein's remarks one focuses on, it is easy to see why these two different ways of reading Wittgenstein would develop. For Wittgenstein does say over and over again that any attempt on the part of philosophers to describe the "absolute" sense in ethics is nonsense; what we get is always a description of relative value, i.e., a factual description. These remarks seem to support the positivist interpretation of Wittgenstein that ethics was plain nonsense. On the other hand, unlike the positivists, Wittgenstein expressed a deep respect for those who run against the boundaries of language and says that he "would not, for my life, ridicule it".³⁹ Such a remark seems to support Malcolm's interpretation that ethics is metaphysical, but that it cannot be talked about.

Basically, what we have in these two positions are the two sides of the paradox that we discussed earlier. We feel that ethics must be explainable, but all attempts to do so, seem to fail. We know that ethical propositions exist but we are unable to say what their existence consists in. That is Malcolm's point. The other alternative was to say that since we can never say what ethics is then why should we believe that there is such a thing. The conclusion was that there is nothing to ethics, despite what we might think. This is what I earlier called the position of the

³⁸Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1967), vol 8., p. 331.

³⁹"A Lecture on Ethics", p. 12.

ethical naturalist and it expresses the positivist's point.⁴⁰ But just as Wittgenstein had a third alternative to the ethical paradox, so too there is an alternative to the two ways of interpreting Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics. The third option is to recognize that what proponents of these two positions are fighting over is not ethics at all, but an illusion resulting from their wrong way of looking at it. That is, they project their assumption that ethics is something that can be represented and said, and in so doing, treat what merely helps us to represent ethical judgements as something to be represented. They are fighting over the result stemming from this fundamental confusion.

In short, Malcolm and the positivists are arguing over a puzzle that arises from their shared way of looking at ethics; importantly, they are not arguing about ethical propositions themselves. Thus they share in the same problem that we saw philosophers following in the footsteps of Russell's "new way of propositions" share. Just as Russell had a failed idea of what a proposition is, so Malcolm and the positivists have a failed idea of what an ethical proposition is. It is a philosopher's game that they are playing and Wittgenstein is trying to show the absurdity

⁴⁰Wittgenstein is against the positivists (naturalists or emotivists) in ethics in that he sees something important about the "absolute" sense of ethics. But he supports the positivist's critique of the bogus talk that is used by absolutists in ethics to justify that sense. Wittgenstein's view is that we can't justify this sense (absolutist), nor can we not justify this sense (naturalist), but rather that what we think we are justifying or not justifying is not the kind of thing to be approached that way. What we think we are justifying (or not justifying) is the form by which ethical actions are justified in real life.

of the game, not trying to say anything one way or the other about ethics itself.

FOUR

THERAPY OVERLOOKED: THE LATER PERIOD

1. Kripke and the "Wittgensteinian Paradox"

We have seen that throughout his philosophy, Wittgenstein is concerned with showing philosophers that what they typically take to be something requiring explaining and justifying is in fact no such thing. When philosophers reflect upon ideas and propositions, whether they be of ethics or of epistemology, they confuse what are the result of their misguided way of looking at things for what are genuine propositions and ideas. By looking at Wittgenstein's views on representation, we have seen how Wittgenstein articulates this therapeutic view by showing that philosophers confuse what helps to represent things with what is represented.

The failure to keep in mind that Wittgenstein is criticising the philosopher's approach to things has generated confusion in interpreting key Wittgensteinian ideas. Perhaps no better example of this confusion can be found than in the discussions surrounding what Wittgenstein means by following a rule. In what follows, we shall see that the overlooking of the therapeutic dimension of Wittgenstein's thought vitiates the alternative accounts of Kripke, Malcolm and Baker and Hacker. After showing this, I shall show a similar failure to consider the therapeutic aspect of the *Tractatus* has led to an equally damaging misunderstanding of the fundamental ideas of that book.

First, let us consider the much discussed "paradox" of rule-

following at section 201 of *Investigations*. In this section, Wittgenstein summarizes his previous discussion relating to what it means to follow a rule in the form of a paradox.

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.

The first question that we need to address concerning the paradox is to whom the "our" refers, whose paradox is it? Does the "our" refer to us as we go about our everyday life? Or does it refer to philosophers who look at rules in a particular way? My contention is that the paradox is one that arises for philosophers who look at rules in a particular way. I do not think that Wittgenstein ever meant to deny that anyone who speaks of rules as determining actions is somehow open to paradox.

Saul Kripke, in his *Wittgenstein: On Rules and Private Language*, assumes, in contrast to my contention, that the issue is not how philosophers think about or approach rules, but about how we normally think about them.¹ That is, he thinks that the "our" that Wittgenstein mentions refers to anyone who happens to think about rules. When we do think about rules, says Kripke, we will see the import of Wittgenstein's paradox as showing that there are no facts for rule-following to consist in. His view of

¹Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein: On Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) (hereafter cited simply as "Kripke").

Wittgenstein's argument is that since our words can always be misapplied in the future, there is nothing that we can point to (no facts about ourselves) that determines the meaning of our words in the present. More precisely, whenever we think that a rule justifies our present use of a word, we may posit a parallel rule which is identical to the first rule in its past applications, but differs from it in future applications. Any "fact about my past history", anything "that was ever in my mind, or in my external behaviour", that we might appeal to in order to justify the first rule as the one that determined our present use of a word, can equally well be used to justify the parallel rule as determining it.² Since the divergence in application between the two rules occurs only in the future, and since, by definition, future uses have yet to occur, there is nothing that we can point to, no fact in the world, which can assure us that it was not really the parallel rule that determined our use of the word. Perhaps, says Kripke, we merely thought it was the first rule that determined it, but it was really the parallel rule. Worse still, thinks Kripke, if there is nothing in the world to distinguish the first rule from the parallel rule, then wherein lies the confidence that our use was determined by a rule at all?

Kripke concludes that Wittgenstein is presenting "the most radical and original sceptical problem that philosophy has seen to date".³ Moreover he thinks that Wittgenstein responded to this

²Ibid., p. 13.

³Ibid., p. 60.

sceptical problem by proposing a "sceptical solution" to the paradox which involves the community as the determining factor in conveying meaning to our actions.

Kripke's view then is that anyone who takes facts about people to determine whether the rule for an action is justified is basically confused. What Wittgenstein is showing, he contends, is that though we may think that a fact backs up the rule, actually it must be something else. Moreover, if there is not something else determining the action, says Kripke, we face scepticism. This means that in everyday language, our talk about rules determining this or that action is really misleading. On Kripke's view, our standard justifications about these rules ends up being paradoxical.

One difficulty with Kripke's view is that it conflicts with Wittgenstein's remark that "philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it, it leaves everything as it is".⁴ And, contrary to what Kripke would have us believe, Wittgenstein says that it is not his "aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways".⁵ For him, "philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.--Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain".⁶ Such remarks clearly move in the opposite direction from Kripke's

⁴Investigations, 124.

⁵Ibid., 133.

⁶Ibid., 126.

interpretation of the paradox which assumes that everyday talk about rules is somehow paradoxical and in need of a philosophical explanation or a sceptical solution.

On the other hand, there seems to be something right about Kripke's understanding of the paradox in so far as he takes it as directing us away from looking to facts in the world in order to explain our notion of a rule. Wittgenstein does indeed argue that there is nothing that can explain our notion that a rule determines our action.⁷ For when we try to explain our action by reference to a rule, Wittgenstein says that "every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule". And this means that "if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it". It does seem then that Wittgenstein is denying that our actions can be explained by reference to a rule.

We need, therefore, to reconcile Wittgenstein's apparent view that rules cannot explain our actions with his view that everyday talk of rules as determining actions is perfectly acceptable and not in need of philosophical reform or revision. In my view, this can be done by recognizing that Wittgenstein's target in the

⁷There are many passages where Wittgenstein says that the rules are autonomous. For instance, he says,

Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary.

See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. A.J.P. Kenny (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 184.

paradox was not the everyday use of the word "rule" at all, but rather the idiosyncratic way in which he thinks philosophers think of rules. And further, we must recognize that the idea expressed in the paradox, that we cannot explain our action by reference to a rule, is aimed at the philosopher's conception of rules.

In my view, in contrast to Kripke's, Wittgenstein is saying that nothing can explain our notion of a rule determining our actions because rules are not the kind of things requiring philosophical explanations at all. In other words, to talk of rules determining our actions makes perfectly good sense; it is rather the way philosophers typically talk about rules, as explanations of actions, that is problematic. Wittgenstein's view is that of course nothing "in the world" can help solve the problem of what we mean by our actions, since the whole idea that there could be a problem about rules that requires an explanation arises from the way philosophers typically look at things.

This means that Kripke's interpretation, that there are no facts in the world that explain what rule-following consists in, has too narrow a notion of "the facts". For he contrasts "the facts" over and against a conception of community agreement, as one potential answer among others to the question of meaning. But Wittgenstein is not rejecting "the facts" considered as the basis of one potential answer to the problem of meaning, but rather is rejecting them in so far as they are considered as the basis of an answer as such. In other words, his view of the facts is broader than Kripke's. He contrasts the facts over against the

philosopher's way of looking at things. Thus Kripke fundamentally misinterprets the intent of the paradox. Wittgenstein's point is not to show that there is no meaning to our actions on the grounds that there are no facts in the world for meaning to consist in. Nor is his object to come up with a better account of meaning in face of a thoroughgoing scepticism. Rather he wishes to emphasize that the location of the **problem** of meaning is in the way philosophers typically look at things. Wittgenstein's idea is that once we see this, we will not be as tempted to ask philosophical questions about things as we were likely to do before; the very urge to offer philosophical interpretations or explanations will no longer arise.

This point is crucial for understanding Wittgenstein's remark on rule-following at 201. I quote it in full because it is the second part of the remark, the part that Kripke ignores, that provides the clue to Wittgenstein's intentions.

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action could 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.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shows 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.

Hence there is an inclination to say: every

action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression for another.

What the paradox is supposed to highlight, says Wittgenstein, is the fact that in the course of the argument, we give one interpretation after another. And from this, he says, we can see that there is a misunderstanding. The misunderstanding makes us give one interpretation after another. The misunderstanding Wittgenstein speaks of here refers to the demand that an interpretation, a general explanation, is required in the first place. At the very moment when the paradox seems to show that meaning cannot be accounted for, we experience a compulsion to offer yet one more interpretation. Wittgenstein asks: "Why is that? Isn't there a misunderstanding here?"

We are chasing our tail: this is what Wittgenstein means when he says that "in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it".⁹ And the "misunderstanding" which this reveals refers to the implicit assumption, that the "meaning" of a proposition is a representative, and is something to be explained. The fact that we feel compelled to give one interpretation after another only shows, for Wittgenstein, that we are looking at things the wrong way.

⁹The "thumb catching" game that we saw earlier is pertinent here. The misunderstanding that Wittgenstein would like us to recognize is that we have projected on to things the form of representing it and that like in the thumb catching game we are trying to "catch" or understand what is necessary for "catching" or understanding.

Against the background of the paradox, our compulsion to offer yet one more account of the rule, far from being the innocent step that we think it is, may just as well be interpreted as the result of a brute, arbitrary commitment to a general explanation. What the paradox shows is that there seems to be little reason why we must follow the philosopher towards this general explanatory account of rules. And it is in this questioning of the need for a philosophical explanation or interpretation of rules that Wittgenstein appeals to what "is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases". The message of the paradox is not that there are no rules, but that we must question the need to look at rules in an explanatory way.

Another way of saying this is that the message of the paradox is to question philosophers' obsession with general explanations and their disregard for descriptive accounts of actual cases. In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein says that "when Socrates asks the question 'what is knowledge?' he does not even regard it as a preliminary answer to enumerate cases of knowledge".⁹ This illustrates, Wittgenstein adds, the philosopher's "contemptuous attitude towards the particular case". It is this contemptuous attitude towards actual cases that is reflected in philosophers' questions about the meaning of an action, of a rule, of a proposition. They ask such questions without even considering, even as a preliminary answer, descriptions of the actual cases in

⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. R. Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 20.

which the action, rule or proposition has its life. This is not to say, of course, that philosophers show no interest in actual cases. But where the contemptuous attitude is revealed is in their treating the actual case as if it must hold some important lesson which is applicable to all other cases; as if some universal set of criteria or "system" must be derivable from this one case which will illuminate the nature of meaning in all other cases.

It is interesting to see that Kripke's interpretation brings us to the very point that Wittgenstein feels is necessary in order to begin questioning our explanatory attitude in philosophy. The whole point of the paradox, according to Kripke, lies in the attempt to account for "meaning" at the very moment when no facts in the world appear to account for it. Kripke writes,

Sometimes when I have contemplated this situation, I have something of an eerie feeling. Even now as I write, I feel confident that there is something in my mind--the meaning I attach to the "plus" sign--that instructs me what I ought to do in all future cases. But when I concentrate on what is now in my mind, what instructions can be found there? What can there be in my mind that I make use of when I act in the future? It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air.¹⁰

Kripke experiences the confidence that "meaning" must be determinate, even though nothing he can point to can satisfy that demand, as an "eerie feeling". But this is exactly what Wittgenstein wants us to feel. He wants us to feel "eerie" enough to start questioning the nature and status of the philosophical

¹⁰Kripke, pp. 21-22.

question in terms of its having general significance. Unfortunately, Kripke fails to do this. As a result, he fails to see that his sceptical conclusion, that "meaning vanishes", that rules by themselves do not determine meaning, but that something else must, represents just one more philosophical interpretation. Thus, he misinterprets Wittgenstein's reference to "what is exhibited in actual cases", which is premised on the rejection of the explanatory framework, as part of Wittgenstein's "solution" to the "problem" of what it means to follow a rule.

This is also why it is wrong for Kripke to claim that Wittgenstein's "scepticism" has close affinities with Hume's. For it is wrong to think Hume's scepticism is the proper model to have in mind when reading Wittgenstein's philosophy. As I said in the last chapter, the striking similarities are between Wittgenstein and Kant.

The fundamental point of Kripke's view is that Wittgenstein's "no-fact thesis" with regard to meaning, could just have well have been Hume's "no-fact thesis" with regard to causation. Where Wittgenstein questions the nexus between past intentions and present practice, Hume questions the nexus whereby a past event necessitates a future one. And, according to this view, both philosophers conclude that there is no fact which justifies these inferences. In Hume's case, there is just a psychological regularity between two events; the idea that the first event necessitates the second lacks empirical justification. Similarly, according to Kripke's reading of "Wittgenstein's paradox", there is

no empirical justification for claiming that a past intention (i.e. our prior applications of a rule) justifies our present practice; on his reading, there is just a communal "necessity".

The broad outlines of Kant's response to Hume are well-known. Kant argued that so long as philosophers remained within Hume's empiricist framework Hume's sceptical conclusion was inevitable. No sense could be made of our idea of one event necessitating another. So what was required was an interrogation of the empiricist framework itself. As I have said, the "transcendental turn" comes when we reject the assumption that the sole origin of our ideas comes from "the world". Kant says: "But although all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises from experience".¹¹ What Hume fails to appreciate, says Kant, is that our idea of necessity arises, not solely from experience, but from the way we come to know experience. The notion of necessity arises from our form of representing experience. So Hume's mistake, according to Kant, was to confuse experience with the form of representing experience. This misunderstanding accounts for, what one might call, Hume's "sceptical paradox". Convinced that our idea of necessity arises from the world, but unable to account for it there, Hume concludes that the idea is vacuous. Part of Kant's contribution was to see that this dilemma was predictable from the start. By confusing the form of representing experience for experience itself, the philosophical tradition makes Humean

¹¹Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 41.

scepticism unavoidable. In one bold move, Kant not only accounts for the inevitability of Hume's scepticism, but he also moves beyond it.

The similarities between Wittgenstein and Kant should by now be obvious. Wittgenstein's intention behind the "no-fact thesis" has little to do with scepticism with regard to meaning. Like Kant, Wittgenstein was more concerned with how we think about experience than with experience itself. For Wittgenstein, scepticism is premised on misunderstanding the way language functions, on failing to see how it represents the world. When that premise is rejected, there is nothing left to talk about in that way, and nothing to account for. Thus, his position is similar to the one he held in the *Tractatus*:

Scepticism is not irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something can be said.¹²

Wittgenstein is neither denying that rules determine our actions nor insisting that we must see our actions as determined by the social practices in which they are embedded. Rather, it is the philosopher's attempt to explain rules by looking for an underlying foundation informing our practices that is Wittgenstein's target. If we feel the need to refer to rules (or, for that matter, a conception of community agreement) in order to account for a philosophical worry we might have about our practices, I think that

¹²*Tractatus*, 6.51.

Wittgenstein's message is that we are already, hopelessly on the wrong track. For the intent behind the paradox is not to show that everyday talk about rules is problematic, but rather that the worry lies in the way that philosophers look at them.

2. Kripke, Malcolm and the community thesis

Norman Malcolm's account of rule-following in *Nothing is Hidden* makes a similar mistaken contrast.¹³ Malcolm shares with Kripke the belief that the paradox raises a dilemma about how the meaning of our rules is fixed. He thinks that Wittgenstein is rejecting the view that an interpretation is required to fix the meaning of a rule when he shows that that view leads to the paradox. In its place, Malcolm sees Wittgenstein as showing "what more is required" to fix the meaning of a rule. "Wittgenstein's answer", says Malcolm, "is that what fixes the meaning of a rule is our customary way of applying the rule in particular cases". Malcolm asks "who is this we?", and answers that "it is virtually all of us".¹⁴ However, Malcolm's whole idea that something more is required to fix the meaning of rules presupposes that the problem is a genuine one, residing in our everyday talk of rules. Like Kripke, he fails to consider that this idea, namely that something more is required to fix the meaning of a rule, might arise from the way philosophers

¹³Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 155.

look at rules, and not in the rules themselves.¹⁵

Malcolm shares with Kripke the view that the presence of a paradox in a language game implies *prima facie* that the game is "wrecked", that we don't know what we mean.¹⁶ This consequence, they think, is attributable to a mistaken view that we have about rules. Only if we think that the rules themselves, conceived as functioning on their own, so to speak, determine their applications will we think that a paradox undermines the game. What we need to realize is that the application of the rules is in our hands and that we, not the rules themselves, decide what situations we are to apply them in. Whether a paradox "wrecks" the game is therefore,

¹⁵Another good example of assuming that something more is required to account for the meaning of our propositions is found in Peter Winch's discussion of rule following. In response to the question "What is it to follow a definition?", Winch says,

Again there is a superficially obvious answer to this: the definition lays down the meaning and to use a word in its correct meaning is to use it in the same way as that laid down in the definition. And in a sense, of course, that answer is perfectly correct and unexceptional; its only defect is that it does not remove the philosophical puzzlement.

Winch assumes that there is some philosophical puzzlement left over, that going on in the same way as that laid down in the definition must be an inadequate response. But there is no reason why this must be so. Rather, the philosophical puzzlement that Winch wants explaining does not lie in the world (in the meaning of words) but rather lies in the way we look at things, in the way we assume as philosophers that everything needs explaining. See Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 26.

¹⁶The phrase "wrecked" is used by Wittgenstein in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, rev. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1978), p. 371.

on this reading of Wittgenstein, dependent on our mistaken view of rules.

There are really two sub-arguments to the argument that I have just sketched. First, there is the issue concerning the relationship between rules and their application. Second, there is the issue concerning our conception of rules and how we deal with the paradox. Malcolm, like Kripke, maintains that a proper conception of rules will invoke a changed attitude toward the paradox. Let me comment first on the issue concerning the relationship between rules and their application.

Malcolm's interpretation of Wittgenstein's views about rules is similar to Kripke's except that he does not see Wittgenstein as presenting a sceptical argument. When boiled down Kripke's interpretation of the paradox is this:

1. Either the rule (conceived on its own) justifies its own applications or nothing justifies it.
2. The rule (conceived on its own) does not justify its application.
3. So nothing justifies the rule's application.

Malcolm's interpretation is similar:

1. Either the rule (conceived on its own) justifies its applications or we justify the rule's applications.
2. The rule (conceived on its own) does not justify its applications.
3. Therefore, we justify the rule's application.

Kripke thinks Wittgenstein is first posing a sceptical problem

about rules, and then presenting a sceptical solution in terms of the community. Malcolm, on the other hand, denies that Wittgenstein is posing a sceptical problem about rules, and thinks instead that Wittgenstein is defending the community thesis of meaning. Both insist, however, that the rule paradox is part of Wittgenstein's strategy to get us to realize that the community fixes the application of rules; Malcolm simply "short circuits" the sceptical issue.

Malcolm, in my view, is closer to getting matters right: Wittgenstein has no interest in presenting a sceptical problem of rules. But that does not mean that Wittgenstein's interest in the paradox is as a means of enabling him to develop a theory which fixes the rule. Malcolm ends up like Kripke thinking that a theory about rules is required to fix them. So in the end, Malcolm and Kripke end up in the same boat; they both hold that the paradox arises from a mistaken view of rules and that in order to avoid the paradox we need to find the correct view of what fixes them. In short, they both interpret Wittgenstein as presenting a theory of rule-following. From this vantage point, the fact that Kripke interprets Wittgenstein as a sceptic, while Malcolm doesn't, is neither here nor there.¹⁷

When we look at either Malcolm's or Kripke's argument, this much is clear: they are right to say that Wittgenstein is against

¹⁷As we shall see below, Malcolm is more sensitive than Kripke to recognizing the importance of Wittgenstein's idea of an "internal relation" between the rule and its application, and it is this idea which rules out for him any question of scepticism.

the idea of rules when they are conceived as functioning on their own. Wittgenstein is against the idea that the rules have their applications built-in, and that the rules compel us inexorably to follow them. But unlike Kripke and Malcolm, I do not believe that Wittgenstein thinks that conception is *wrong*, but rather that he thinks that it is meaningless, that it cannot be thought through. Kripke and Malcolm think that conception makes sense, but is mistaken; I think that for Wittgenstein it is senseless and that therefore it makes no sense to raise the question whether it is mistaken.

There are many occasions in Wittgenstein's writings where Wittgenstein's interlocutor attempts to give expression to the idea of rules functioning on their own only to have Wittgenstein question the sense of these remarks, and precisely not question whether these remarks are mistaken. In the *Investigations*, for instance, Wittgenstein writes,

"It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word in a flash." Like *what* e.g.?--Can't the use--in a certain sense--be grasped in a flash? And in *what* sense can it not?--The point is, that it is as if we could "grasp it in a flash" in yet another and much more direct sense than that.--But have you a model for this? No. It is just that this expression suggests itself to us. As the result of the crossing of different pictures."¹⁸

Wittgenstein does not deny that the expression that the applications are already built-in could have a sense, but he questions whether the expression as the interlocutor uses it does

¹⁸*Investigations*, 191.

have a sense. In fact, he questions the interlocutor whether the expression can be thought through, whether there is a model for understanding it, and his answer is "no". Far from making sense, the most that Wittgenstein can make of it is that it is the result of a conceptual confusion, the crossing of different pictures.¹⁹

Similarly, in a remark from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein makes the same point with regard to contradictions. Wittgenstein's interlocutor says:

But what I want is that one should be able to go on inferring **mechanically** according to the rules without reaching any contradictory results.

What is Wittgenstein's response? He says "the meaning of the word 'mechanical' misleads you". Again, Wittgenstein points to the senselessness of this conception, not its incorrectness.²⁰

But why is this point about senselessness important and how does this affect the premises of Kripke and Malcolm's arguments? The answer is: if Wittgenstein thinks that the interlocutor's talk about rules having their applications built-in cannot be thought through, if there is no model for it, that it is misleading, then

¹⁹When we ask "What does grasping a word in a flash consist in?" we often fail to keep in mind the use of the expression "grasping a word in a flash". Instead, we try to look beyond what occurs in a particular case of "grasping a word in a flash" in order to determine what it consists in. But part of what we mean by "grasping a word in a flash" is that we normally go on to make the correct applications of the word. So that when we fail to keep the use of the expression in mind, and instead ask our question looking **through** the medium of a particular use, the illusion arises that its applications (or how we go on) are somehow built into our grasping the word.

²⁰Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, p. 371.

we cannot use that "conception" as part of the premises to their arguments that we have outlined above. If we say "either this is the case or that is the case" as a premise in an argument, we must presuppose that when we say "this is the case" we know what "this is the case" means. So when Kripke says, for instance, "either the rule, conceived on its own, justifies its application or nothing does, or when Malcolm says "either the rule, conceived on its own, justifies its applications or we justify them", they presume that the idea expressed by "the rule, conceived on its own, justifies its applications" can be thought through.

So the first point of disagreement that I have with Kripke and Malcolm is not that Wittgenstein is against the interlocutor's talk of mechanical rules; he clearly is against it. What I disagree with is that the nature of this opposition is that of finding the interlocutor's talk incorrect, as opposed to finding it senseless. If I am right in thinking that Wittgenstein thought this talk to be confused, not wrong, then the premises of the argument cannot be established.

Once the premises go in Kripke's and Malcolm's arguments, obviously they cannot be used to establish the conclusion of these arguments either, but I want to consider them anyway because it demonstrates in my opinion an important and quite natural move that many interpreters make when reading Wittgenstein that nevertheless leads them (and us) in the wrong direction. Assuming that the premises of the argument have been established, and that we know that Wittgenstein thinks that rules do not have their applications

built-in, that rules do not compel us to follow their applications, the only conclusion left, short of out and out scepticism, seems to be that we determine the applications of the rule. Let me return to the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics to show how easily this inference is liable to be made. Wittgenstein's interlocutor says,

"We take a number of steps, all legitimate--i.e., allowed by the rules--and suddenly a contradiction results. So the list of rules, as it is, is of no use, for the contradiction wrecks the whole game!"

To which Wittgenstein responds "Why do you have it wreck the game?"²¹ It is easy to think that by this question, Wittgenstein is implying that the rules are not something we are bound mechanically to follow to all possible ends, something we can do nothing about or have no choice about. And that he is implying, moreover, that the rules must somehow be in our hands, that we determine their application.

Now this much is clear: when Wittgenstein says "Why do you have it wreck the game?", he is saying that the game need not be wrecked by the presence of a contradiction and that there is something that we (as interlocutors), are doing that forces us to say that the game is wrecked. However, when we consider what it is that we are doing which forces us to say that the game is wrecked, there are two possibilities. The first possibility is that the interlocutor has a **mistaken** view of the relationship between rules and their application so that he or she mistakenly thinks that

²¹Ibid, p. 371.

these rules have their applications built-in in a mechanical fashion. This is the only possibility that occurs to Kripke and Malcolm. That is, they think that the interlocutor has made a mistake in thinking that the rules have their applications built-in, and that in exposing that mistake, Wittgenstein is presenting the alternative view that we decide the application of the rule. But there is another possibility that they overlook. The interlocutor may have a confused view of the relationship between rules and their application, as opposed to a mistaken one. So that when Wittgenstein says "but why do you have it wreck the game" he is asking for clarification. He means something like: "this is confusing for me, what could you possibly mean by saying that the game is wrecked? I don't follow you. Please clarify".

On the first possibility, when Wittgenstein asks "But why do you have it wreck the game" what Wittgenstein is really saying is "You are in control of the rule's application; you are wrong to think that the rules crank out their applications automatically, so don't say the contradiction wrecks the game". But why must we assume that Wittgenstein has this view, namely that we justify a rule's application, and that it is this view that is behind his question? As I said, why can't Wittgenstein simply be saying that the interlocutor's inference that the game is wrecked is confused and why can't this question reflect a demand for clarification?

If Wittgenstein is requesting clarification of the interlocutor's remark, he need not have an alternative position about the relationship between rules and their applications.

Indeed, he cannot have an alternative position since there can be no alternative to confusion, it being part of the meaning of "alternative" that there be an original position to which an alternative is an alternative of. Wittgenstein does not have the alternative view or theory that the application of rules are in our hands since the interlocutor has not yet presented a view to which Wittgenstein's alternative is an alternative to. What the interlocutor thinks is a view is still too misleading to count as one in the first place.

Kripke and Malcolm simply assume that Wittgenstein must have an alternative view about what it is that justifies the rule, and on the basis of this assumption interpret Wittgenstein's opposition to the interlocutor's talk about "mechanical" rules with an eye to discovering what this view is. But Wittgenstein is not against the interlocutor's mistaken view of rule following, as they suggest, but rather is objecting to the misleading and confusing way the interlocutor talks about rules and their application. And I suspect that the idea that grounds the community thesis, that "we justify the rules", is as misleading for Wittgenstein, as the interlocutor's remarks that "the rules themselves justify their application".

3. Malcolm and Baker and Hacker: grammar and therapy

G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker and Norman Malcolm have recently disagreed on whether Wittgenstein thinks a community is essential for rule-following. Malcolm argues that rule-following is a social

practice, necessarily involving a community of rule-followers, whereas Baker and Hacker argue that a community is not essential to following a rule, but merely to shared rule following. The debate centres on the seemingly make-or-break question of whether a forever isolated individual can follow rules and hence have a language.

Both sides of this dispute, however, have missed the real significance of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following and agreement. The crux of their misunderstanding lies in the fact that both of them fail to recognize the importance of the therapeutic dimension of Wittgenstein's discussion about rules. This comes out clearly in the way they interpret what Wittgenstein calls "grammatical remarks". For Wittgenstein, unlike Malcolm and Baker and Hacker, grammatical remarks have no meaning outside of the therapeutic context in which they play their role.

Before I examine their discussion, a preliminary point about their interpretation needs to be mentioned, one which is essentially connected to the interpretive mistake just mentioned. Because Baker and Hacker and Malcolm do not place a high value on therapy when interpreting Wittgenstein, they treat Wittgenstein's notes, many of which have been collected and published as independent books, to supplement what they take to be Wittgenstein's theory. But there is a crucial difference between these notes and the remarks in the *Investigations*. For what we see reflected in the *Investigations*, that is not emphasized to nearly the same degree in his notes, is Wittgenstein's painstaking attempt

at ensuring that his remarks are not left as "hostage to fortune". Again and again in *Investigations*, the interlocutor, and by extension the reader, tries to foist on Wittgenstein a view or a theory, only to have Wittgenstein repudiate the charge.²² For instance, the interlocutor says,

"But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?-- Admit it? What greater difference could there be?--"And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a nothing."--Not at all. It is not a something, but not a nothing either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here."²³

Another example which reflects Wittgenstein's attention at welding his remarks together with a therapeutic intention in mind can be found at 207 and 208. In reference to a language in an unknown country in which there is no regular connection between what the speakers of the language say, the sounds they make and their

²²This elusive aspect of Wittgenstein's work, characterized by the receding of his meaning, has drawn enough attention that some psychiatrists have suggested that it represents "schizophrenese", a form of schizophrenia. As one psychiatrist puts it, "one essence of schizophrenese is that the meaning of a statement is never quite contained within the statement, but lies somehow 'behind' it and, when searched for, continually retreats behind further elucidating statements--a phenomenon that Wittgenstein's philosophical writings exhibit to a singular degree". And he concludes "it does seem clear that Wittgenstein was pretty nutty. This raises as many questions about the pathology of his disciples as about him". See "Revealed: the great philosopher was just a nutcase," *The Sunday Telegram*, Dublin, Ireland (March 10, 1991). This article refers to a correspondence concerning Wittgenstein's state of mind in the journal, *Nature*.

²³*Investigations*, 304.

actions, Wittgenstein says "There is not enough regularity for us to call it 'language'".²⁴ But now it seems that Wittgenstein is expressing a theory of language based on regularity as a necessary condition of language, as an "independent determinant" of it.²⁵ Wittgenstein immediately corrects this impression. It begins with the question "Then am I defining "order" and "rule" by means of "regularity"? But instead of answering it, Wittgenstein shows that what is meant by "regularity" has to do with ordinary things such as what is exhibited when we teach a child how to go on.²⁶ In other words, he is not saying that the foreign "language" fails to count as a language on the grounds that it doesn't meet the necessary condition of regularity as expressed in a theory, but rather because the "speaker" isn't going on in a way that we would call "speaking a language"; the "speaker" doesn't make sense in the same way that we would say that of a child who fails to go on in the right way when given instructions to do something.

Given Wittgenstein's therapeutic intent, then, we must be especially careful not to read his notes out of context. Unfortunately, in so far as Wittgenstein's notes lack the necessary therapeutic qualifications, they are more susceptible to be read as expressing a theoretical perspective. By undervaluing the therapeutic dimension in Wittgenstein's thought, the interpreter

²⁴Ibid., 207.

²⁵Gordon P. Backer & Peter M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 191.

²⁶Investigations, 208.

feels less constrained to read the notes from a theoretical vantage point, and as these notes are not always qualified in a therapeutic way, unlike in the *Investigations*, they serve to confirm the theoretical viewpoint the interpreter is trying to elicit from them.

As I said, Baker and Hacker and Malcolm undervalue the therapeutic dimension in Wittgenstein's thought and so it is not surprising that they too examine Wittgenstein's remarks out of context. Drawing not only on unpublished remarks as well as remarks from the *Investigations* and the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, they attempt to construct Wittgenstein's theory of rule-following. What we must do, however, is see whether those arguments fit in with the general intentions of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a whole. In particular, we must look at these remarks and remember that they are, for the most part, notes, and that were they to be included in Wittgenstein's published text, they undoubtedly would have taken on a different light, in particular, a therapeutic one.

The centre of the dispute between Baker and Hacker and Malcolm concerns the so-called problem of whether following a rule requires a community (Malcolm) or merely a regular practice (Baker and Hacker).²⁷ Baker and Hacker think that though a community is necessary to understand shared rule following, it does not follow that it is necessary to understand rule following as such. Malcolm

²⁷I have taken Baker and Hacker's way of framing the dispute. As we shall see, I am not sure that Malcolm would have approved of Baker and Hacker's way of viewing their disagreement.

disagrees: he thinks that communal agreement is essential to any kind of rule following (shared or not) and that Wittgenstein's remarks about forever-isolated individuals backs him up.

Malcolm puts the disagreement in terms of "the hard question" to which he feels Baker and Hacker's answer is inadequate. He asks,

What decides whether a particular step taken,
a particular application made, is or is not in
accordance with the rule?

And he declares,

This question is not answered by the
declaration that a rule is "internally related
to the acts that accord with it".²⁸

Baker and Hacker, on the other hand, argue that Malcolm's question is fundamentally confused, since it abrogates "the pivotal point in Wittgenstein's remarks on following rules", namely "that a rule is internally related to acts which accord with it".²⁹ For them, questions about what is in accordance with a rule concern the "grammar" of rules (i.e. what they are internally related to) and that it is part of that grammar that an actual community is not necessary for them to be followed;

The concept of a language is grammatically
bound up with the possibility of shared
understanding and agreements, but not with its
actuality.³⁰

²⁸Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein on Language and Rules," *Philosophy*, vol. 64 (1989), p. 8.

²⁹Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, p. 172.

³⁰Gordon P. Baker and Peter M.S. Hacker, "Malcolm on Language and Rules," *Philosophy*, vol. 65, (1990), p. 179.

I think that Baker and Hacker are right to insist on the importance of "internal relations" in Wittgenstein's conception of rules.³¹ Moreover they are also right to argue that Malcolm's notion of a community as a necessary condition for rule following violates this idea. Despite Malcolm's claim to appreciate the significance of Wittgenstein's idea of an internal relation, he fundamentally misses the point: to demand that community agreement "fixes" the acts that accord with the rule demonstrates a commitment to explaining rule following by appeal to a third party.

To be sure, Malcolm appreciates some of what is involved in the notion of an "internal relation". He sees that, for example, the rule '+2' is not understood unless one writes 1002 after 1000, and 1004 after 1002. It was the failure to see this idea that led Kripke into thinking that Wittgenstein was presenting a sceptical argument. For he sees Wittgenstein opening up a "gap" between the rule "+2" and the acts that accord with it, namely "1002", "1004", etc. He thinks that by asking "What justifies that I should say '1002' when asked to apply the rule '+2'?", Wittgenstein is worried about bridging a "gap" between the rule and its applications and that the "sceptical solution" is his attempt to bridge it. But for Malcolm, such a question presupposes that the act and the rule can be separated. That is, it presupposes that one could respond to the directions to apply the rule "+2" with the arbitrary answer "5" and still be following a rule, whereas insight

³¹In chapter one and two, we saw that the notion of an "internal relation" between language and the world is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein's early philosophy as well.

into Wittgenstein's notion of an internal relation (on Malcolm's reading) shows such a question to be absurd; to answer "5" when asked to apply the rule "+2" to "1000" shows that one is not applying the rule for "+2". Insight into the "internal relation" between the rule and its application shows that there is no gap and that a fortiori any attempt at bridging it, by a theory of justification, is absurd.

Malcolm's question "What decides whether a particular application is or is not in accord with the rule?" is thus not a sceptical question, since Malcolm is not separating the rule from what is in accord with it. Instead, Malcolm takes himself to be asking a different question about whether it is the rule considered on its own that decides whether the application is in accord with the rule or whether it is the rule in the context of a community that decides it. That is, if someone says "1002" while applying the rule "+2" to "1000", Malcolm wants to know: does it make sense that this person could be applying it without any reference to a community of speakers? Could that person be applying the rule by themselves? Malcolm wants to say "no".

Malcolm is not trying to justify our use of a rule in the manner of Kripke, but he is nevertheless attempting to explain how rules work in the sense of providing the necessary conditions for rule following. That is, he feels that unless there is a community which forms a background of agreement against which rules operate, it would be inexplicable how following a rule (and thus language) is possible. As we saw in the last section, he is committed to

the options that "Either the rule determines its application or we determine it". Since he believes that Wittgenstein has shown that the rule does not determine it on its own, Malcolm concludes that it must be that we determine it. He writes,

The applications of a rule (its "extension"), are not given with the rule, but have to be produced; the extension has to be constructed.³²

His question "What decides whether a particular step taken is or is not in accordance with the rule?" is really asking "Given that the rule does not produce its applications, what decides that the extension taken is in accordance with the rule?" His answer is that it must be us; "without the framework of general practices and large agreement there would be neither rules nor language".³³

Behind Malcolm's question is a fascination concerning the possibility of language. He writes, "for the most part, each one of us does apply colour-words unhesitatingly, on his own--yet we agree! Nothing could be more astonishing. But if it were not for this astonishing fact, our 'colour-words' would not be colour words".³⁴ Malcolm is convinced that not only does agreement lie at the basis of our language but that this is an astonishing fact, since it implies that the possibility of language rests on the brutish contingency that we happen to go on in the same way, that

³²Malcolm, "Wittgenstein on Language and Rules", p. 8.

³³Ibid, p. 12.

³⁴Ibid, p. 14.

we are creatures of habit.³⁵

Malcolm is saying that if the community does not explain how a particular act is in accord with the rule, then language is inexplicable. So his question is really "What determines that when I say, for example, 'this is red', when asked to point out a red thing, that I am following a rule, that my action is not inexplicable?" In asking this, it is important to reemphasize, Malcolm does not deny the point about internal relations, that our applications help to determine whether one is applying the rule or not. His position is that even if this were so, even if a rule would not be a rule unless we went on in such and such a way, we still need to ask what backs up our going on in such and such way. For example, suppose we ask (after Kripke) "What justifies my saying 1002 after 1000 to the order '+2', and not 5?" We might appeal to the concept of an internal relation and say "if one didn't say 1002, one would not be following the rule for '+2'; the rule and its application are internally related". But Malcolm feels the need to ask the further question, "What determines that 1002 is internally related to '+2'?" He thinks that if this question is not answered the fact that we all go on in the appropriate way remains inexplicable. It is in his answer to this

³⁵The idea that agreement forms a brutish contingency seems to be supported by Wittgenstein's often quoted remark that "What has to be accepted, the given, is--so once could say--**forms of life**". See *Investigations*, p. 226. Here "has to be accepted" is taken to refer to a brutish contingent fact. I think this is fundamentally mistaken. The idea of explanations coming to an end by appeal to form of life can only be properly understood in light of Wittgenstein's critique of the urge to theorize in philosophy. The notion of a form of life is not an explanatory concept.

question that he appeals to "the astonishing fact" that we agree with the general practice of the community. The fact that we all agree backs up our saying 1002 when asked to add 2 to a 1000.³⁶

Now it is unquestionable that Wittgenstein links agreement and custom to rule following. He says, for instance, "a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom" and "to obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions)".³⁷ My dispute with Malcolm concerns the general aim to which these remarks are put, i.e., whether they serve the interest of theory or therapy. The larger question is whether by such remarks Wittgenstein is explaining to us what rule following and language are, or whether these remarks serve to undermine the very idea of explaining such things in the fashion of Malcolm. Malcolm's failure to address this prior question casts Wittgenstein's remarks about agreement and rules in an altogether wrong light.

We have seen that Malcolm is astonished at the fact that agreement makes language possible. I do not think that Wittgenstein would have shared Malcolm's astonishment. As we have seen, the problems of philosophy are for Wittgenstein astonishing only in the sense that they make things appear to be "of the

³⁶This agreement, Malcolm insists, does not mean that we have a majority vote. The agreement could be tacit. It could be a psychological regularity that we have developed as being part of a social group.

³⁷Investigations, 199.

highest generality" and "have the character of depth".³⁸ Moreover, Wittgenstein warned against the idea of viewing language as something special;

"Language (or thought) is something unique"--this proves to be a superstition (not a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions. And now the impressiveness retreats to these illusions, to the problems."³⁹

Wittgenstein leaves little doubt that he would have viewed Malcolm's expression of astonishment at the possibility of language based on the contingency of agreement to be the result of a "grammatical illusion", a superstition resulting from the way we misunderstand the language. But how so?

Malcolm's hard question, to recall, is "What is it that decides that a particular application is in accord with a rule?". As we have seen, Malcolm sees only two alternatives, namely that the rule determines its application on its own or we determine it. His assumption is therefore that something determines the rule's application. Furthermore, he assumes to the point of dismissing it out of hand that if we cannot find this something, the possibility of language is inexplicable.

Consider, for a moment, though, Malcolm's assumption that something determines the rule's application. Let us take an example to make this clear. (Malcolm uses a arithmetical example, but I use a psychological example instead.) We say, while pinching

³⁸Ibid., 104 and 111.

³⁹Ibid., 110.

oneself on the arm, that no one else can have **this** pain. So there is a relation between my saying "this pain" or "my pain" and the case of pinching oneself on the arm. Certainly I think I am using the phrase correctly when I do this. But what makes it correct? What determines that pinching myself on the arm is in accord with the way we use "my pain"? What decides that the pain that I experience here is "my pain"?

Malcolm wants to say that **something** must decide this, that **something** must determine that **this** (i.e., pinching oneself on the arm) is my pain, for instance, and not another's pain. The answer that intrigues him is that even in the apparent comfort of our own bodies, what decides the correct attribution of our pain language involves the community, and that the apparently private depends on the public. But this whole way of looking at the rule for "my pain" is mistaken. For the very idea that **something** determines the application is, for Wittgenstein, a grammatical illusion.⁴⁰ That is, the requirement that there must be a **something** which is required to fix the rule does not arise from "the world", but rather arises from the confused way philosophers' look at rules; it arises from a conceptual confusion.

When we keep in mind how we have learned and use the expression "my pain", the so-called problem of discovering this **something** that fixes the rule's application seems absurd. For we see that when we describe the use of the expression "my pain" we

⁴⁰So also is the idea that **nothing** determines the application a grammatical illusion.

describe different ways of behaving, one of which involves ascribing to myself pain when I pinch myself. That is, part of the extension of the rule for the expression "my pain" covers what occurs when we are pinching oneself on the arm. In other words, pinching oneself on the arm is part of what we call "my pain". In the terminology that we used in chapters two and three, pinching ourselves on the arm is part of how we represent "my pain", it is part of the form of representation.

Instead of viewing pinching oneself as part of the description of "my pain" and as something which describes the standard for some of our pain behaviour (so that, for example, in normal circumstances when someone hurts themselves we comfort the person who is hurt and not those who are watching), Malcolm asks about what fixes or determines that standard itself. When my arm is pinched and I say "oh, that hurts", Malcolm wants to know what it is that determines that I should say "that hurts" in this instance. But what does it mean to say that there is something that determines that I should say that? Isn't it simply that the case of pinching myself describes the way we play the "language games" involving "my pain"? In other words, it forms part of the background which determines pain behaviour. And it means something entirely different to say that this background is determined by something.

The philosophical question "What determines or decides that I should say 'that hurts' when I am being pinched?" is as confused as the assertion that "nobody can feel my pain" or that "I should say

'that hurts' when my arm is pinched, but not when another's arm is".⁴¹ Such questions and assertions concern our ways of talking about "my pain". Asking such questions depends on looking at these ways of talking from the wrong logical/linguistic viewpoint. They are thus confusions and illusions. Contrary to our strongest inclinations, these "assertions" and "questions" make no sense at all.⁴² They are trivial and their relevance, beyond simply reminding us of the way the language works, is in serious doubt.

The demand that something fix, determine or decide the application of the rule arises from the way Malcolm looks at rules, as things to be explained. His question expressing this demand may have the form of an empirical inquiry such as in the question "What determines that exercise helps keep people fit?" That is, it may have the form of the question that there is something that we need to uncover, something we need to discover which fixes the rule. But unlike the exercise example, there is nothing to discover; what appears to be something that needs to be discovered to fix the rule is a confusion.

When Malcolm approaches rules and their application with his explanatory framework, he imposes the view which makes their relation (and thus language) look inexplicable and unaccountable. He finds Wittgenstein's reference to community agreement to be the missing component which explains how language is possible; without

⁴¹Of course, there are everyday situations where these expressions can be given a sense.

⁴²Ibid., 253.

agreement, Malcolm wants to say, there can be no language. But Malcolm has misunderstood both the nature of the problem that concerns him and the nature of the account which he thinks explains the problem. It is not, as Malcolm contends, that without agreement, language would be inexplicable. When we reject Malcolm's explanatory framework, it becomes clear that without agreement language would be incomprehensible. What Malcolm sees as inexplicable, i.e., language without agreement, Wittgenstein sees as incomprehensible. Remember that to say, for instance, that "this (i.e. pinching oneself on the arm) is my pain" and that "another person cannot have my pain" is to give a grammatical rule about the way we normally use the expression "my pain". It precludes our understanding the circumstances of, say, the doctor who while tending to my injury, manifests the pain behaviour one would normally expect of me as the injured party. Our rule makes such behaviour incomprehensible to us under normal circumstances.⁴³ To describe such rules is to describe a practice, a custom, a pattern of behaviour.

It thus makes no sense to speak of the something behind that application of the rule, something that makes it the correct application. For we could not make sense of the rule being wrong; for example, we cannot think through what it would be like in normal circumstances for another person to have my pain. The rule

⁴³Of course, there might be a circumstance that we are unaware of that would make sense of the situation. But until that connection is made clear to us, we cannot understand what is transpiring.

is neither right, nor wrong; there is neither something nor nothing that is behind the rule. Rather, the whole idea of thinking of rules this way arises from us, from the way we look at rules as things to be explained.

Thus what is fundamentally wrong with Malcolm's interpretation is that he appeals to community agreement to explain what following a rule consists in. His claim that without such agreement there can be no such thing as language is not the kind of thing to be affirmed or denied. As an explanatory assertion, it simply makes no sense. Social agreement cannot be inserted between a rule and its application in order to fix what counts as the correct application of the rule, because one cannot separate agreement from rules that way. Agreement cannot account for the rule, since to understand a rule is to understand a practice, and to follow a practice is to participate in a form of life, a way of going on, a form of agreement. As Wittgenstein says, "the word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are related to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of the one word, he learns the use of the other with it".⁴

We saw earlier that Malcolm thinks that Baker and Hacker's appeal to "internal relations" does not answer his hard question about what decides the correct application of a rule. But Malcolm has not sufficiently understood the significance and scope of

⁴"Investigations, 224.

"internal relations".⁴⁵ For he fails to see that Wittgenstein's insight into the internal relation between a rule and an application blocks any attempt to find an intermediary third term which accounts for how an application accords with a rule. But this is the point that is at the basis of Baker and Hacker's appeal to internal relations. Baker and Hacker see that Wittgenstein was not only rejecting the picture of the rule determining its application on its own, as a kind of "logical machine", but was rejecting the picture of the rule being determined by a community agreement as well. For them, any attempt to try to mediate the rule and the application is misguided. For that would involve seeking an external explanation for a rule, whereas the idea of internal relations blocks the external approach. For Malcolm to think that community agreement decides the rule's application shows that he has missed the pivotal role of internal relations in

⁴⁵In Wittgenstein, *Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, Baker and Hacker accuse Malcolm of abrogating Wittgenstein's idea of internal relations in his *Nothing is Hidden*. In the later article with which I have mostly been concerned, i.e., "Malcolm on Language and Rules", they are more charitable, insisting that the idea of "internal relations" is something that Malcolm and they agree upon. Instead, they say "disagreement breaks out over the character of the logical nexus between rule and agreement". See Baker and Hacker, "Malcolm on Language and Rules", p. 168. I think that Baker and Hacker are being too charitable here by accepting and agreeing with Malcolm's limited view of "internal relations". As we shall see, the reason that idea was originally regarded as "pivotal" for Baker and Hacker for understanding Wittgenstein's view of rules was that it ruled out of hand all attempts at providing an external justification for rule following of the sort that Malcolm, Kripke and others champion. Baker and Hacker do not emphasize this aspect of their disagreement with Malcolm, preferring to concentrate on what they take to be a genuine "disagreement" concerning the extent of the role of social agreement in understanding what it means to follow a rule.

Wittgenstein's thought. According to Baker and Hacker, the very form of his question betrays this misunderstanding;

the very form of the question presupposes that rules and what accords with them, as well as understanding a rule and knowing what accords with it, are externally related.⁴⁶

Baker and Hacker's account of rules is more sophisticated than Malcolm's in that they see Wittgenstein's appeal to custom, regularity, practice and agreement as a part and parcel of his description of what they take to be the grammar of rule following. Unlike Malcolm, they see the attempt to try to provide a ground for the rule (whether it be in a rule-based conception of the mind or in terms of a community) as misguided and confused. Social agreement, for instance, is not used by Wittgenstein as a ground to mediate between rules and their applications, but rather is part "of the framework within which a language-game is played".⁴⁷ That is, we need the concept of agreement to describe the background of certain language games that we play, the practices that we partake in, the rules that we follow. In other words, the concept of agreement is grammatically related to our speaking a language.

I think Baker and Hacker are right to insist that the notion of agreement is not an explanatory concept, but is one required for the description of the language. However, where they fundamentally betray Wittgenstein's intentions has to do with misinterpreting the role of these descriptions as theses. In other words, I want to

⁴⁶Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, p. 243.

⁴⁷*Ibid*, p. 243.

say that Baker and Hacker violate Wittgenstein's therapeutic objectives by transforming Wittgenstein's descriptions of grammar and grammatical (internal) connections into metaphysical theses.

One way in which we can see this is by returning to the point of disagreement between Malcolm and Baker and Hacker over Malcolm's hard question "What decides the application of a rule?" I have said that Baker and Hacker reject the form of this question since it presupposes that a rule and an application are externally related, that the rule is "cemented by [a] third thing" to its application.⁴⁶ So whatever disagreement Malcolm and Baker and Hacker have, the first thing to notice is that Baker and Hacker reject the terms of the debate as it is presented by Malcolm. They do not want to answer Malcolm's question since they think it is confused. Instead they want to relocate the debate in their own terms. Having rejected the need to search for a "third thing" between the rule and the application, and thus having rejected Malcolm's whole approach to (and use of) Wittgenstein's remarks on agreement, they shift the focus to describing the practices that we follow when we obey rules, and they try to assess the relative importance of the concept of agreement in terms of this focus. Having done this, they feel that there is a genuine disagreement between Malcolm and themselves concerning the role of agreement in regard to rule following. Malcolm's question "What decides the application of a rule?" can be asked anew.

Whereas Malcolm conceived of his hard question as requiring

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 243.

something to be discovered, Baker and Hacker conceive of it as a request for a description, as a grammatical question. For them, the question "What decides an application is in accord with a rule?" becomes "What is the grammatical role that agreement plays in our practice?" In reformulating the question this way, Baker and Hacker think they are teasing out a genuine disagreement with Malcolm concerning the grammatical role that agreement plays. The disagreement, as they conceive of it, concerns whether agreement is essential to rule following as such or whether it is essential to merely shared rule following. They attribute the former view to Malcolm while they deny "that the concept of a language is so tightly interwoven with the concept of a community of speakers (and hence with actual agreement) as to preclude its applicability to someone whose use of signs is not shared by others".⁴⁹

It is crucial to see that Baker and Hacker frame the debate as a question about what grammatical relations there are. Their question is, "What are the grammatical connections between following a rule and the concept of agreement?" That this is the focus of their question is supported by their concession to Malcolm, "Not that we denied that there are any grammatical connections between these two concepts" and their conclusion that "The concept of a language is grammatically bound up with the possibility of shared understanding and agreements, but not with its actuality".⁵⁰

⁴⁹Baker and Hacker, "Malcolm on Language and Rules," p. 167.

⁵⁰Ibid, p. 167.

In framing their questions this way, Baker and Hacker have committed a fundamental interpretative mistake. For they have separated Wittgenstein's reference to grammatical connections from his aim of therapy. The questions "What are the grammatical connections between following a rule and the concept of agreement?" and "Is agreement essential to language or not?" are just as illegitimate as Malcolm's original question "What decides that an application is in accord with the rule?" As in the case of Malcolm's question, we must not try to answer Baker and Hacker's questions, but rather show that they contain a confusion.

Baker and Hacker are following Wittgenstein when they remind Malcolm that the question "What decides that an application is in accord with the rule?" is confused. To use our earlier example, Malcolm wants to say "this is my pain", while pinching himself on the hand. He thinks that this assertion is significant and that it needs to be accounted for. His question concerns what backs up our saying "my pain" in this instance. What decides that this application of "my pain" is in accord with my use for the expression "my pain"? Baker and Hacker remind Malcolm that it is a confusion to look for something that backs up the application of the rule and that he what he is expressing, far from being a deep philosophical insight, is in reality a truism, a platitude about how we go on, about how we agree in using pain behaviour. That is, that another cannot feel my pain expresses a rule which is interwoven with our practices concerning pain. Once Malcolm sees that he is uttering a platitude, and that it is confused to seek a

definite something that backs it up, Baker and Hacker hope that Malcolm will give up on thinking that rules need to be accounted for by some external means. Thus Baker and Hacker's are being true to Wittgenstein when they refer to our practices, to the way we go on, and to the grammatical connection between agreement and rules, in this negative way.

The difficulty with their use of grammatical connections lies in thinking that once Malcolm (or the philosopher in general) has given up his demand that rules need to be accounted for, that is, once the reference to grammar has served its therapeutic purpose, there is still something philosophically to say about rules. Another way of putting this is to say that Baker and Hacker use grammatical rules to get philosophers to give up on seeking external explanations of rules, but they do not envisage, as Wittgenstein did, that philosophers give up on explanations as such. Baker and Hacker take too seriously questions about whether rules are grammatically connected to agreement, etc. By asking them, they perpetuate the very philosophical questions Wittgenstein aimed to expose.

Baker and Hacker's question "Is agreement essential to language or not?", has two possible answers: "agreement is essential to language" and "agreement is not essential to language". Take the first one, which Baker and Hacker attributes to Malcolm. What does it mean to say that "agreement is essential to language"? Does this not simply express the platitude that in normal situations if we did not agree about what our words refer

to, we could not communicate? It says that when we are following a shared practice (such as bartering) we are committed to a form of agreement. But what does it mean to assert or deny such a thing? How could such a statement be challenged? When one thinks about it, it makes no sense to assert or deny it. This is not to say that we could not imagine a situation in which this statement is asserting something, something that it would be possible to doubt or deny. But to simply assert it, in the absence of such a pertinent situation, is platitudinous and is not the kind of thing it makes sense to doubt or assert.

It would be wrong to conclude from the fact that it is platitudinous to say that agreement is essential to language that the other possible answer, that agreement is not essential to language, is wrong. The statement "agreement is not essential to language" expresses a platitude as well, but this time refers to those cases where, say, we are speaking to ourselves, when there is no one else around, i.e. when we are not speaking about a shared practice. In such cases, we are following rules but our following them does not depend on the agreement of anyone else. This platitude holds true for many different situations, but again, it is absurd to assert it or deny it. These are things that we already know. But again, what is the point of asserting these things?

Since both possible answers to Baker and Hacker's question "Is agreement essential to language" are platitudes, and do not make sense to assert or deny, the question must itself be dismissed as

absurd. These truisms typically hold true in some situations, but not in others. But the important point is not to take seriously the question whether agreement is always and everywhere essential to language or not, as Baker and Hacker do. Instead, the point is to see that the question is confused and "answers" to it are platitudes recast as metaphysical theses. The question depends on approaching language from the wrong point of view.

Ironically, by asking the question whether agreement is necessary for language, Baker and Hacker violate Wittgenstein's idea of internal relations which they place so much stress upon. For their question presupposes that it is possible to separate language from the concept of agreement. For without pausing to think that what is meant by "language" covers both shared and unshared practices, Baker and Hacker ask whether agreement is necessary to language. But far from being "necessary", agreement is part of what we call language. Agreement is internally related to language. By asking whether agreement is necessary to language, Baker and Hacker presuppose that we have a real choice here. They have betrayed Wittgenstein's idea that "agreement is part of the framework within which a language game is played".⁵¹

Malcolm was thus right to challenge Baker and Hacker's claim that agreement was not essential to language, while Baker and Hacker were right to challenge Malcolm's claim that there could

⁵¹Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, p. 243. Baker and Hacker's question "Is agreement essential to language?" is like the question "Is it essential, when playing solitaire, that one plays alone?" In both these questions, no real choices here are offered.

never be language without agreement. Each of their negative criticisms are right. In so far as they point out to each other's overlooked grammatical connections between rule following and the notion of agreement, they undermine each other's respective (metaphysical) position. That is, in so far as they use these "grammatical remarks" critically, they break the hegemony of each other's viewpoint. It is when these "grammatical remarks" are used as positive theses that things go wrong. For then one assumes that there is a hypothesis to be defended and an argument to be attacked. But exposing that assumption, we have seen, is at the heart of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules.

FIVE

THE THERAPEUTIC TRACTATUS

1. Philosophical misunderstanding

If few philosophers are sympathetic to reading Wittgenstein's later philosophy from the therapeutic point of view that I have emphasized, even fewer approach the *Tractatus* from this vantage point.¹ Indeed, the standard view is that Wittgenstein was intent on providing a general theory of the nature of language, the nature of the world and the relationship between them.² Acknowledgement is of course made of Wittgenstein's famous concluding (therapeutic) remark that there is nothing to say in philosophy, but this conclusion is commonly taken to be a consequence of his philosophical theory, a consequence that is often thought to retroactively disqualify the arguments leading up to it.

To my mind, this standard interpretation could not be more mistaken. Wittgenstein's intention was never to provide a general

¹Cora Diamond is an exception. She sees what I am calling the therapy as central to Wittgenstein's thought. See Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1991), especially pp. 179-203.

²Thus we find D. Pears in *The False Prison*, say of one of Wittgenstein's later works: "If the book belongs to the second period of his philosophy, which began in 1929, the biggest surprise will be the absence of theories". See David F. Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 3. Monk too in his biography attributes the change in Wittgenstein's philosophy to the absence of theories. He says, for instance, "Wittgenstein's abandonment of theory was not, as Russell thought, a rejection of serious thinking, of the attempt to understand, but the adoption of a different notion of what it is to understand". See Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 308.

theory of language and the world, but to show philosophers that the questions to which such a theory would normally be aimed at solving is the result of a "misunderstanding".³ Therapy is not derivative from theory in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. It takes centre stage.

The difficulty in seeing this begins at the beginning with Wittgenstein's remark that the problems of philosophy are due to a "misunderstanding".⁴ For the wrong way of interpreting Wittgenstein here leads to the standard reading of the *Tractatus*. *Prima facie*, it seems that he is suggesting that there is a correct way of understanding language. But what would a correct way of understanding language be if not a theory? On this reading, we may grant that the consequence of Wittgenstein's theory is that our questions are confused and that we should refrain from saying anything in philosophy. But the theory that points this out to us would still stand.⁵

There is, however, another way of interpreting Wittgenstein's reference to "misunderstanding" and this leads to a therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*. On this reading, the misunderstanding Wittgenstein speaks of is not due to philosophers having the wrong perspective on things, but due to their being radically confused,

³Recall that in the preface to the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says that "the reason these problems are posed is that the logic of the language is misunderstood". Also, in this context, see *Tractatus*, 4.003.

⁴As we saw, the idea of a "misunderstanding" is the key to understanding Wittgenstein's view of the paradox involving rules at 201 of the *Investigations*.

⁵Cora Diamond refers to this way of interpreting the *Tractatus* as "chickening out". See *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 181.

to their having the wrong approach to things.⁶ Thinking of "misunderstanding" this way shifts the focus from the standard assumption that Wittgenstein is intent on presenting us with the correct theory. For, as I have already said, there is no such thing as an alternative theory to a confused one, since it is part of the meaning of "alternative" that there be something to which an alternative can be an alternative to. There is thus, on my interpretation, no alternative theory possible to the kind of misunderstanding that results in the posing of the problems and questions of philosophy.

One might ask, "Why can we not think of Wittgenstein as simply putting this confusion on the part of philosophers aside and yet still see him presenting what he takes to be the correct perspective on things?" What is wrong with this suggestion is that it fails to pay attention to Wittgenstein's insistence that it is the posing of philosophical problems as such that is due to a misunderstanding. If he had in mind particular problems that he thought were posed as a result of a misunderstanding we could make sense of Wittgenstein rejecting the incorrect answers and of his presenting alternative ones in their place. But since he clearly has in mind the problems (questions, propositions) of philosophy, there are no problems left--no remaining room, so to speak--for an alternative theory to gain a foothold.

On my reading, Wittgenstein is not presenting an alternative

⁶Cora Diamond puts this in terms of a distinction between the illusion of perspective and the correct philosophical perspective. Ibid., p. 196.

theory. He does not offer a theory in place of mistaken view about things, nor does he aim to remove confusion so that we can proceed in an unconfused way. His project is more radical than that, his target being the philosophical "perspective" itself, the one that makes it look as if there is something to be confused or right or wrong about. It is this "perspective" that is the result of a misunderstanding, and to which there can be no alternative.

Such an initial approach to the *Tractatus* radically changes our perspective on a number of standard assumptions that commentators make about the book. First and foremost, if it makes no sense to think that Wittgenstein is presenting an alternative theory or doctrine, we must characterize the remarks of the *Tractatus* in a new way. In particular, we can no longer speak of Wittgenstein's ontology or his philosophy of language, or his view on ethics or the mystical. Nor does it any longer matter what objects are, or whether meaning is "world-up" (realism) or "language-down" (idealism). And if Wittgenstein's target is not to "understand the world", but to undermine in some sense the whole philosophical approach in which the question of "understanding the world" is raised, then we must look afresh at what his concern with "representatives" (and the failure of the logical constants to represent) amount to. It becomes clear that this concern has more general significance than the commonly assumed one of finding a leaner notation than that of Russell or Frege.

Moreover, if there can be no alternative theory in philosophy, the role of philosophy as "critique of language" must be understood

in a much more radically different way than is commonly assumed. Critique cannot be in the service of theory (pace Russell), but must assume a more front-and-centre role. Indeed, we can begin to question the assumption that his critique in the *Tractatus* is inconsistent with what he calls the only method of philosophy, of "saying nothing" and waiting to show philosophers that they don't mean anything by their signs. Finally, if Wittgenstein was not presenting a theory, his disclaimer about the remarks about the *Tractatus*, as nonsensical, and as a ladder to climb up upon, must be reexamined. The supposed "theoretical" remarks of the book cannot be invalidated as straightforwardly as the standard interpretation assumes.

2. The standard view

Not only is it commonly thought that Wittgenstein's aim was to provide a general philosophical theory of language and the world, it is often assumed that that account is a (perhaps less plausible) version of Russell's logical atomism. Wittgenstein is thought of as attempting, like Russell, to provide an account of the fundamental nature of the world and like Russell, he is assumed to have proceeded via a consideration of language, of what we are committed to given what we believe to be true.

This is not to say that the standard view does not acknowledge the differences, indeed even the anomalies, in Wittgenstein's approach when contrasted with Russell's. For instance, commentators recognize that for Wittgenstein, in contrast to

Russell, significant propositions were truth-functions of elementary propositions and that, again in contrast to Russell, he thought that there were no such things as negative facts. Further whereas Russell took logically proper names to denote sense impressions, universals and perhaps the self, Wittgenstein, we are told, notoriously left this issue open. And acknowledgement is certainly made of Wittgenstein's interest in the mystical and this is shown to be in contrast with Russell's more scientific focus. Lastly we are told not to forget to contrast Wittgenstein's dismal assessment of what philosophy can accomplish with Russell's bold optimism about the possibility of making progress in philosophy. Nevertheless, despite these qualifications and acknowledgements, the standard assumption has prevailed that the overall target of Wittgenstein's philosophical theory is significantly similar to Russell's.

It is easy to see why one might be inclined to read the *Tractatus* as a modified version of Russell's logical atomism. Not only does the later Wittgenstein lump his earlier work with Russell's, while developing a sustained and penetrating criticism of each of them, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* pays homage to Russell for showing the way to understanding the essence of philosophy as "critique of language"; "it was", he says, "Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one".⁷ And in performing this service, Russell inaugurated what Ramsey called, in a now

⁷*Tractatus*, 4.0031.

famous remark, a "paradigm for philosophy", a paradigm consisting of approaching philosophical problems through the analysis of language.

From the point of view of this paradigm, philosophy is concerned primarily with semantic-cum-metaphysical issues. It functions as a kind of super-science or super-physics.⁸ While the physicist determines what is true and false; the philosopher figures out by techniques of analysis what the physicist is actually committed to. The idea of philosophical analysis is similar to that of chemical analysis, of showing complexes, such as "the book is on the table", to be analyzable into logical simples with which, on Russell's view anyway, we are acquainted. While not exactly following in Russell's footsteps on this score, Wittgenstein seems to be travelling down a similar path. For he appears to analyze complexes into their constituents and analyzes facts into more fundamental states of affairs, even if he never gives us any examples of these simples.

From the point of view of this paradigm there is a crucial distinction to be drawn between what has come to be known as the surface structure of propositions and their deep structure. Where

⁸Russell says,

This possibility of successive approximations to the truth is, more than anything else, the source of the triumphs of science, and to transfer this possibility to philosophy is to ensure a progress in method whose importance it would be almost impossible to exaggerate.

See Bertrand Russell, "On Scientific Method in Philosophy" in *Mysticism and Logic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 109.

philosophers have gone wrong in the past is that they failed to distinguish between the two and hence wrongly ended up assuming that the world mirrored the grammatical structure of language. It seems that Wittgenstein follows Russell in believing that it is the job of philosophy to clear away such misconceptions, through analysis, so that we can get to the true logical form of things. In this way, analysis is "therapeutic", because if everything were made perspicuous, i.e. if everything were cast in terms of an ideal language, the forms of language would become clear and a metaphysical picture of the world would be easier to display.⁹ For the philosophical puzzles which act as obstacles to our reading the logical commitments of ordinary language straight off would be eliminated. The therapeutic analysis of language, on this paradigm, is secondary and subservient to the interests of attaining a theoretical picture of the ontological commitments we have of the world.

3. Drawing the limits to what cannot be said

This qualified assimilation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* to Russell's logical atomism has been, in my opinion, disastrous for understanding Wittgenstein. Because of its dominance, even those opposed to it and who take a more adventurous reading of the

⁹Russell says, for instance, "It seems to me that the business of metaphysics is to describe the world and it is in my opinion a real definite question whether in a complete description of the world you would have to mention negative facts or not". See Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R.C. Marsh (London: Unwin Hyman limited, 1956) p. 215.

Tractatus are reluctant to challenge the central premise of this interpretation, namely, that Wittgenstein is presenting a philosophical theory. But that premise is exactly what we need to look at in order to understand the Tractatus.

To begin to see the Tractatus therapeutically, we need to remember the lessons of chapters two and three. The most important lesson was that, just as the Cartesians had failed to understand what an idea was, Russell had failed to understand what a proposition was. What Russell meant by a "proposition" was really an illusory entity resulting from the way he misunderstood the logic of the language. But from Wittgenstein's point of view, it makes no difference whether we refer to "ideas" or "propositions" as the unit of philosophical reflection. Both conceptions are a product of a deep misunderstanding, not something to be discussed and explained. The trouble always seems to be the same thing: what philosophers take to be the measure of everything else is in fact not something it makes sense to talk about in the manner of a science (broadly construed).

On Wittgenstein's view, it is hopeless to argue over philosophical puzzles:

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical.¹⁰

And he adds, "It is not surprising that the deepest problems are in fact not problems at all". For what the philosopher reflects upon,

¹⁰Tractatus, 4.003.

and what is genuine experience are two radically different things. In philosophy, we are never speaking about genuine experience, since genuine experience is experienced, i.e, precisely not the thing to be talked about or reflected upon. What philosophers reflect upon is not the measure of our understanding, rather it is just the reverse. It reflects the measure of our misunderstanding of things. Traditional philosophy, when conceived as a quasi-science, has to be seen as nonsense.

We can understand Wittgenstein's insight into the nature of philosophical reflection better when we bring in the background of Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus* between what can be said and what cannot be said. Wittgenstein considered this distinction to capture "the whole sense of the book".¹¹ What can be said, says Wittgenstein, are the "propositions of natural science". However, in a very important qualification he adds "i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy".¹² What philosophers appear to talk and reflect about, namely, "propositions" and "ideas", are not something that we can reflect upon at all.

For Wittgenstein, what cannot be said or questioned is everything that we as philosophers unwittingly and commonly think can be said. What can be said begins, so to speak, when philosophical reflection is "reined in". That is, the realm of what can be said begins when we "say nothing", that is, except what

¹¹Ibid., p. 3.

¹²Ibid., 6.53.

can be said, i.e., "something that has nothing to do with philosophy". Most commentators of the *Tractatus*, having failed to see the fundamental reorientation that Wittgenstein is making, interpret the remarks about what can and cannot be said quite differently. Having failed to see that what they, as philosophers, refer to when they philosophically "describe" their room, for instance, is not "the world", but is rather their peculiar way of looking at "the world", they naturally interpret this as designating what Wittgenstein thinks can be said. When explaining Wittgenstein's views on these matters, they will say, for instance, "that my coffee cup is here in my hand, (while holding up their coffee cup) is a proposition of natural science (an empirical proposition) or what Wittgenstein means by what can be said".¹³ But this is a mistake. What philosophers are saying is precisely what Wittgenstein thinks cannot be said. The point he is making is that if we want to say what can be said, we should simply say it, in ordinary life, and leave philosophy out of the picture entirely. Above all, we should not confuse what we think philosophically can be said as if that described what can be said.

Philosophers not only unwittingly assume that the object of their philosophical reflection is what can be said, they also try to account for what Wittgenstein means by "what cannot be said" in terms of it. They thus look through and beyond the very thing they

¹³Indeed, in my view, one of the lessons of Wittgenstein is that whenever a philosopher, say in a lecture situation, picks up a paper or a book, or points to a chair, in order to demonstrate something that they think is so basic that no one would possibly question, that is the time to pay the most attention.

should be aiming to see. Fully confident that they know what the propositions of natural science are, i.e., those propositions that have nothing to do with philosophy, they look "outward" from these "certainties" in order to give an account of what they think Wittgenstein must mean by "what cannot be said". For example, they will look at the coffee cup that is in their hand and say "the proposition 'the coffee cup is in my hand' is a clear example of what Wittgenstein thinks can be said", and then they will go on to define "what cannot be said" as whatever doesn't have the characteristics of this proposition.¹⁴

This fundamental confusion in turn frames the way they conceive of Wittgenstein's whole project which is "to set the limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards to what can be thought" and "to signify what cannot be said by presenting clearly what can be said".¹⁵ For they conceive of Wittgenstein, in the words of David Pears, as working from within "a bubble" of what they think is factual language and working outward towards its limit:

¹⁴On this view, whatever does not have characteristic of these "scientific" or "empirical" propositions and isn't a tautology will be rejected as metaphysical. Thus, Ayer conceives of logical positivism as discovering the criterion for a proposition, and then using this criterion to rule out as nonsense what does not meet it. But often what Ayer takes as an empirical proposition isn't a proposition at all.

¹⁵Tractatus, 4.112-4.115.

He needs some way of working from inside factual discourse...He worked back from the skin of the bubble of ordinary factual discourse to its notional centre, elementary propositions. Then using a logical formula he worked outwards again to the limit of the expansion of the bubble.¹⁶

For Pears, what lies beyond the skin of the bubble, beyond the limit of factual language, is nonsense, what cannot be said. The bubble metaphor aside, Pears shares with most others the view that Wittgenstein's aims to get factual language (i.e., what can be said) straight and that any "propositions" not fitting our description will fall outside as metaphysics (i.e., what cannot be said). The way Wittgenstein gets factual language straight is through his theory of factual language.

There is, however, another way we can conceive of Wittgenstein's project of "signifying what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said". In order to present clearly what can be said (i.e., that which has nothing to do with philosophy), we need not present a theory of factual discourse at all, as most interpreters assume, for we can achieve that result by reining in our quasi-scientific approach to things. Our philosophical approach is in fact precisely what gets in the way of our seeing "the world aright".¹⁷ By misunderstanding the logic of the language, and by taking the object of philosophical reflection as a given, we are led into thinking that what we are "theorizing"

¹⁶David F. Pears, *Wittgenstein* (London: Fontana, 1971), pp. 56-7.

¹⁷*Tractatus*, 6.54.

about is (A) something that it makes sense to theorize about and (B) something that poses genuine problems for us to solve by invoking these theories. But if we can show that the object of philosophical reflection is not something that it makes sense to theorize about, and is not something that poses genuine problems for us, we can entertain the possibility of giving up our "theoretical framework". But to give up this framework is to see that there is nothing to say beyond what we say in ordinary life; it is to return us to our "pre-philosophical" understanding of the world.

What I am suggesting is that we can "present clearly what can be said" by removing obstacles (i.e., philosophy's theoretical perspective) that block our clear vision. The standard approach to the *Tractatus* is just the reverse; it is based on building structures, namely, a theory of factual discourse. Moreover, I am suggesting that the root reason for the standard approach is that its advocates assume as sayable the very thing that Wittgenstein was aiming to show cannot be said, namely, what is after all the logic of our language looked at from the wrong point of view. What they take for granted is what Wittgenstein is aiming to expose as confused.

On my interpretation, then, the crucial thing for philosophers to recognize is that the object of philosophical reflection, which they formerly considered to be the most important thing, is the measure of their confusion. They need to see that what they formerly thought it makes good sense to speak of and theoretically

analyze makes no sense to speak of and analyze at all, and that what they did not speak of, namely that which has nothing to do with philosophy, is the only thing that it makes sense to say. The only way of seeing what can be said, i.e., that which has nothing to do with philosophy, is to recognize that what we formerly thought could be said, cannot be said. In short, the crucial thing for philosophers is to recognize the framework or approach that they have been employing unawares.

4. The theoretical framework of philosophy

We can now begin to see why I think it is wrong to think that Wittgenstein was involved in a quasi-Russellian project of describing the ultimate logical features of the world. On the contrary, what Russell thought he was describing and theorizing about, was the product of his **misunderstanding** of language. Russell imposed a theoretical framework on language and demanded that it answer to its demands. Wittgenstein's remarks were not aimed at working within that framework, but of exposing it, of showing that we are employing it unawares.

It cannot be emphasized enough how radical Wittgenstein's position is. What we quite innocently take (we think) as everyday experience in philosophy is actually the measure of our **misunderstanding** of it. An analogy may help to make this clear. Most of us are familiar with trying to spell a word which, after having concentrated on it for too long, begins to look unfamiliar and odd to us. When this happens we lose our confidence in our

ability to spell it. Indeed, we may even begin to wonder whether we have the right word after all. Those of us familiar with this experience will know that it passes, especially if we leave the word for a while and return to it at a later date. The thing to do is to "shake" ourselves out of looking at the word in this strange way. For we know that it is hopeless to try to recapture our original familiarity with it by concentrating even more on the word's spelling. Likewise, what Russell thinks requires explaining is analogous to explaining the word that appears strange to us. The fact that Russell is puzzled about the language is a measure of the way he misunderstands it just as the fact that we are puzzled about the word is not due to the word but rather to our strange way of looking at it. And to complete the analogy, what counts as understanding the word again in our old familiar sense is precisely that we stop asking puzzling questions about it just as what tells us whether we have understood our language is that we stop asking philosophical questions about it.

The point can be put this way. We ask "What" questions in philosophy, e.g. "What does a proposition mean?", and we acknowledge that in asking such questions, there is something missing that we need to know before we understand. But, for Wittgenstein, understanding what a proposition means is not to be had by providing this something that is missing. It is not a theory that is required, but rather the recognition that theorizing about a proposition is a guarantee that one does not understand it. If one understands what a proposition means, one will not ask

questions about it. But it is not because one already knows the correct theory of meaning, but because in not asking about it one exhibits what is involved in "not approaching propositions theoretically" in the first place. In sum, for Wittgenstein, to ask philosophically "What is the meaning of a proposition" counts as a criterion for misunderstanding it. It is the framework that we employ unawares, the one that makes it look as if a proposition were something whose meaning needed to be determined or not, that is at the heart of Russell's approach.

Putting the point this way, however, makes it look as if Wittgenstein were merely interested in exposing Russell's framework. But, as I indicated earlier, Wittgenstein is clearly interested in the general problems of philosophy. He speaks, for instance, of "the problems of philosophy" and says that "the reason they are posed is because the logic of the language is misunderstood". Moreover, as we saw in the introduction, he speaks of philosophical questions as of a single "kind". And he takes his approach to shed light on the issue of ethics, mysticism, death, scepticism, value, etc. Clearly if Wittgenstein is exposing a framework, it is a framework that is employed by philosophers in every area of philosophy.

So it is not simply that Wittgenstein's interest was in exposing the philosophical framework employed by Russell. The target that he was exposing was the framework that he thought common to traditional philosophy, of which Russell was a part. From this vantage point, we should not be misled by the fact that

Wittgenstein seems often to be responding to individual problems on the part of Russell and Frege into thinking that he was "fine tuning" their views and probing (relatively) minor flaws in their systems.¹⁸ On the contrary, in order to understand the *Tractatus*, we must once and for all shake lose the assumption that Wittgenstein was "basically" taking a "scientific" quasi-Russellian approach to things and instead start approaching that book afresh. This means as well that we must not try to explain away the "anomalies" of the *Tractatus*--that his own remarks are nonsense, that there is very little argument in it, that the remarks seem oracular, that they are necessary, etc.--but attempt to understand them. Instead of putting them on the index for future consideration, we should see how they are integral to Wittgenstein's point of exposing the framework of philosophy.

5. Where is the interlocutor of the *Tractatus*?

The kind of revision in orientation that Wittgenstein envisages cannot be achieved by arguing a thesis within philosophy. The obvious difficulty with such an approach is that any particular philosophical response that Wittgenstein could give would be viewed by the philosopher (who has failed to adopt the revision) as a response inside the problematic framework. To refer to an analogy

¹⁸Carruthers, for example, thinks that Wittgenstein is doing philosophy of language and one of his concerns is over whether Wittgenstein is more of a Russellian or a Fregean philosopher of language. See Peter Carruthers, *Tractarian Semantics: Finding Sense in Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

we used earlier, the philosopher would be in the similar position of the audience who thinks that the stage manager who runs on to the stage to warn the audience of a fire is part of the play. For even if we were to shout at the philosopher "You are in a philosophical framework!", this warning will be understood only from within this framework, as a philosophical remark.

This is an important point and I will elaborate it a bit more. The point is that Wittgenstein cannot say to the philosopher "You are employing a framework and cannot talk about the things in the way that you think you can". For the philosopher will simply respond with the question "What is it that you refer to that you say I cannot talk about?" In order, then, for Wittgenstein to "draw a limit" here, so that the philosopher will come to recognize that what he formally thought was alright to talk about is not something that it makes sense to talk about, Wittgenstein has to find another method. He has to find a way of drawing the limit without being involved in the futile attempt of saying what can and cannot be thought. As Wittgenstein notes,

to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).¹⁹

Instead of telling the philosopher (who has misunderstood the logic of the language, and who thinks that what cannot be talked about can be talked about) what it is that cannot be talked about, Wittgenstein says that he will draw the limit "to the expression of

¹⁹Tractatus, p. 3.

thoughts", that is to the expressions (the language) of the traditional philosopher. Philosophy will be "critique of language" in the sense that the philosopher will "say nothing except what can be said...i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy--and then, whenever, someone else want[s] to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he ha[s] failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions".²⁰ By being critical of the philosopher's language, Wittgenstein hopes to get philosophers to give up on the theoretical framework or *Weltanschauung* they unwittingly employ. And in giving up this framework, the obstacle is removed to seeing what can be said; the limit has been drawn.

An apparent problem with Wittgenstein's "method" of critique is that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein makes no mention of a philosophical framework and next to nothing of philosophical propositions that he thinks requires criticizing. There seems to be no philosophical interlocutor as we find in his later work. Indeed, Wittgenstein's characterization of his method in the *Tractatus*, as opposed to the method he seems to be employing, better fits that of the *Investigations*. For in the *Investigations*, there is a readily identifiable interlocutor whose remarks Wittgenstein is constantly criticising and probing. Moreover, in the *Investigations*, the interlocutor invariably opens the discussion, insisting on a "metaphysical" remark such as "no one else can have my pain" to which Wittgenstein attempts to show that

²⁰*Ibid.*, 6.53.

this cannot be thought through, that it is something that we have no model for.²¹ But in the *Tractatus*, there is no sign of an interlocutor, and almost no "metaphysical" propositions that Wittgenstein appears to be lying in wait to criticize. If the correct method of philosophy is to lie in wait for someone else to say something metaphysical, how can Wittgenstein be true to it?

Now Wittgenstein does refer to Russell's and Frege's work on a number of occasions. But the context of his reference to their work makes it clear that he is not criticizing a "metaphysical" proposition that they have made. Rather he mostly refers to their work in terms of showing how they have misunderstood such and such a feature about language and logic. Indeed, one is left with the distinct impression that Wittgenstein could have left out all references to Frege and Russell, and still have accomplished his task. Wittgenstein's overall task in the *Tractatus* is not to criticize their work; the metaphysical propositions that he says it is the job of philosophy to criticize are not Frege's and Russell's alone. Rather, his metaphysical target is something else, namely the philosophical framework or *Weltanschauung* of traditional philosophy. But if so, where do we find it in the *Tractatus*?

Another way of putting this is to ask: where do we find the metaphysical propositions that Wittgenstein, if he were to be true to his method, is supposed to be criticizing? Who is this "someone else who wanted to say something metaphysical" that Wittgenstein refers to in his remark about the "correct method in philosophy"?

²¹See, for instance, *Investigations*, 191 and 192.

Where do we find these propositions that cannot be said and where is the interlocutor of the *Tractatus*? For if I am right that Wittgenstein was aiming to expose the theoretical framework on the part of philosophers, should we not expect to find propositions belonging to this framework?

My contention is that much like in the *Investigations* there is indeed an interlocutor to whom Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Tractatus* are addressed. The trouble is that we cannot at first glance see this interlocutor precisely because the interlocutor is right before our eyes. The interlocutor is us, with our philosophical interests, and with our quasi-scientific way of looking at the world. It is the way we take our approach for granted, and assume to be so straightforward and "unproblematical" that constitutes the realm of the metaphysical, of what cannot be said. In other words, I want to say that simply because we cannot readily see an interlocutor in the *Tractatus* doesn't mean that there is not one to be found. On the contrary, it means that we have not learned the lessons of the *Tractatus*. For once these lessons have been learned, once we come to see the framework we are employing for the first time, the interlocutor "in us" will step forward into broad daylight. We will see that what we had taken for granted at the outset of our reflections was a very definite and arbitrary and confused way of looking at things.

What the *Tractatus* does, on my interpretation, is to lay out the logic of the language in face of our misunderstanding of it. This is crucially important since Wittgenstein believes that the

framework or *Weltanschauung* that we philosophers bring to our reflections depends on looking at language from the wrong point of view. By laying out the features of the language and showing how they relate to the world, Wittgenstein shows philosophers what it would be like to confuse these features and relations. By bringing into focus how things work, we can begin to see how not to look at them, thereby bringing into focus our *Weltanschauung*, which according to Wittgenstein is predicated on seeing these things from the wrong logical/linguistic viewpoint.

Now the main focus of the *Tractatus* concerns the nature of the proposition because it is this that philosophers have misunderstood.²² Of course as I have stressed, up until Wittgenstein the importance of language and propositions was not recognized as being central to the problems of philosophy. What Wittgenstein attempts to do is bring the nature of the proposition into clear view. But what is it about the proposition that philosophers have not seen? The fundamental point that I have been emphasizing through out is that philosophers unwittingly confuse the way the world is with the way we talk about the world. In other words, they think they are talking about the world, when they are really talking about their language, their propositions. The importance then of bringing a proposition into clear view lies in showing philosophers that they were confused, that they were transforming propositions into things that they are not.

²²This was always a main focus of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. For instance, he says "My whole task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition". See *Notebooks*, p. 39.

In chapter two I discussed examples of how philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding the nature of language (and propositions) as well as Wittgenstein's general approach to them. His approach, as we saw, was to show how propositions function as signs, in a sign system. In other words, philosophers have overlooked the nature of propositions as symbols.²³ As I see the *Tractatus*, one of Wittgenstein's primary goals is to show how propositions are symbols, and to show how as symbols they represent the world. As I mentioned, it is important that the main focus of propositions comes after the nature of pictures as symbols are developed. That is, the general issue of representation is discussed prior to our learning how propositions represent. For propositions, according to Wittgenstein, must be seen from the more general vantage point of representation. It is not surprising, therefore, that we first learn about the nature of pictures and how they represent, prior to our learning about the nature of propositions.²⁴ For it is the proposition as a picture, as a sign in its projective relation to the world, that represents, and which has been overlooked, and has led philosophers into confusion.

Before learning from the *Tractatus*, the nature of the

²³G.P. Baker thinks that the central focus of the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's early philosophy has to do with what he calls "the metaphysics of symbolism". He is right to put his finger on the issue of symbolism, but I think it is fundamentally wrong to think that Wittgenstein's interest is metaphysical. See Gordon P. Baker, *Wittgenstein, Frege and the Vienna Circle*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 83.

²⁴Wittgenstein's remarks on picturing begin at 2.1 and carry on until 3.1 at which point the proposition starts to be discussed.

proposition, as part of a symbolism, is unclear to us. In fact, according to Wittgenstein, our philosophical "problems" are parasitical on our not being clear about them. The framework or *Weltanschauung* that I spoke of earlier arises from looking at language from the wrong point of view. We look at language as something that is a representative, not as something that helps us to represent, as a sign system clearly does. It is with this assumed background in mind that Wittgenstein lays out how signs represent things, and how propositions are symbols. His reference to facts, states of affairs and objects (which are laid out in the most general terms) is integral to his attempt to make perspicuous the general features of representation against which we can come to understand the nature of the proposition and language. (On my reading, the central issue of the *Tractatus* has to do with understanding the nature of the proposition as a symbol; the remarks on logic, mathematics, ethics, mysticism, etc., help elucidate this "conception" of the proposition.)

By working through the remarks of the *Tractatus*, by coming to see how propositions function, we come to appreciate that we have been looking at language from the wrong point of view; indeed, language becomes an issue for us. (Remember, on my view, Wittgenstein does not point out how we misunderstand things. Instead, he simply lays out the rules of the language.) The insight that a proposition is a symbol is at the same time the insight that what we formerly thought were things to ask about (i.e. properties of the symbol treated as a thing) were not things

that it even makes sense to ask about. But to see how we have been looking at language from the wrong point of view is to see the framework or *Weltanschauung* that we have employed all along. The *Tractatus* thus acts as a mirror in which we see our philosophical reflection. Crucially, it does not contain theses about language and the world, but rather lays out the logic of the language--shows how language relates to the world--so that when we come to see how it works, we see our former way of looking at things for what it is, as the product of confusion.

Perhaps an example would be helpful in showing how the *Tractatus* can perform a therapeutic role of helping us come to recognize the framework that we philosophers employ unawares. We saw in chapter two how Russell's failure to separate the form of a sentence from what that sentence expresses leads him into thinking that the relational and subject-predicate forms of our sentences describe objective properties of the world. Thus, for instance, he analyses the proposition "the book is to the right of the telephone" into the form "xRy", and thinks this form is a constituent of the proposition. The result is that he thinks that there is a world of forms which it is the job of philosophy to study.

Russell thinks that his analysis of propositions makes an important advance over Aristotelian subject-predicate analysis by revealing the real logical constituents of the world.²⁵ On

²⁵This issue is discussed in Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, p. 207.

Russell's view, when we analyze "Socrates is wise" in Aristotelian logic we ascribe a predicate to a subject and this leads Aristotelians into thinking that the world is made of substances and attributes. For if we have a subject-predicate analysis of language, we are led to think that there are substances (e.g. Socrates) which have properties adhering to them (e.g. wisdom) and that these substances and properties make up the ontology of the world. By analyzing the sentence "Socrates is wise" into the subject/predicate form "Wx", with "Socrates" representing an argument, Russell feels that he has made a significant shift away from the old substance/attribute metaphysics. For he can now say that the world includes forms.

From Wittgenstein's view of representation, Russell's mathematically based conception of propositions in terms of functions and arguments is not as great a shift away from the Aristotelian conception as Russell believed. The problem for him is not, as Russell thought, that the Aristotelians had a wrong metaphysics or ontology. Rather the problem is that they are led to think that there is an ontology to describe at all. For Wittgenstein, in so far as Russell merely substituted one ontology for another, he shares the same basic presuppositions with the Aristotelians.

According to Wittgenstein, what Russell and the Aristotelian both assume is that one can develop an ontology by reflecting on what the expressions of one's notation says about things. In other words, for him they both fail to see the role of their expressions

as part and parcel of a system of symbolic representation and as a result end up confusing what belongs to their notation for things of the world. From this vantage point, the difference in ontology between Aristotle and the new logic is not significant. For instance, the subject/predicate form "Wx" is still based on a conception of objects and properties, even if we think of "Socrates" as an argument rather than as a substance. For the form is arrived at by abstraction from our subject/predicate sentences. And whatever ontology that is developed on the basis of our adherence to the subject/predicate sentence is going to appear in the functional analysis as well.²⁶

One of the consequences of basing an ontology on our reflections of ordinary linguistic forms is that we are led to think that the world divides up into things and relations. Thus, for instance, when we describe the contents of our room, we think of the objects that are in it as one sort of item and the relations between them as further items.

This assumed ontology illustrates what I mean by a Weltanschauung or a framework. We simply take it for granted that the ontology of the world divides up into items of various sorts, and we take it as our business to describe those things. This ontology seems unavoidable when we reflect upon an expression which we use to describe our room such as "the telephone is white". For by repeating that sentence to ourselves, while concentrating on the

²⁶As I said earlier, Russell thought that adherence to the subject-predicate form biased metaphysics away from recognizing the reality of relations.

telephone that is before us, we appear to be confirming to ourselves the view that the world divides up into things and properties. And indeed, any of the descriptions that we use to describe our room is taken as evidence that the ontology of the world is made up of such items.

From Wittgenstein's point of view, however, by repeating to ourselves the sentence "the telephone is white", philosophers are not providing evidence for an ontology. Rather what they are unwittingly describing is the form of a sentence which they have projected into "the world". In other words, by failing to see that the subject/predicate form of our sentence (which after all depicts things by organizing them into subjects and predicates) is part of the means of representation, they are led into thinking that the ontology of the world is described by subjects and predicates and hence that it is made up of things and properties.

In conversation with the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein addressed this point explicitly. He said,

The whole conception of objects is hence very closely connected with the subject-predicate form of propositions. It is clear that where there is no subject-predicate form it is also impossible to speak of objects in this sense. Now I can describe this room in an entirely different way, e.g. by describing the surface of the room analytically by means of an equation and stating the distribution of colours on this surface. In the case of this form of description, single "objects", chairs, books, tables and their spatial positions are not mentioned any more. Here we have no

relation, all that does not exist.²⁷

For Wittgenstein, the analytic description is another means of representation. By referring to it, Wittgenstein makes clear that our everyday subject/predicate forms are a means of representation, and that by dispensing with these forms, we can convey everything that is needed without postulating the existence of individual objects. What looks like the world of individual objects is a projection of the way we misunderstand the subject/predicate expressions that we use to describe things.

Given Wittgenstein's conception of representation, it becomes clear how misguided it is to found a theory of linguistic representation on a "thing-based" ontology.²⁸ For the very idea of a "thing-based" ontology presupposes a fundamental misunderstanding of linguistic representation. That is, if we get ourselves into a position of asking about the ontology of the world and how we are able to communicate about it, we have already allowed that ontological questions make sense, and that the world divides into individual things. But it is those assumptions that Wittgenstein's appeal to the means of representation is aimed at combatting.

²⁷Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, pp. 41-42.

²⁸When I say "thing-based" ontology, I do not want to convey the impression that for Wittgenstein there is another ontology to take its place. It is important to remember that this way of looking at things is an illusion; the idea that there is something to be accounted for in the manner of ontology arises from a confusion about how language works.

Indeed, it is in challenging these assumptions that Tractarian objects becomes significant. Commentators often try to account for the "objects" of the *Tractatus* by wondering how his ontology works. But as we see questions of ontology presume the framework or *Weltanschauung* that arises as a result of confusing the means of representation with the world. And Wittgenstein introduces the issue of objects in the effort of showing how propositions act as means of representation. Thus it is fundamentally misguided to ask what Wittgenstein ontology is and how objects figure into it."

²⁹There are two standard ways of understanding the objects of the *Tractatus*. On the one hand, there are those who think that Tractarian objects are realistic and that language depends on the "way the world is". We may call this the "world-up" view. David Pear's discussion of what he calls Wittgenstein's "basically realistic" conception is a good example of the "world-up view. The False Prison, vol. 1, pp. 88-114. On the other hand, there are those who think that Tractarian objects are linguistic elements, and that language is not determined by the world. This is the "language-down" view of the *Tractatus*. A good example of this view can be found in Brian McGuinness' discussion of Wittgenstein's "anti-realism as regards 'objects'" in "Language and Reality in the *Tractatus*," *Teoria*, issue 2, (1985), pp. 135-44. In my view, both ways of interpreting the *Tractatus* are mistaken. For both view accept the possibility that questions of ontology make sense, and both views are trying to account for Wittgenstein's reference to objects with this possibility in mind. But for Wittgenstein questions of ontology arise as a result of misunderstanding the language. And Tractarian objects are part and parcel of Wittgenstein's critical aim of making perspicuous this logic. Thus, to ask what objects are, and how language is possible, is for Wittgenstein part of the problem, not the solution. Wittgenstein expressed this view to members of the Vienna Circle:

The following question has now no sense: Are objects something thing-like, something that stands in subject-position, or something property-like, or are they relations, and so forth. It is simply where we have elements of representation of equal status that we speak of objects.

See Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, p. 43. I am indebted to

Tractarian objects are part of the means of representation; they are "elements of representation". For instance, in the sentence "the telephone is white", the sign "telephone" and the sign "white" are used to say that the telephone is white, to show how things stand. The objects are whatever basic ingredients the sentence fits together. In another means of representation, as, for instance, the analytic description of the room that we spoke of earlier, the elements will be different.

Of course it is important to distinguish between what refers to an object and what belongs to the particular form of representation. "The telephone is white" has a particular linguistic form in our language. But we could develop a different notation, perhaps a hand sign notation, to convey the same thing. In such a notation, the subject/predicate form will drop out; in this notation, a different form will be essential for representation. What Wittgenstein believes is that whatever notation one is using, there will be objects that the signs are about and that those signs will be combined in a definite configuration in coordination with the configuration of objects. (In order to express a sense, a sentence must have the right logical multiplicity and the right possibility of configuration.) Whatever the individual signs of the expressions of a notation refer to (in whatever notation) are the objects of representation

Andrew Lugg for bringing my attention to the above quotation.

for Wittgenstein.³⁰ It is also important to remember that notations with excessive multiplicity (like natural languages) can mislead us into thinking that what belongs to the language is part of the world, part of the objects.

Wittgenstein has in mind the framework of philosophers who divide up the world in, for example, a "thing-based" way. His objects cannot be accounted for in terms of this ontology. But there is the relationship between Tractarian objects and a view of the world comprised of individual things. For elements of representation, when seen from the "perspective" of philosophy, are the things of ontology. That is, when the elements of our linguistic forms are looked at from an inflated, quasi-scientific framework, they take on the appearance of being "about the world". In other words, our framework of philosophical questioning arises as a result of looking at what belongs to the means of representation as things that are to be represented. For Wittgenstein the "things" that are talked about, that are seen from the point of view of a "thing-based" ontology, for instance, are really the elements of linguistic representation looked at from the wrong logical/linguistic viewpoint. We look at these individual things and ask explanatory questions about them, but what we are really asking about are the elements of linguistic representation, looked at from the wrong perspective. The change in perspective

³⁰Wittgenstein's often noted indifference with regard to the character of objects should therefore be seen as reflecting his concern with dispelling philosophical problems as opposed to providing theoretical answers to them.

that Wittgenstein is envisaging here is as great as seeing a Jastrow diagram at one time as a duck and another time as a rabbit.³¹

For Wittgenstein, there would be no need to make perspicuous the logic of the language were it not for the fact that philosophers misunderstand this logic. Thus his interest in describing the function of linguistic representation is essentially tied to showing philosophers how not to approach the logic of the language. Wittgenstein thinks that to achieve the insight that a proposition is a sign, part of a symbolism, is at the same time to bring about a radical shift in one's own perspective. For example, if one has a "thing-based" ontology, and sees sentences as ascribing properties to objects, and brings this *Weltanschauung* to the *Tractatus*, one achieves an important insight into what one's *Weltanschauung* consists in. For one will see that what seems to be something requiring philosophical investigation, indeed, what prompts the whole urge toward philosophical explanation in the first place is really the consequence of looking at the grammar of our language from the wrong point of view. In short, to achieve insight into the logic of the language is to see one's former *Weltanschauung* as the product of a confusion. Wittgenstein's method is thus not to tell us about the metaphysical nature of language and the world, but rather to lay out the logic of the language so that we will see that our urge to ask such metaphysical questions is arbitrary and confused.

³¹See *Investigations*, p. 194.

6. How to read the Tractatus

I have been stressing that we cannot look at Wittgenstein's discussion of the general features of representation without also keeping in mind his therapeutic purpose. I have shown that there would be no interest in discussing such features unless there was a tendency on the part of philosophers to misunderstand them. I have tried to illustrate this by showing that the individual things that some philosophers think make up the world only appear to constitute an ontology. And that Wittgenstein's aim in making perspicuous the logic of the language is aimed at showing this.

My way of thinking about the Tractatus makes sense of a problem of interpretation that philosophers have had with his famous last sentence, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence". For there seems to be two interpretations to the "what" in "What we cannot talk about". On the one hand, we can read the "what" as referring to a definite and legitimate something, but a something which for some reason or other we are prevented from talking about. This use of the word "what" is similar to that found in a child's game in which one of the rules is to never say a certain word, say, "sugar". When one child turns to another and says "what we cannot talk about we must be silent", the "what" has a definite referent--it means the word "sugar". The problem for the children is just not to talk about this thing.

The situation is entirely different, however, if we read the "what" to mean, not a legitimate something, but rather nothing at all, as in, say, an illusion. When we speak of an illusion, we do

not want to imply that there is something legitimately and definitely there. On the contrary, the whole idea of an illusion implies that there is nothing there to speak of at all.

If we read Wittgenstein's remark under the latter interpretation, taking "what" to refer to a type of illusion, then Wittgenstein's remark is going to appear definitional. It looks like he is saying that what is an illusion cannot be talked about and we must remain silent about. But that seems trivial and uninformative.

So either there is a something, but we cannot talk about it or there is nothing at all, but then why say that one cannot talk about "nothing at all"? The solution to these two ways of interpreting the "what" lies in reading the *Tractatus* therapeutically. That is, it rests in seeing that the reason Wittgenstein is laying out the essentials of representation is to prevent a misunderstanding on the part of philosophers. An example of such a misunderstanding is the "thing-based" ontology that results from unwittingly confusing the subject-predicate form of our language with what is represented. In effect, Wittgenstein is saying, "What you think is something to discuss only looks like a something when you look at the language from the wrong point of view, as something to be represented". More generally, Wittgenstein is saying that "what" philosophers are interested in and constitute their metaphysics, their epistemology, their ontology and philosophical logic, are illusions resulting from misunderstanding the logic of the language. What one cannot talk

about (but which we formerly thought was the only thing to talk about) is now seen for what it is, as nonsense.³²

My contention is that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is laying out the logic of the language with an eye to show how we philosophers (with our *Weltanschauung*) are looking at things. That is, Wittgenstein discusses propositional signs, the nature of logic, mathematics, ethics and so on, with the intent of showing that what we are inclined to say on these matters can be shown to rest on misunderstanding concerning how the language works. His belief is that if we can work through his remarks and think them out carefully we will eventually see how we have misunderstood the logic of the language, and we will see our former way of looking at things, our philosophical framework, for what it is, namely, confusion.

On my reading, then, we represent the philosophical interlocutor that Wittgenstein says it is the correct method of philosophy to lay in wait for. We bring to the text a way of looking at things which we are completely unaware of and which Wittgenstein aims to expose. Given this *Weltanschauung*, we work through the text and eventually see that our way of looking at things stems from our misunderstanding the workings of the language. The interlocutor of the *Tractatus* steps forward and we

³²This way of reading the *Tractatus* makes sense of his assertion that "the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these [philosophical] problems are solved". *Tractatus*, p. 4. Those who think Wittgenstein is presenting a theory must find this remark unsettling, especially in light of the important influence that the book has had on analytic philosophy.

see that the whole point of the *Tractatus* lies our appreciating our error.

A helpful way of thinking about the *Tractatus* is to see it as providing what Wittgenstein calls in his later philosophy "a perspicuous representation", an overview of the workings of language.³³ In both books, he is looking at things from the point of view of the interlocutor (and by extension the "the whole modern conception of the world")³⁴ and is attempting to "dissolve" or expose (or draw a limit to) the interlocutor's framework which results in the world looking philosophically puzzling and out of joint. The remarks of the *Tractatus*, like those of the *Investigations*, aim to achieve this by presenting an overview of the workings of language aimed at undermining the interlocutor's misunderstanding which engenders philosophical questions. As in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein is not interested in disputing anything, but rather in laying things out in a perspicuous way such that we along with the interlocutor will come to see that there is nothing to dispute.

In saying this, I am not denying that there are important differences between the approaches in his two books. For instance, the perspicuous representation aimed at in the *Investigations* is organized in a piece-meal fashion, concerned with individual philosophical confusions, whereas the perspicuous representation aimed at in the *Tractatus* is organized in a global manner. This

³³*Investigations*, 122.

³⁴*Tractatus*, 6.371.

stems partly from Wittgenstein's assumption in the *Tractatus* that language functioned in only one way, namely, to convey information.³⁵ He was led to believe that philosophical confusion arose from misunderstanding the logic of the language, as if it arose in one way only, and this meant that a critical philosophy aimed at dissolving philosophical confusion could be organized in one way as well. The point that I am concerned in making, however, is not how the overviews of the language provided in the two books differ, but to notice that he is indeed presenting an overview in both of them.³⁶ For it is that whole approach to the *Tractatus* that has been traditionally overlooked.

The notion of a perspicuous representation of the functioning of language is essentially tied to the notion of critique. (Remember, Wittgenstein says "all philosophy is critique of language".) We have already seen in chapter four how key interpreters of Wittgenstein's later philosophy sever his remarks about language from his critical aims. I think that this mistake underlies most approaches to the *Tractatus* as well. We bring to it a framework, an approach that presumes that there are things to

³⁵See section four of the next chapter.

³⁶Thus I disagree with Ray Monk's remark that,

The *Tractatus* analysis of the proposition must be replaced by a "perspicuous representation" of grammar which would throw overboard "all the dogmatic things that I said about 'objects', 'elementary propositions', etc".

Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 320.

explain in philosophy, and that there is nothing "unproblematic" about philosophical questions. We merely want to know how Wittgenstein can shed light on our reflections about these things. But what we find in the *Tractatus* is guaranteed to disappoint us, for it seems that ultimately Wittgenstein is not even touching upon our problems. We hear Wittgenstein refer to simple objects, for example, and we are interested in this because we are interested in knowing "What there is". But then Wittgenstein hardly says anything about these simple objects; he doesn't tell us what they are. And we are baffled and left to ourselves to figure what they could possibly be. We feel it is our job to fill in the details that Wittgenstein has, for some idiosyncratic reason--artistic purity perhaps--left out. This leads us to construct the theory that best organizes Wittgenstein's sparse and seemingly oracular remarks.³⁷

This standard way of approaching the *Tractatus* is destined to

³⁷A good example of the wrong way of approaching the *Tractatus* can be found in Anthony Kenny's *Wittgenstein* and Robert Fogelin's *Wittgenstein*. Committed to the possibility of a theory of representation, these philosophers try to shed light on Wittgenstein's remarks on objects and states of affairs and pictures and representation by presenting models by which to understand them. Thus Fogelin maps Wittgenstein's remarks onto a classical atomistic model in order to help us get clear on Wittgenstein's ontology, while Kenny translates these same remarks into a chess game with an eye on unveiling Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning and representation. But they are on the wrong track. The key to Wittgenstein, in my opinion, is to see that Wittgenstein does not think that there is such a thing as "ontology" and that he thinks that a theory of representation is absurd. See Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 72-78, and R. J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2d. ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987). pp. 3-17.

failure. We can never understand the remarks of the *Tractatus* until we come to see the framework that we are employing unawares. And we can never understand this framework until we understand the point of the remarks of the *Tractatus*.³⁶ To understand these remarks is at the same time to appreciate the philosophical explanatory framework that we employ unwittingly. Once that

³⁶My interpretation sheds light on Wittgenstein's traditionally puzzling remark,

Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself had the thoughts that are expressed in it--or at least similar thoughts.--So it is not a text book.--Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it. understanding. (*Tractatus*, p. 3)

To this remark, Frege said,

The pleasure of reading your book can therefore no longer be aroused by the content which is already known, but only by the peculiar form given to it by the author. The book thereby becomes an artistic rather than a scientific achievement; what is said in it takes second place to the way in which it is said.

Frege seems to have thought that he was pointing out a flaw or weakness in Wittgenstein's formulation. But if one thinks of the *Tractatus* therapeutically, it becomes easier to understand why he would say that it is not a textbook. For the *Tractatus* does not present a theory about anything and so there is no information to learn. Moreover, it also becomes clearer why he would say that perhaps the only person who will understand him would be someone who already had the thoughts that are contained in it. For to understand the *Tractatus*, one must understand that it has no purpose other than pointing this fact out to us. For to understand the point of the *Tractatus*, one must have exposed one's framework or *weltanschauung*. But if that is needed to finally see what the remarks of the book are all about, then it does appear that one must already have understood the essential point before the remarks of the book are understood. For Wittgenstein's remark, see *Tractatus*, p. 3. For Frege's remark, see Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 174.

framework is recognized, the status of the remarks of the *Tractatus* will be revealed as having no more importance than to help see this.

Wittgenstein's remarks about representation in the *Tractatus* lay out the logic of the language with a critical eye on breaking the hold of the framework that philosophers employ unawares. They only become significant, and become understood, after we have worked to reconstruct the framework that philosophers employ when they misunderstand language. In other words, they play a therapeutic role, even though, unlike in the *Investigations*, the philosophical interlocutor appears to be missing. The remarks of the *Tractatus* lay out in a step by step fashion the rules of the language, its logic, and by coming to acknowledge them, we free ourselves from the belief that there is anything in philosophy to explain.

SIX

THE THERAPY OVERLOOKED: THE EARLY PHILOSOPHY

1. The "anomalies" in the Tractatus

So far I have suggested that there are two fundamentally different ways of reading the Tractatus. There is the theoretical reading, which assumes that Wittgenstein is attempting to "tell us something" about language and the world. Such an approach assumes at the outset that it is the proper job of philosophers to convey information and that such an enterprise is perfectly legitimate. The other reading of the Tractatus is the "therapeutic" one, a reading which assumes at the outset that philosophers are deeply confused if they think that there is anything to say in philosophy, and that they need to be shown that the enterprise of explaining language in its relationship to the world is incoherent.

One of the major advantages to the therapeutic reading is that it better accounts for some of the so-called anomalies of the Tractatus. For instance, consider once more his remark concerning the only strictly correct method in philosophy,

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science--i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy--and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person--he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy--this method would be the only

strictly correct one.¹

Wittgenstein says that the only correct method is A to say nothing, B to wait for a metaphysician to say something, and C show the metaphysician that he or she has failed to give a meaning to his or her propositions. The theoretical interpretation of the *Tractatus* can only plausibly account for component C. The therapeutic interpretation can account for all three components of his remark.

As I mentioned, the standard view of the *Tractatus* is that Wittgenstein is presenting a theory of factual discourse. The idea is that he is providing a criterion for determining what is a meaningful sentence and what is not. By providing the formula (the general rule for constructing sentences from elementary propositions) of a proposition--what Wittgenstein calls "the general form of the proposition"--the assumption is that Wittgenstein is constructing all possible factual propositions. What is outside of these factual propositions, such as remarks about theology and ethics, can thus be shown to be nonsense. Wittgenstein shows, according to this interpretation, what cannot be said, i.e., metaphysical propositions, by presenting clearly what can be said, i.e., factual discourse. He sets the limit to factual propositions, so that if a person utters something metaphysical, we are able to check to see if that metaphysical proposition falls into the domain of allowable sentences. On this interpretation, Wittgenstein's drawing the limits to factual language involves a process of elimination; we must keep checking

¹*Tractatus*, 6.53.

to see which propositions fit into the allowable pool; those that do not are eliminated.

Let me grant that the theoretical interpretation does offer an account of how metaphysical propositions are shown to be nonsense. Even if this is a fundamentally mistaken interpretation of Wittgenstein, as I think it is, it at least offers a plausible account. Moreover, this is the way that some of the logical positivists, such as Ayer, interpreted the *Tractatus*. So for the sake of argument, let us grant that the theoretical interpretation can account for part of what Wittgenstein means by "the only correct method". That is, it can offer an account of component C, namely of showing the metaphysician that the signs of his proposition have no meaning.

But even having granted this, the theoretical interpretation cannot account for the other aspects of Wittgenstein's view about the correct method in philosophy. According to the theoretical account, it cannot make sense that Wittgenstein is presenting such a useful criterion of meaning while remaining consistent in claiming that the correct method is to "say nothing". Moreover, proponents of the therapeutic interpretation would have to admit that there are practically no examples of any metaphysical propositions in the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein says it is the job of philosophy to criticize. So, on the theoretical interpretation, Wittgenstein is neither "saying nothing", nor is he waiting for a metaphysician to come along in order to say something. On the contrary, so proponents of the theoretical interpretation must

think, Wittgenstein has said a great deal in presenting us with a useful theory of meaning and we can now use it to criticize the metaphysical propositions that we do encounter. Thus Hacker writes,

philosophy, as practised in the book, had the *de facto* status of a description of the essence of the world, thought, and language, but a *de jure* status of nonsense. The future philosophy, the groundwork of which is laid by the *Tractatus*, would be purely elucidatory.²

Notice Hacker's use of the word "future". He is saying that the *Tractatus* itself is not purely elucidatory, but in fact describes the essence of the world, thought, and language. His idea is that what the *Tractatus* claims the method of philosophy must be applies to future philosophy, since, he thinks, Wittgenstein's practice of the method is not consistent with his principles as expressed in his book. Max Black puts the point more succinctly: "it will be noticed, of course, that the method pursued in the *Tractatus* is not the 'correct' one".³

This apparent inconsistency in Wittgenstein's method should not be accepted so readily. On the therapeutic interpretation, it makes sense that Wittgenstein would advocate that the correct method is to say nothing and wait until a metaphysician utters a proposition. In other words, that remark is perfectly consistent with his therapeutic aim in the *Tractatus*. For, on the therapeutic

²Peter M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 156.

³Max Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 377.

interpretation, there is an interlocutor, a metaphysician, which Wittgenstein's remarks aim to undermine. And since Wittgenstein's purpose is not to present a theory, but rather to lay out the logic of the language in a perspicuous way in order to show that the theoretical framework that we employ unawares is based on confusion, we can make sense of his claim to "say nothing".

What Wittgenstein is saying is that the **wrong** method in philosophy is to say anything philosophical, to present philosophical theories about things. The right method is to say nothing and then show that those who propose philosophical theories are confused. The right method must reflect the idea that the only reason why one would say anything in philosophy, and not go on about our everyday business, is to show others that they have confused their terms.

So the therapeutic interpretation can account for components A (i.e. to "say nothing") and B (i.e. to wait for a metaphysician to come along). As for component C, namely that of showing the metaphysician that the signs of his proposition have no meaning, the therapeutic interpretation can account for that as well. As I said in the last chapter, Wittgenstein is giving a "perspicuous representation" of the workings of language (and propositions) in face of which metaphysicians come to see how they have misunderstood these workings. And in coming to see this, they see how their former way of looking at things rested on this misunderstanding. They see the framework that they have employed unawares is based on illusion, and they see that "they had failed

to give a meaning to certain signs in [their] propositions".

2. The composition of the *Tractatus*

Another of the so-called anomalies that advocates of what I have called the standard interpretation of the *Tractatus* acknowledge is troublesome and annoying is the fact that Wittgenstein doesn't put his "theory" in plain language. Why doesn't Wittgenstein just get to the point? If our assertions are metaphysical why doesn't he tell us which ones they are and be done with it?

These questions raise the interpretive question of whether it is an "accident" that the *Tractatus* was written in the way it was. Most commentators think that the unusual composition of the *Tractatus* is mostly attributable to Wittgenstein's artistic tendencies, that the practical absence of argumentation and difficulty of the pronouncements has to do with artistic temperament. What other reason, so this interpretation goes, would Wittgenstein write in such short oracular remarks, all the time suggesting a "mystic revelation"?⁴

It is well known, of course, that when Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus*, he knew that it would be difficult for people to understand and in fact was convinced that no one would ever understand him. For instance, not only does he say in the preface "perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has

⁴Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 303.

himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it--or at least similar thoughts", but he was dubious that there were such people around. In fact, he jokingly suggested to his publisher that in order to "make the book fatter [he should] leave a dozen white sheets for the reader to swear into when he has purchased the book and can't understand it".⁵ This seems to confirm the view that Wittgenstein was artistically idiosyncratic. The idea is that he knew the book was difficult--in fact he thought that no one could understand it--but he published it anyway. Why else would anyone do that if one did not hold an overriding artistic concern, a concern of such obvious value (to him) that one would sacrifice the message that one was trying to get across?

Some interpreters take an even more uncharitable view of accounting for the nature of the composition of the *Tractatus*; they think that Wittgenstein has a penchant for obscurity. Fogelin expresses this viewpoint when he chooses Epictetus for the motto of his book on Wittgenstein;

When a man is proud because he can understand and explain the writings of Chrysippus, say to yourself, if Chrysippus had not written obscurely, this man would have had nothing to be proud of.⁶

But the fact of the matter is that Wittgenstein did want to be understood. First of all, we must remember that he thought the

⁵This after Ogden pleaded with him to include supplements that would make the book easier to read. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Letters to C.K. Ogden*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p. 46.

⁶Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. xvi.

Tractatus to be of "first rate philosophical importance".⁷ And he said to Russell that it wouldn't matter if the book was not published in his life time since it would eventually be recognized and then went on to compare it with Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.⁸ He tried to get Frege to read it. And after a disappointing discussion with him in which, as Monk says, "there is nothing to indicate that Frege got past the first page", Wittgenstein writes to Russell: "I gather he doesn't understand a word of it" and "so my only hope is to see you and explain it all to you, for it is VERY hard not to be understood by a single soul!"⁹ Is it possible that a book of such perceived significance, the message of which the author desperately wanted to communicate, would have its meaning sacrificed for artistic purity or for a penchant to obscurity?

⁷See Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 166.

⁸He said to Russell,

Either my piece is a work of the highest rank, or it is not a work of the highest rank. In the latter (and more probable) case I myself am in favour of its not being printed. And in the former case it's a matter of indifference whether it's printed twenty or a hundred years sooner or later. After all, who asks whether the Critique of Pure Reason, for example, was written in 17x or y? So really in the former case too my treatise wouldn't need to be printed.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, ed. and with introduction by B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 88.

⁹Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 164.

Maybe, but it strikes me as implausible especially in light of the therapeutic interpretation of the book. Indeed, if we think of the *Tractatus* as therapeutically inspired in the way that I have suggested, a better account of the nature of the composition of the *Tractatus* suggests itself. Specifically, the question arises whether the composition of the book is not essentially tied to the message he is trying to convey. That is, it seems to be a mistake to think that its composition is something that should be written off to an artistic purity, or a penchant for obscurity or even worse, charlatanism.

Commentators ponder over Wittgenstein's remark in the *Investigations* that the reason he wrote his remarks in short philosophical remarks is "connected with the very nature of the investigations".¹⁰ The idea is that since Wittgenstein is not interested in propounding philosophical theses, but is involved in countering our penchant for them, he lets his interlocutor give expression to these theses, leaving Wittgenstein to deflate them. A further suggestion of this view is that Wittgenstein's method of presentation in the *Investigations* marks a radical departure with the *Tractatus* and that the reason for this is due to the fact that Wittgenstein recognized the errors of his former way in propounding philosophical theses.

As I have said, this further suggestion is erroneous: the *Tractatus* is similarly therapeutic in intent to the *Investigations*; its aim is to undermine the whole notion of theorizing in

¹⁰*Investigations*, p. ix.

philosophy. But that means that we should look afresh at the idea of the composition of the *Tractatus*; it is clearly just as unusual as the *Investigations*. If we are led to think that the composition of the *Investigations* is essentially tied to the (therapeutic) "nature of the investigations", then perhaps the composition of the *Tractatus* is motivated by that intent as well. We should not be so quick to write it off to artistic temperament or a penchant for obscurity.

If Wittgenstein was, as I suggest, targeting the framework of philosophy, he knew that it was impossible to simply indicate that such and such a proposition was metaphysical. For were he to do so, his remark would be seen in terms of that framework. He could not say "this way of picturing things is impossible" since the metaphysician would think that it is possible; the metaphysician would not share the same limitation with Wittgenstein on what counts as picturing. Wittgenstein expressed this point in lectures to his students in the early thirties. He said,

People who make metaphysical assertions such as "Only the present is real" pretend to make a picture, as opposed to some other picture. I deny that they have done this. But how can I prove it? I cannot say "This is not a picture of anything, it is unthinkable" unless I assume that they and I have the same limitations on picturing.¹¹

What was needed was a way of pointing out the limitations of the metaphysician's expressions, not by describing the limits--not by

¹¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932-1935*, ed. A. Ambrose (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 27.

saying that such and such an expression is metaphysical--but by another means. The other means was, as he says in a letter to Ficker, to draw the limits by "remaining silent about it";

For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I'm convinced that, strictly speaking, it can **ONLY** be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which many are babbling today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it.¹²

On the therapeutic interpretation, what cannot be said gets "defined", not by saying anything about it, but by having the metaphysician come to realize that they have been approaching the language from the wrong logical point of view.

When the metaphysician says "only the present is real", Wittgenstein's approach is not to say "The proposition 'Only the present is real' is nonsense", for that would presuppose that the metaphysician would recognize the same limitations as Wittgenstein on what counts as a possible expression, and that is exactly what is in question. Instead, Wittgenstein lays out the perspicuous features of the language so that when metaphysicians come to reflect on the sentence "only the present is real" in face of these remarks, they will see that their sentence depends on not following the linguistic rules which normally apply to the terms of that notation. By describing how the language functions, the metaphysician is left attempting to express something that he or she now realizes cannot be expressed in that system of signs. As Wittgenstein says,

¹²Monk, Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius, p. 178.

If I indicate a picture which the words suggest and they agree, then I can tell them they are misled, that the imagery in which they move does not lead them to such expressions. It cannot be denied that they have made a picture, but we can say they have been misled. We can say "It makes no sense in this system, and I believe this is the system you are using".¹³

This view of Wittgenstein's strategy seems to be confirmed in discussions he had with members of the Vienna Circle about the approach that he took in the *Tractatus*. In these conversations, he expresses an ambivalent attitude towards the method of the *Tractatus*. In one respect, he says that he proceeded too dogmatically, and offended against his own principle that "the answers to philosophical questions must never be surprising" and that "in philosophy you cannot discover anything".¹⁴ What he should have done better in the *Tractatus* he says is to put things so "that they do not give rise to disputes". He says;

Once a perfectly clear formulation--ultimate clarity--has been reached, there can be no second thoughts or reluctance any more, for these always arise from the feeling that something has now been asserted, and I do not yet know whether I should admit it or not. If, however, you make the grammar clear to yourself, if you proceed by very short steps in such a way that every single step becomes perfectly obvious and natural, no dispute whatsoever can arise. Controversy always arises through leaving out or failing to state clearly certain steps, so that the impression is given that a claim has been made that could

¹³Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932-1935*, p. 27.

¹⁴He says that he once wrote these remarks in an early manuscript of the *Tractatus*, but it does not appear in the *ProtoTractatus*. See *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, p. 182.

be disputed.¹⁵

But it is clear that Wittgenstein thinks that in the *Tractatus* he was by and large following this method, despite the fact that he offended against it at times when he thought that there were still "things to be discovered", that he "still proceeded dogmatically".¹⁶ For he immediately goes on to say that his method in the *Tractatus* was the right one, "of not saying anything and leaving it to another person to make a claim".

What I am saying is that it is a fundamental mistake to think that Wittgenstein's intention was to assert anything in the *Tractatus*, as if there were something to be accounted for.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁶See Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, p. 184 (*italics added*). Wittgenstein is suggesting that he saw the importance of being undogmatic in the *Tractatus*, but that he sinned against it. In an entry of one of his unpublished manuscripts, Wittgenstein said confirmed my reading. He says,

In my former book the solution of problems was still far too little presented in a plain manner. It still appeared too much as though discoveries were necessary in order to solve our problems and everything was too little conveyed in the form of the grammatically obvious in ordinary language. Everything still appeared too much like discoveries.

Stephen Hilmy pays no attention to the words "still far too" and "still appeared too much", and instead focuses on the fact that Wittgenstein believes his early philosophy has the element of discovery in it. He thus concludes that Wittgenstein has abandoned his earlier attempt to explain or discover what language consists in. In my view this is a mistake. What we need to understand is the background of continuity that Wittgenstein is expressing in these remarks, against which, we can then understand the differences between his early and later works. See S. Stephen Hilmy, *The Later Wittgenstein: The Emergence of a New Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 62 & 66.

Wittgenstein was rather laying out the logic of the language in a perspicuous way, and in a step by step manner, so that we, as philosophical interlocutors, will not be tempted to think that there was anything to be disputed in philosophy, and so that we shall recognize that there is nothing to assert.

It is thus important to see that the remarks of the *Tractatus* are not laid out as arguments at all, but rather represent an overview of language. In other words, the composition of the *Tractatus* is designed for a different purpose in mind than what is traditionally assumed. One cannot criticize it for lacking argumentation or try to supplement his remarks by providing an argument in their place.¹⁷ The *Tractatus* is not designed for those purposes. On the contrary, it attempts to present a perspicuous display of the rules of the language, designed in such a way as to show that arguments in philosophy are pointless.

In contrast then with the traditional interpretation of the composition of the *Tractatus*, we must not think that Wittgenstein is being dogmatic in his assertions. For the presentation of the step by step rules were designed to avoid the impression that anything was being asserted. Nor is the book lacking argumentation and for that reason purposely obscure. Just the reverse, the purpose of the book is to show the obscurity of philosophical arguments. In short, while there is undoubtedly a literary aspect

¹⁷Thus Richard McDonough is wrong to speak of an argument (in the form of a thesis) in the *Tractatus*. See Richard McDonough, *The Argument of the Tractatus* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986).

to the *Tractatus*, we must be careful not to exaggerate it.

3. The ladder

What gets in the way of understanding the remarks of the *Tractatus* is our own assumptions about philosophy and that it is these very assumptions that Wittgenstein was to bring into sharp relief. The difficulty of the book's remarks lies with us, with our own stubborn presuppositions that ontological inquiry is legitimate, that a theory of representation makes sense, that an analysis to the meaning of a proposition is warranted. To come to grips with these presuppositions, to take some distance from our urge to theorize, is, I have said, the first requisite to understanding the point of the *Tractatus*. That is, Wittgenstein aims to bring into relief our assumption that there is something to learn in philosophy, some philosophical information that we are missing. Once we bring into relief our philosophical approach which assumes that there is information to be had, we recognize that the remarks of the *Tractatus* have no point other than to point this out to us.¹⁸

¹⁸At that point Wittgenstein says that we "will see the world aright". *Tractatus*, 6.54. Max Black criticizes Wittgenstein here. He says,

One might object that there is nothing for seeing the world "right" (*richtig*) to be contrasted with; as one cannot think illogically, so one cannot see wrongly.

I think that Black's is a wrong interpretation. What Wittgenstein means is that after the framework of philosophy has been removed, and the temptation has been removed to think that there is anything to be wrong or right in philosophy, then we will "see the world

That the *Tractatus* has no other aim than to bring us to see that it--and by extension philosophy--has no point, sheds light on Wittgenstein's perennially baffling remark about the ladder;

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them--as steps--to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)¹⁹

The trouble with this remark is that it seems self-defeating. If the remarks of the *Tractatus* are nonsensical, then how can they say anything, even that they are nonsensical?²⁰ The ground seems to have been taken out from underneath us.

In my mind, commentators who view the ladder remark as contradictory, rely on the assumption that Wittgenstein is presenting a theory about language and the world at some level. According to them, if the conclusion of a theory is that the premises of the theory are nonsensical, then the conclusion must itself be nonsensical as well. And so the theory defeats itself. Commentators sympathetic to Wittgenstein who want to avoid such a conclusion seek to qualify the remark away.

I think it is a mistake to play down that remark. Wittgenstein means it; the remarks are nonsensical to someone who

aright". Seeing the world aright is to see that there is nothing to see (in the form of a theory) in philosophy. See Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, p. 377.

¹⁹*Tractatus*, 6.54.

²⁰For a summary of some of the ways which this point has been made, see Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, pp. 378-379.

has eventually seen what they are trying to say. But that doesn't make them contradictory. What we have to reject in order to make sense of the ladder remark is the notion that Wittgenstein is presenting a theory to us in the first place. If we read him in a therapeutic way, as laying out the logic of the language so that we will come to have a "perspective" on our own philosophical approach to things, the ladder remark is exactly what is needed. For when we realize that what we formerly thought was something that could be said, turns out to be something that is deeply confused and metaphysical, in short, something that cannot be said, we realize that our whole tendency to think that a philosophical theory is possible is an illusion. The moment we recognize this, we also recognize the point of the *Tractatus* and we realize that it didn't have any point except to get us to see this. When we recognize our philosophical perspective as the perspective of illusion through the help of the *Tractatus* we can genuinely throw the ladder away.

4. The later criticisms

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticized some of the "grave mistakes" that he saw in his former book and thought that they would nicely serve as the backdrop against which his new ideas could be understood.²¹ On the basis of these criticisms, many commentators are led to think that Wittgenstein has effected a deep reversal of his position. In particular, many take these criticisms to indicate that, whereas the *Investigations* is

²¹*Investigations*, p. viii.

concerned with the doing away with philosophical theories, the *Tractatus* is theoretical through and through.²²

One would expect that, if "the absence of theories", as Pears puts it, marks the change in his philosophy, that Wittgenstein would have insisted on this out in his later writings.²³ But while we find criticisms of the *Tractatus* on a many different areas in his corpus, the idea that Wittgenstein was presenting a theory in the *Tractatus* is not one of them. In fact, Wittgenstein suggests just the reverse. In a clear allusion to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein says in 109 of the *Investigations*,

It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such'--whatever that may mean. The conception of thought as a gaseous medium. And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation...

Far from Wittgenstein criticizing the *Tractatus* for presenting a theory, Wittgenstein suggests in this passage that the *Tractatus*, like the *Investigations*, was similarly anti-theoretical in outlook.²⁴

²²In chapter five, I quoted some of the commentators who believe that the absence of theories is at the heart of the changes in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

²³David Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 3.

²⁴In their analytical commentary of the *Investigations*, Baker and Hacker discuss the point of remark 109. They say that Wittgenstein is indicating to us that the *Tractatus* was not wrong on all accounts. But the way in which they make this point

In my view, the therapeutic aspect of the *Investigations*, far from representing a break with his early philosophy, actually represents a deepening of its primary therapeutic goal. As an example of this continuity, I have traced Wittgenstein's view that many philosophical problems arise from approaching language in a quasi-scientific way. In particular, we have seen that in both periods of his philosophy, he saw that philosophical problems often arise when philosophers mistake language as a form of representation for something that is represented.

One *prima facie* difficulty with my approach is how to account for the sometimes sweeping criticisms that the later Wittgenstein makes of his former view. And indeed, he even criticizes his former view on precisely the issue that I have stressed is common with his later view, namely, the issue of confusing forms of representation with things. For instance, at 114 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes,

(*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.5): "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are."--That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.

indicates that they have trouble with seeing the *Tractatus* positively in this light. For instance, they say that "even TLP adhered to the view of the irrelevance of experience" (my italics). Unfortunately, they do not say anything at all about Wittgenstein's remark that "we may not advance any kind of theory". But we would like to know that proposition's relation to the *Tractatus*, especially since 109 begins with a positive allusion to it. See Gordon P. Backer & Peter M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 224-225.

Wittgenstein condemns his former view for confusing the frame for things, and worse, he locates this confusion at the heart of the *Tractatus*, at the part where he tells us what a propositions is.

I think that while it is important to see that Wittgenstein criticises the *Tractatus* for confusing the frame for things, we remember that Wittgenstein has not said anything about whether that idea was first to be found in the *Tractatus*. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that just because Wittgenstein's criticises the *Tractatus* for holding a certain position, that he has reversed his position with regard to it. We must not overlook the possibility that the form that the criticisms that the later Wittgenstein makes actually have their origin in the *Tractatus* itself. Indeed, it would not be surprising that the reason the later Wittgenstein is attuned to looking for the mistake of confusing the frame for things is because he had already developed it as a central focus of his earlier view.

The way to appreciate Wittgenstein criticism of his former view, while still insisting that this form of criticism is central to it, is by looking at his changed conception of form. Let me first recall how Wittgenstein envisages forms in his later philosophy; with this in mind, we can see how he envisages this notion in his early philosophy.

Philosophers, for Wittgenstein, utter platitudes which they inflate and take to be significant metaphysical theses in their own right. To use an example discussed earlier, they say such things as "another person cannot have my pain". This statement appears to

represent a deep metaphysical truth and is the kind of thing which forms the basis of solipsistic accounts of knowledge. But for Wittgenstein, this statement is a platitude that describes how we happen to talk about people in their relation to pain. It expresses a general rule which describes the standards for how we talk about pain. For instance, when we have cut ourselves, the rule/platitude "another person cannot have my pain" is exhibited in (under normal circumstances) others asking us questions about how we are doing, about how we feeling, as opposed to asking bystanders. And there are countless other circumstances in which that rule is interwoven with how we go on in our lives.

The ways in which such a rule is interwoven in our lives can be viewed as ways of representing things, comprising the presuppositions that hold fast for us, and by which we distinguish between what is right and wrong.²⁵ In other words, we can think of these characteristic ways of going on as forms of representation. And we can now state the confusion that philosophers make in terms of this terminology. When philosophers insist that "another person cannot have my pain", we can say that they have confused a form of representation as if it were something to be represented.

But why do I say a form of representation? The answer is that what philosophers have in mind when they say "another person cannot have my pain" is merely one of the ways in which our rule figures in our lives. In other words, they have in mind a particular

²⁵On Certainty, 94.

application of the rule, a particular way in which it manifests itself, but instead of seeing this particular application as an application of the rule, they see it as determined by the rule, as an extension of it. And so they unwittingly represent a particular form of it.

As we have seen, part of Wittgenstein's goal in the *Investigations* is to get philosophers to see that they are indeed thinking of an application of the rule when they assert it as a metaphysical truth. For if philosophers can be brought to see that they are thinking of an application, they will begin to see that what they thought was an assertion about "my pain" is really a platitude about how we represent it. That is, they will see that to utter "another person cannot have this pain" is neither true nor false but rather elucidates a rule that one happens to use when talking about pain. In short, they will see that they have been uttering platitudes as if they were informative propositions.

Part of the way Wittgenstein achieves his goal of getting philosophers to see that they have represented their form of representation is to describe the various uses of the expression under consideration. In our example, when the interlocutor says "another person cannot have my pain", say while pinching himself, Wittgenstein reminds us that pinching oneself is indeed an application of "another person cannot have my pain", though an extremely odd one. In other words, those circumstances describe a use of the expression "my pain". The important point is, however, that Wittgenstein reminds the interlocutor of the

different forms that that expression takes in our lives, and of the different ways in which it is represented.

What the later Wittgenstein calls "language games" are forms of representation. To describe them is to describe the way in which we represent things; it is to describe the presuppositions that lie at the basis of our assertions and denials; it is to describe the way we think about things. When we keep this view of representation in mind and look back at Wittgenstein's conception of representation in the *Tractatus*, we can begin to see how the *Tractatus* is both an example of confusing forms of representation for things, as well as a critique of that idea.

Wittgenstein says of the general form of a proposition, "that is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times". And he links our repeating this proposition to our confusing the frame by which we look at things for a thing. That is, we think we are discovering something essential about the proposition when we are really tracing around (repeating) the way we look at it, the way we represent it. The way to understand this criticism is to see that Wittgenstein is attacking his early assumption that a proposition works in only one way, to convey information. But before I show this, let us keep in mind what we have learned about the early Wittgenstein's notion of form of representation.

We saw that the early Wittgenstein believed that philosophers confuse the language for something in the world. Thus, for instance, while analyzing the proposition "the telephone is white",

Russell treats the form of that sentence as something that needs to be explained. In doing so, Russell, according to Wittgenstein, had failed to see that "the telephone is white" is a propositional sign in its projective relation to the world. For only someone who fails to see this would be misled into thinking that the form of our sentences requires explaining. In other words, for Wittgenstein, Russell had failed to see the proposition as a way of representing things, as a form of representation. As we saw, for him, Russell's whole explanatory approach to the proposition lies in treating what helps us to represent as something that is represented. Indeed, I argued that for him this kind of misunderstanding of the logic of the language is at the centre of the framework from which philosophers pose their questions.

One of the main messages of the *Tractatus* is that we approach the proposition from the wrong point of view. We see it as something to be explained, something that, for instance, ascribes properties to things, something that can be true or false. But a proposition is not something that can be true or false, something that can be explained or represented. Rather a proposition is a sign that--if true--represents things, that has the right multiplicity with what it represents, that "configures" its components in the way that the things are configured, that sets the standards for what is true or false. A proposition is a notational sign that brings a standard form for "configuring" things.²⁶ (A map

²⁶In the "Notes on Logic", Wittgenstein already had this view. He says, for instance, "a proposition is a standard to which facts behave". See *Notebooks*, p. 95.

is another way of configuring things.) A proposition is a sign that says "things are configured this way". It behaves like a picture and says "this is how things are", "this is how things stand". It is not something that is true, as Russell believed, but is essentially something that could be true (or false). It is "whatever can be true or false".²⁷

Wittgenstein believed that in giving these formulations of the general form of a proposition, he was giving the essence of language,²⁸ that he was showing that language was not something to be explained and represented--that was the mistake of philosophy--but was instead something that sets the standard for all explanation and all truth stating. In terms of the terminology of forms of representation, we can say that he was saying that the essence of language was that it acted as a form of representation, but was not something to be represented.

So the confusing of the frame for a thing is central to Wittgenstein's early thought. But how is it that this confusion is exemplified in his early thought? I said above that the crucial point is to see that Wittgenstein assumed that language operates in one way, to convey information, and that this is at the heart of his early confusion. To see this, recall above that when Wittgenstein says in wake of Russell's confusion that a proposition

²⁷I have presented some of the different formulations that Wittgenstein gives for the general form a proposition. See *Investigations*, 104, 134 and 136. For the original formulation, besides its logical formulation at remark 6, see 4.5 of the *Tractatus*.

²⁸See *Investigations*, 65.

is a sign, he identifies the proposition independently of its uses in the language. In other words, he does not see, as he does in his later work, that a proposition as a form of representation is something that is exhibited in our daily practices. Instead, he envisages a proposition to be a sign system, as a calculus that we operate with, and which we use to convey information to people.

Wittgenstein's early view is that a sentence, such as "the telephone is white" tells us that the telephone is white, and not red, or something like that. But how did he determine that? Here we come to the crucial point in terms of the differences with his later philosophy. That the sign "the telephone is white" enables us to convey information about the telephone is one way in which that sign can be used. But there are others ways that the early Wittgenstein is not paying attention to. Instead of thinking of the language game of telling someone some information, we could be using that sentence to teach someone what we designate as white. And again, there are many more language games in which that expression plays a role.

What I am saying is that the early Wittgenstein's view about the essence of language is seen through the medium of this one language game of conveying information. Failing to keep in mind the uses of language was a clear fault with the *Tractatus*;

It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus logico-Philosophicus*.)

And,

If you do not keep the multiplicity of language-games in view you will perhaps be inclined to ask questions like: "What is a question?"²⁹

And, more generally, "What is language?"

What Wittgenstein is describing when he tells us about the nature of a proposition (and hence language) is really a misunderstood description of the role of the proposition in the language game of conveying information. In other words, Wittgenstein is misled into thinking that there is something called "the logic of the language", "the general form of a proposition", "the essence of language", because he has confused what lies in the method of representing things (i.e. the language game of conveying information) for a thing in itself. That is, by failing to see that the game of conveying information is but one use of our expression "the telephone is white", Wittgenstein assumes that there is indeed a question about the essential features of how that sign represents.³⁰ But once it is kept in mind that the sign has a use, it becomes clear that Wittgenstein is merely describing a use of that sign, not its essential features (whatever that means).

²⁹Ibid., 23 and 24.

³⁰In this context, it is interesting to keep in mind his remark at 304 of the Investigations.

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts--which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please.

On my view, Wittgenstein was repeating to himself "this is how things are" because by focusing on the essential features of a propositional sign in so far as it represents, he thought he could discern everything that was essential to language.³¹ (And we have seen that by doing that he could show the metaphysician how not to look at things.) In other words "this is how things are" is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself because by doing so the hope is there that the essential features of language will be revealed. But once Wittgenstein sees that signs have uses, it becomes clear that saying "this is how things are", far from revealing a deep insight into the nature of language, actually gives expression to the way the sign is used in a language game;

How can I say that this is the general form of propositions? [...] But how is this sentence applied--that is, in our everyday language? For I got it from there and nowhere else. We may say, e.g.: "He explained his position to me, said that his was how things were, and that therefore he needed an advance".³²

For the later Wittgenstein, the formulation "this is how things are" describes the everyday use of conveying information, an

³¹He may have the *Tractatus* in mind when he writes,

There is always the danger of wanting to find an expression's meaning by contemplating the expression itself, and the frame of mind in which one uses it, instead of always thinking of the practice. That is why one repeats the expression to oneself so often, because it is as if one must see what one is looking for in the expression and in the feeling it gives out.

On Certainty, 601.

³²Investigations, 136.

ordinary application. But in the *Tractatus*, this ordinary application was treated as something special, as the paradigm by which all of language was to be judged. And by repeating "this is how things are", Wittgenstein thought that he was getting clear about the essence of the language. In other words, in doing this he thought he was tracing "the outline of the thing's nature [i.e. language] over and over again". In fact, however, he was "merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it".

Thus we see that though the later Wittgenstein criticised the *Tractatus* conception of language in order to deflate its abstract and metaphysical airs, the basis of this criticism lay in the *Tractatus* itself. In particular, the notion of exposing metaphysics by getting clear on how language represents was central through out his philosophy. The therapeutic insight is at the centre of the *Tractatus* and was deepened by the later Wittgenstein. And as we have just seen, part of this deepening of this view involved criticisms of his former view.

I maintain that it is only against the background of this therapeutic aim that the criticisms that Wittgenstein makes against his former self must be seen. It would take us too far off the track to go into these criticisms, but I believe that they should be seen as criticising the assumptions that Wittgenstein had about language while developing his therapeutic views. Only in this sense can we speak about the *Tractatus* as a theoretical work.

RUSSELL, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE PROBLEM OF THE RHINOCEROS

1. The argument over the rhinoceros

The therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy can also shed light on some of Wittgenstein earliest philosophical pronouncements, ones which were fortunately recorded by Russell during their first encounters in 1911. These early pronouncements formed the basis of one of Russell's more humorous anecdotes concerning a disagreement he had with Wittgenstein over the question of there was a hippopotamus in the room that they were in.¹ Russell thought it obvious that there was no hippopotamus there, and jokingly looked underneath the desks to prove it. But this did not satisfy Wittgenstein. In letters to Lady Ottoline Morrell, written in November of 1911, Russell records that Wittgenstein "was refusing to admit the existence of anything except asserted propositions" and that Wittgenstein "as usual, maintained his thesis that there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions".²

Actually, if Russell's frequent reports of his conversations with Wittgenstein to Lady Morrell are to be believed, the

¹Bertrand Russell, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," *Mind* 60 (1951):297-298, p. 297.

²These letters (247 & 254), written on the seventh and thirteenth of November, 1911, are reprinted in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (Vintage, London, 1990), p. 40 and are discussed in Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 89. I wish to thank Mr. Kenneth Blackwell at The Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario for his assistance in relaying the content of these letters prior to their publication in Monk's book.

discussion didn't concern a hippopotamus, but rather a rhinoceros. And the precise nature of the discussion concerned Wittgenstein's refusal to "admit that it was certain that there was not a rhinoceros in the room". "My German engineer, I think, is a fool", said Russell. "He thinks nothing empirical is knowable--I asked him to admit that there was not a rhinoceros in the room, but he wouldn't."³

Prima facie, Wittgenstein's reported objection, that there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions, implies that Russell's remark about the rhinoceros is not an asserted proposition. And since Wittgenstein apparently thought that only asserted propositions exist, it would seem that he thought that Russell's remark only appears to be an asserted proposition but is in fact no such thing. This interpretation of Wittgenstein's remark, however, raises two immediate questions. First, what did Wittgenstein mean by an asserted proposition? Second, in what sense did Russell's remark not qualify as one?

2. McGuinness' hypothesis

In *Wittgenstein: A Life*, Brian McGuinness argues that Wittgenstein's objection to Russell that only asserted propositions exist is an obscure formulation of a thesis which would take clearer form in the *Tractatus*. This thesis, says McGuinness, concerns the logical composition of the world. "The claim that only asserted propositions exist is clearly intended as a correction of

³McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 89.

Moore's position in his 1899 article ['The Nature of Judgement'] according to which the world is formed of concepts."⁴ According to McGuinness, Wittgenstein's correction is based on the idea that the world consists of facts--asserted propositions being facts--not of things or what Moore called simple concepts. The correction thus seems to anticipate the idea that "the world is the totality of facts, not of things", which is one of the opening ideas of the *Tractatus*.

McGuinness appeals to the fact that the phrase "asserted proposition" plays a central role in Russell's and Moore's earlier accounts of the nature of a proposition, accounts that Wittgenstein is practically certain to have read. The situation, as McGuinness reads it, is that Wittgenstein had already formed an objection to Russell's and Moore's views, which he was attempting to express in his conversation with Russell. In particular, McGuinness claims that Wittgenstein used the phrase "asserted proposition" in the technical sense in which Russell and Moore had earlier used it.⁵

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Ibid. Nicholas Griffin echoes McGuinness' interpretation:

We do know that Wittgenstein at one point defended the views that no empirical propositions are knowable and that the only things that exist are asserted propositions. Few conclusions about Wittgenstein's philosophy can be drawn from these remarks, except that the second of the them is based on Russell's account of asserted propositions in *The Principles of Mathematics*.

See "Ludwig in Fact and Fiction," *The Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1992):79-93, p. 89.

Russell and Moore's use of "asserted proposition" is connected with their conception of the "content" of a proposition as its essential feature and their view that the psychological processes involved in judgements involving this content have a secondary status. On this view, a proposition is not a psychic phenomenon as it is for Locke but rather is what Lockean ideas and the like are about.⁶ Moore called the entities that make up propositions "concepts" and Russell called them "terms". A proposition, on this view, is what Moore took to be a complex or what Russell called a set of terms. It is not something mental, but rather a complex or collection of subsistent, Platonic-like, entities.

On Russell and Moore's conception, truth does not lie in anything external to the proposition; it is not conceived as a relationship between the proposition (considered as a mental entity) and something else. Instead, truth is a property of the proposition considered as a complex or configuration of terms; a proposition just happens to be true. Conceived as such, a true proposition is a fact. As Moore says,

Once it is definitely recognized that the proposition is to denote not a belief (in the psychological sense), nor a form of words, but the object of belief, it seems plain that it differs in no respect from the reality to which it is supposed merely to correspond, i.e. the truth that "I exist" differs in no

⁶It must be kept in mind that though Moore in "The Nature of Judgement" develops his realist conception of the proposition in opposition to Bradley's idealism, his version of realism is also antithetical to the conception of ideas derived from British Empiricism. For more on this topic see John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1966). pp. 202-204.

respect from the corresponding reality "my existence".⁷

What differentiates a true proposition, or a fact, from a false proposition is the quality it has of "being asserted". As Russell says,

True and false propositions alike are in some sense entities, and are in some sense capable of being logical subjects; but when a proposition happens to be true, it has a further quality over and above that which it shares with false propositions, and it is this further quality which is what I mean by assertion in a logical as opposed to a psychological sense.⁸

McGuinness thinks that Wittgenstein was harking back to this earlier technical use of the phrase "asserted proposition" in his conversation with Russell. He thinks that by saying that "there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions", Wittgenstein was intending to challenge Russell and Moore's basic assumption that there was something ~~more~~ fundamental than facts. On the view being attributed to Wittgenstein, false propositions are not "entities", as Russell and Moore believed; there is not a complex of terms (or concepts) in virtue of which something is not; the world is composed of facts, not of terms, concepts or things.

For McGuinness, then, the discussion between Wittgenstein and Russell amounted to the question "What complex can reasonably be supposed to exist in virtue of there not being a rhinoceros in the

⁷Ibid., p. 203.

⁸Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1938), p. 49.

room?"⁹ He holds that Russell was of the view that a certain complex existed, namely what is denoted by the false proposition "there is a rhinoceros in the room", whereas Wittgenstein, in arguing that there was nothing except asserted propositions, was denying this claim. As McGuinness puts it, Wittgenstein was

denying existence in this sense to everything except asserted propositions or facts. Thus he had already reached the position expressed in the first propositions of the *Tractatus* that the world consists of facts...[and that] things, objects, or what Moore called simple concepts do not go to make up the world.¹⁰

3. Difficulties with McGuinness' view

In spite of McGuinness' claim that Wittgenstein's remark was "clearly intended" as a correction of Moore's position, we must surely regard this as conjectural. There is no direct evidence to be found in Russell's letters to Lady Morrell to indicate that the two men were discussing Moore's article or indeed any of Moore's or Russell's earlier views. In fact, if we are to discern anything definite on the basis of Russell's report of those conversations, it is that Russell was worried about whether the two men were discussing anything at all; what emerges from his reports to Lady Morrell is not that Russell was alarmed by what Wittgenstein was saying but rather by whether he was saying anything. These conversations, it must be remembered, occurred very early in their relationship, in fact, a mere fourteen days or so after they first

⁹McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 91.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 91.

met. At this stage, Wittgenstein's credentials were not yet established and Russell clearly indicates that he is worried that Wittgenstein may be "an infliction", "a fool" and "a crank".¹¹ McGuinness' claim that Wittgenstein's remark "was clearly intended as a correction of Moore's position" does not take into account Russell's serious doubts about Wittgenstein. It presumes instead that the framework of discussion between the two men was much more settled than would appear to have been the case.

This point is especially telling given that the position McGuinness attributes to Wittgenstein was, as McGuinness himself points out, already considered and rejected by Russell in his discussion of Meinong.¹² How could a sophisticated view about the nature of false propositions and complexes that was earlier considered and rejected by Russell, when given renewed (even if poorly articulated) expression by Wittgenstein, drive Russell to suspect that Wittgenstein may have been, not merely wrong, but rather a fool and a crank?

A further difficulty with McGuinness's interpretation has to do with accounting for Wittgenstein's remark in "Notes on Logic" of

¹¹Ibid., p. 89. The conversation in which, according to another of Russell's famous anecdotes, Wittgenstein asks Russell whether he (Wittgenstein) is an "idiot" or not, and thus whether he should go into aeronautics or philosophy, was not to take place for another three weeks. In response to Wittgenstein's question whether he was "utterly hopeless at philosophy", Russell says "I told him I didn't know but I thought not. I asked him to bring me something written to help me to judge". It would thus seem that three weeks after the rhinoceros conversation, Russell was still having doubts. This "later" conversation is discussed by Russell in R. Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius, p. 40.

¹²McGuinness, Wittgenstein: A Life, p. 90.

1913, that "there are only unasserted propositions".¹³ How can McGuinness argue that Wittgenstein's remark about asserted propositions anticipates the opening remarks of the *Tractatus*, given Wittgenstein's apparently radical change of opinion in between? Are we to infer that Wittgenstein changed his mind between 1911 and 1913, and then changed it back again by the time of writing the *Tractatus*?

The idea that Wittgenstein may have changed his mind about asserted propositions also runs counter to a fact that McGuinness uses to support his contention that the early conversation anticipated ideas later expressed in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein, McGuinness reminds us, claimed that his fundamental ideas came to him very early.¹⁴ But if this is right and there is a line of continuity in Wittgenstein's thinking to be drawn back to his earlier remarks, it is difficult to understand how McGuinness can appeal to it to bolster his view that Wittgenstein meant the same thing about asserted propositions in 1911 as in 1918. At the very least, if McGuinness is to use the idea of "asserted propositions" to establish a line of continuity between Wittgenstein's earlier and later remarks, he owes us an account of the remarks from "Notes on Logic" concerning unasserted propositions.

Finally, on McGuinness' interpretation of the *Tractatus* such

¹³ *Notebooks*, p. 95.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein said to M.O'C. Drury that "my fundamental ideas came to me very early in life". "Conversations with Wittgenstein," *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. R. Rhees (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984), p. 158.

remarks as "the world consists of facts, not of things" are ontological claims. But Wittgenstein's aim, as he makes abundantly clear, is not to propound philosophical doctrines, but to show that they stem from a misunderstanding of the logic of the language.¹⁵ McGuinness' view that Wittgenstein was "correcting Moore", both in the opening remarks of the *Tractatus*, as well in his earlier objection to Russell, suggests that Wittgenstein and Moore shared a similar program; to offer an account of the furniture of the world. Where they differed, thinks McGuinness, only concerned whether the furniture consisted of facts (or asserted propositions) or, concepts.

To be sure, McGuinness is not unaware of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical remarks. Thus he observes that in his "propositions about the form of the world, paradoxically said to be obvious, Wittgenstein is also indicating that there is something odd about this very ontology of his (or perhaps of any ontology)".¹⁶ But he thinks that the "something odd" is attributable to Wittgenstein's "literary style". As he puts it, "again we see that Wittgenstein's whole approach, his literary style, has as part of its aim to tell us that he may be only seeming to be uttering straightforward propositions about palpable objects".¹⁷

The logical status of the opening remarks concerning the world

¹⁵See, e.g., *Tractatus*, p. 3, 4.003, 4.112 and 6.53.

¹⁶McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life*, p. 301.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

and facts, and indeed, for that matter, the status of all the remarks of the *Tractatus* has by no means been settled. Still it seems clear that for Wittgenstein the question "What does the world consists of?" is in some sense illegitimate and nonsensical, and so too are the propositions that are proposed as answers to it. By taking Wittgenstein to have been following the same program as Moore, McGuinness prejudges this whole issue. And, in my view, this leads him in the wrong direction.

4. Asserted propositions

To do proper justice to that early conversation we need an interpretation that (of course) makes sense of what Russell reported in his letters and in his recollections, notably, that "he [Wittgenstein] claimed that nothing empirical is knowable", that Wittgenstein "maintained that all existential propositions are meaningless" and that "there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions". But our interpretation must also account for Russell's extreme reaction to Wittgenstein. Not only that, it must accomodate Wittgenstein's recorded use of "assertion" around the time in question. And finally, it must preserve the continuity of his fundamental ideas, and accomodate his claim that they came very early, as well as take into consideration the development of Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance adopted in the *Tractatus*.

As a first step toward clarifying Wittgenstein's objection to Russell, it is helpful to keep in mind two of Wittgenstein's uses of "assertion" in his "Notes on Logic", notes written within two

years of that early conversation. In the first use, Wittgenstein speaks of "assertion" in the manner of Russell, in the way that McGuinness suggests. He says,

Judgment, question and command are all on the same level. What interests logic in them is only the unasserted proposition.

There are only unasserted propositions. Assertion is merely psychological.

The assertion-sign is logically quite without significance. It only shows, in Frege and Whitehead and Russell, that these authors hold the propositions so indicated to be true. "├" therefore belongs as little to the proposition as (say) the number of the proposition.¹⁸

In the second use, Wittgenstein speaks of "assertion" in the context of saying what cannot be asserted, of indicating what it would be meaningless to assert. Thus, for instance, at the end of the last passage quoted above, Wittgenstein says "A proposition cannot possibly assert of itself that it is true" and he says,

Russell's "complexes" were to have the useful property of being compounded, and were to combine with this the agreeable property that they could be treated like "simples". But this alone made them unserviceable as logical types, since there would have been significance in asserting of a simple, that it was complex.

As well, he declares,

Types can never be distinguished from each other by saying (as is often done) that one has these but the other has those properties, for this presupposes that there is a meaning in asserting all these properties of both types.¹⁹

¹⁸"Notes on Logic", pp. 95, 96 & 103.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 101 (*italics added*).

In "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway", written in 1914, Wittgenstein continues with this second use of assertion when he speaks of "what is sought to be expressed by the nonsensical assertion" of Russell's theory of types.²⁰

If Wittgenstein's "Notes on Logic" shed any light on what he might have meant in his early conversation with Russell, the evidence is against his having used "asserted proposition" in the sense of Russell. In fact, if we stress the continuity of his ideas, it is likely that he would have been opposed to the terminology of asserted propositions in Russell's sense. For, as he said, Russell's sense of assertion is psychological, and betrays a confusion about the nature of a proposition. What is more likely is that Wittgenstein was using "assertion" in the sense of determining what counts as a meaningful assertion or not.

If Wittgenstein were indeed employing this latter notion of "assertion" in his early conversation with Russell the natural inference to draw is that Wittgenstein is straightforwardly questioning whether the proposition that "there is no rhinoceros in the room" asserts anything. On this hypothesis, in saying that "there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions", Wittgenstein was saying that the proposition about the rhinoceros only appears to assert something, but in fact does not. Since it does not assert anything, the utterance, for Wittgenstein, would

²⁰This use of assertion that we find in the "Notes on Logic" is the progenitor of the crucial notion of "saying" (as opposed to showing) that first finds expression in "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway".

make no sense, it being one of his fundamental ideas that only propositions which assert something make sense. Russell's proposition about the rhinoceros would thus represent what Wittgenstein called in "Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway", a "nonsensical assertion", and what he called in the *Tractatus*, a "nonsensical pseudo-proposition".²¹

Contrary to McGuinness, then, I am suggesting that the notion of an "asserted proposition" that Wittgenstein was employing may have been radically different than what Moore and Russell had earlier meant by it. Implicit in Wittgenstein's use of the phrase was a fundamental challenge to Russell and Moore's conception of the proposition, a conception that allowed Russell to confuse nonsensical pseudo-propositions with propositions proper. He was challenging the very framework with which Russell and Moore pursued their investigations into the nature of propositions. On this hypothesis, Wittgenstein was not working from within that framework and "correcting Moore" as McGuinness assumes; rather he was launching a criticism from outside it.

5. Full circle

A major objection to this interpretation is that there is nothing problematic about Russell's statement about the rhinoceros. "Of course", we want to say, "there is no rhinoceros in the room we are in". Indeed, we cannot think of a better example of a true

²¹"Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway", p. 101 and *Tractatus*, 4.1272.

proposition. How can it be correct to suggest that Wittgenstein thinks of such a statement as a nonsensical pseudo-proposition? What could be a more trivial fact than that? In short, we want to say, "Of course the proposition 'there is no rhinoceros in the room' can be asserted".

Before we agree that "there is no rhinoceros in the room" obviously counts as an assertion, we should pause and consider some remarks from *On Certainty*, remarks that were written in the last year and a half of Wittgenstein's life. For in these we find Wittgenstein arguing that "propositions" remarkably similar to Russell's proposition about the rhinoceros, notably "Here is a hand", "I know that there is a chair over there", "The earth existed long before one's birth", "I am here" are nonsensical. These apparent "assertions" are grist for Wittgenstein's mill in *On Certainty*, and are seemingly at least as commonsensical and undeniable as Russell's assertion that "there is no rhinoceros in the room".

Part of Wittgenstein's story in *On Certainty* is that these so-called assertions, which appear to be about the way the world is, are assertions "about" how we talk about the world, about the logic of the world, not assertions about the world at all. Moore thinks that it is a fact of experience that "he has a hand" and he thinks that the proposition "I have a hand" is a straightforward empirical assertion. But for Wittgenstein such a proposition is not an assertion, but "stands fast" for us when we make assertions about the world. He says, for instance,

I should like to say: Moore does not know what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our method of doubt and enquiry.²²

Insofar as Moore intends us to believe that his proposition is a straightforward empirical proposition, and is something that we can know and assert, Wittgenstein regards it as nonsensical. In his "misfiring attempt", Moore is trying to describe what "stands fast" for us, and which "belong[s] to our frame of reference".²³ That is, he is enumerating propositions which are true only in the sense that if they did not hold, we would lose our standards of correct judgement:

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.²⁴

It is fascinating that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein harks back to the terminology of the *Tractatus* and of his earlier writings to make his point about what can be asserted. He says, for instance,

My life shews that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on.- I tell a friend e.g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut the door", etc. etc.²⁵

Wittgenstein is saying that we say such things as "take that chair

²²Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, translated by D. Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1971), remark 151.

²³*Ibid.*, remarks 37 & 83.

²⁴*Ibid.*, remark 309.

²⁵*Ibid.*, remark 7.

over there", but we do not (at least under normal circumstances) assert the proposition "there is a chair over there". Despite how commonsensical it may appear, Wittgenstein is objecting to any straightforward attempt to assert the latter proposition. For him, only the former remark can be asserted; we might say that, despite appearances to the contrary, "there is a chair over there", taken as a straightforward assertion, "does not exist".

There is a relationship, however, between so-called "facts" such as "I have a hand" and my saying "I have hurt my hand". The former is, says Wittgenstein, *shown* in my saying the latter. That I have a hand is presupposed and forms the "background" for the assertion "I have hurt my hand".²⁶ But precisely because it forms the background, it makes no sense on Wittgenstein's account to assert or say anything about it.

Could it be that in his early conversation with Russell, Wittgenstein thought that Russell's claim that "there is no rhinoceros in the lecture room" was a "background proposition" which Russell had unwittingly assimilated to an everyday proposition? Could it be that Wittgenstein's response that "there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions" was intended to remind Russell that what he thought were propositions about the world were in fact not propositions at all? More specifically, could it be that Wittgenstein was arguing in opposition to Russell that "propositions" about the background are not propositions or assertions at all and that the only kind of propositions that

²⁶Ibid., remark 94.

existed were the everyday ones used in everyday life (i.e., propositions like the propositions of natural science referred to in the *Tractatus*, which have "nothing to do with philosophy")?²⁷ On this interpretation, an "asserted proposition" would be something like a proposition used in everyday situations, something that meaningfully can be said to be true or false, to be bi-polar, to say something, to have a use. Whereas Russell's proposition, being about the background for asserting propositions in everyday situations, doesn't qualify as an asserted proposition since it cannot be said to be true or false, bi-polar, etc.

Of course, Wittgenstein did not use the phrase "background" in the *Tractatus* or in his earlier notes. Instead, he spoke of the "form of representation" of a proposition. We can put Wittgenstein's objection to Russell in these terms. Russell's assertion about the rhinoceros is not something that can be represented, but rather belongs to the form of representation. His mistake, for Wittgenstein, is to think that he is making a factual claim when he is really confusingly speaking about the framework or form of representation for making factual claims. From Wittgenstein's perspective this explains why Russell does not even think twice about whether his statement "there is no rhinoceros in the room" might be something other than a commonsensical everyday assertion.

This interpretation has the added advantage of dovetailing with Russell's report about Wittgenstein that "he thinks nothing

²⁷*Tractatus*, 6.53.

empirical is knowable". If Russell took "propositions" about the form of representation as empirical propositions proper, he would quite naturally have interpreted Wittgenstein's objection as a rejection of empirical propositions as such. But Wittgenstein, on this interpretation, was not rejecting empirical propositions. Rather he was rejecting propositions that merely purported to be empirical propositions. Likewise, this interpretation explains Russell's remark that "he maintained that all existential propositions are meaningless". What Russell thought to be an existential proposition was not one, whereas it was Russell's purported propositions that Wittgenstein considered meaningless.

Also on this interpretation we may better understand why Russell reacted so strongly to Wittgenstein, and why he suspected that Wittgenstein may have been a crank.²⁸ For Russell would have had, as indeed anyone who has read Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* is sure to have had, a feeling of incomprehension that such apparently

²⁸Some years later when Wittgenstein had an opportunity to explain the *Tractatus* to Russell in conversation, Russell expressed a similar incredulity about some of Wittgenstein's ideas. In particular, Russell disagreed with Wittgenstein's view that any assertion about the world was meaningless. During the discussion, Russell apparently took a sheet of white paper and made three blobs of ink on it and asked Wittgenstein to admit that since there were three blobs, there must be at least three things in the world. According to Russell, Wittgenstein "would admit there were three blobs on the page, because that was a finite assertion, but he would not admit that anything at all could be said about the world as a whole". And he added, "this part of his [i.e., Wittgenstein's] doctrine is to my mind definitely mistaken". It is possible that what Wittgenstein means by a "finite assertion" is similar to what I am suggesting he meant by an "asserted proposition" in the early conversation under discussion and it may very well be that this later conversation is going over terrain similar to that of the early conversation. Russell's remark is quoted in Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 182.

innocent "propositions" such as "here is a hand" could be viewed as objectionable. Indeed, it is important to emphasize how natural Russell's response is. After all, most of us would not have any problem thinking that "there is no rhinoceros in the room" accurately describes the state of our room. All that we have to do is look about our room and it seems absolutely certain (except of course in very unusual circumstances) that there is no rhinoceros in it.

In philosophy classes we do indeed raise sceptical questions about such beliefs. But Russell gives no indication in his reports of their conversations that he and Wittgenstein were following in the sceptic's well-trodden path. In fact, Russell differed from Wittgenstein in regarding scepticism as a genuine, if mistaken, position and he would surely not have reacted so extremely had Wittgenstein been arguing a sceptical position, nor would he have attempted to ridicule Wittgenstein's position by looking underneath the desks in the room to prove his point.²⁹ Moreover, we must not forget that Wittgenstein's objection to the rhinoceros remark was part and parcel of his positive contention that "there is nothing in the world except asserted propositions". And remember that he objected to the **meaningfulness** of existential propositions. Wittgenstein was making a point about what can be said and hence known, not about what we don't know.

It is unlikely, then, that what annoyed Russell was that

²⁹Recall that Wittgenstein says that "scepticism is not irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical". See *Tractatus*, 6.51.

Wittgenstein was venturing a sceptical hypothesis. What is more likely is that what annoyed him--to the point of suspecting that Wittgenstein may have been a crank--was that Wittgenstein was actually objecting to his assertion that there was not a rhinoceros in the room. On my reading, Wittgenstein was questioning the sense of Russell's statement (in so far as it pretended to be a species of an everyday assertion) and it is no more immediately obvious why there could be anything objectionable about the sense of the proposition about the rhinoceros than it is assumed obvious that there is something objectionable about the sense of the proposition that, for instance, "I know that I've never been to the moon".³⁰

If Wittgenstein's early objections to Russell are, as I have been suggesting, substantially similar to those that he raises in *On Certainty*, there is a significant line of continuity between his views on the fourteenth day after he first met Russell and his views in the very last days of his life. However, putting to rest any doubts about this line of continuity will require more information about the early period than is at present available. And indeed, it may well turn out that in confirming it, we will be driven to consider Wittgenstein's philosophical orientation before he met Russell. While we may never know definitely the basis of Wittgenstein's objection, it is not at all unlikely that

³⁰*On Certainty*, remark 111. Wittgenstein once jokingly remarked to M. O'C. Drury that the phrase "You'd be surprised" wouldn't be a bad motto for the Investigations. What philosophers take as matter of fact is for Wittgenstein deeply problematic. And it is in this sense that I think we should understand Wittgenstein's remark to Drury. See *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, p. 157.

Wittgenstein was worried about the same issue in 1911 as in 1950. After all what Wittgenstein refused to admit--according to Russell--was not merely that there was not a rhinoceros in the room, but that "it was certain that there was not a rhinoceros in the room".³¹

³¹Italics added.

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