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The Role Of The Concept Of "showing" In Wittgenstein's Philosophy

Dean Bodo Proessel

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The Role of the Concept of *Showing* in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy

by

Dean B. Proessel

Department of Philosophy

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
March, 1996

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation will examine the role of the concept of *showing* in Wittgenstein's philosophy. In the early writings Wittgenstein drew a sharp distinction between what can be *said* and what can only be *shown*. Accordingly, he held that one can use language to represent the world, but one cannot represent the logic of language, since all representations already presuppose an acceptance of logical form. In the later writings this idea lives on. Although Wittgenstein abandoned his early conception of logic, he continued to hold that grammar is the inexpressible background which gives sense to everything one says and does. In both the early and later writings, he thus attempted to undermine the possibility of a science of logic.

The distinction between saying and showing is inextricably bound up with Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. Wittgenstein *always* insisted that philosophy does not advance any theses; it is, rather, an activity concerned with attaining clarity about the logic or grammar of language. Philosophy does, however, have something very important to *show* us: it shows us the confusion and puzzlement we get ourselves into when we treat conceptual problems as if they were empirical problems. Wittgenstein attempts to lead us out of this grammatical confusion by changing our philosophical point of view: philosophy is not in the business of *saying* anything; it is a therapeutical and ethical activity.
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I don't think I could have written this dissertation without friends around. I would like, in particular, to thank Steve Gamble, Ian Kerr and Greg Hagen. All of these guys, each in their own way, were philosophical soul mates.

A few words cannot capture the thanks I owe to Irving Block. He has made an indelible impression on my intellectual development: first, as an excellent teacher who introduced me to the philosophy of Wittgenstein and made it possible for me to find my way through the writings of this most difficult of thinkers when I was an undergraduate student; then, later, in his role as a supervisor -- his guidance was always useful and insightful, and his own writings greatly motivated the topic of this dissertation; finally, as a kind and good person, someone who was critical yet always encouraging.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate of examination</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. The Origins of the Concept of Showing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell's Theory of Types and Logical Objects</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittgenstein's Critique of Russell</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Showing</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic and the Concept of Showing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Elucidation in the Tractatus</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Propositions and Names</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphysics in the Tractatus</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning and Use</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tractatus and Nonsense</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Philosophy</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Whatever Happened to the Concept of Showing?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overview: Rules and Their Application</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Grammar</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar is Arbitrary</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar is Not Arbitrary</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A User's Point of View</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Agreement in Form to Agreement in Judgments</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Wittgenstein's Challenge to Epistemology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Disengaged Perspective</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective and Objective Certainty</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds for Doubt</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of Showing</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Later View of Logic</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Logical Grammar and World Pictures  
The Relation to the *Tractatus*  
Wittgenstein’s Relation to Kant  
More About Philosophy as *Showing*  
Conclusion  

5. **Changing Our Philosophical Perspective**  
   Some General Remarks on Method  
   Rules and Grammar  
   A User’s Point of View  
   A New Form of Criticism  
   Some Closing Remarks  

Bibliography  

Vita
Abbreviations

The following is a list of abbreviations used to refer to Wittgenstein's texts:

BB

CV

LA

LRKM

NB

OC

PG

PI

PO

PR
RFGB

RFM

T

WVC

Z
Introduction

The year is 1919: Wittgenstein has spent the past seven years discussing with Russell the nature of logic and has just completed writing the *Tractatus*. Yet, he now writes Russell telling him that:

I'm afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention to which the whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by propositions -- i.e. by language -- (and, which comes to the same thing, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown (gezeigt); which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy.¹

It seems that Russell had failed to understand the distinction between what can be *said* and what can only be *shown*. And that, Wittgenstein insists, is of great significance. For not only does he claim that this distinction is the "main contention" of the *Tractatus*, he also proclaims that it is the "cardinal problem of philosophy."

The question is: Why did Wittgenstein conceive this distinction as being so central to philosophy? This is a question which I will seek to answer in this dissertation. Did Wittgenstein abandon this distinction in his later writings? This is the other main question I will attempt to answer. I will argue that the distinction between saying and showing, while not explicitly stated in the later

writings, is implicit therein, albeit in a transmuted form.\(^2\) Not only (as we can see from this letter) is this distinction fundamental to understanding Wittgenstein's early philosophy; it is the key to the unity of all of his writings. For all of his writings, I believe, attempt to undermine the very possibility of a science of logic or grammar and so theories of meaning in general. The *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein's first great attempt to critique metaphysics, the later writings his second.

Now we know that Wittgenstein clearly changed his mind about certain matters when in 1929 he returned to philosophy. In fact, in the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, written years later, he explicitly tells us that his later views can only be understood if one first understands his early philosophy:

Four years ago I had occasion to read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new one's together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking.

The problem is that commentators often exaggerate and misplace the differences between Wittgenstein's early and later writings. And they do so because they take the later writings as repudiating completely the ideas of his

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\(^2\)I am indebted to Irving Block for this idea. In the many discussions we had on Wittgenstein's philosophy over the years, he convinced me that the concept of "showing" survives in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Also see I. Block, "The Unity Of Wittgenstein's Philosophy" in *Language, Logic And Philosophy* (Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium 28th August to 2nd September 1979, Kirchberg/Wechsel Austria), pp. 233-36.
early works. What Norman Malcolm says about this matter, in his exposition of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, is quite typical:

A considerable part of the *Investigations* is an attack, either explicit or implicit, on the earlier work. This development is probably unique in the history of philosophy -- a thinker producing, at different times of his life, two highly original systems of thought, each expressed in an elegant and powerful style, each greatly influencing contemporary philosophy, and the second being a criticism and rejection of this first.³

Malcolm goes on to suggest that Wittgenstein's later writings are anti-realist insofar as they reject what Malcolm considers to be the metaphysical realism of the early writings. What is the so-called realism which the later writings purportedly reject? It is the view that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is giving an account of the metaphysical features of reality, features which are independent of the logical features of language. On this view there exist fixed possible ways in which objects which form the substance of the world can be combined with each other. These possibilities are written into the nature of reality itself and so exist independently of language. They can only be mirrored in language and therefore show themselves, for any attempt to capture them in intelligible language leads to nonsense. And so when Wittgenstein comes to change his mind in the later writings what he supposedly rejects is the notion that one can fix possibility by the metaphysical nature of reality.⁴

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³See page 336.

⁴Evidence of the fact that Malcolm reads the *Tractatus* in this manner is further spelled out in his book *Nothing is Hidden*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). In particular, see the first chapter.
But is this really what Wittgenstein is doing? Does he shift from being a realist about facts to being an anti-realist about them? I do not think so. If anything, Wittgenstein was seeking always to undermine any philosophical standpoint which leads one to pose such philosophical questions in the first place (PI: 402). Wittgenstein attempts to undermine this dichotomy between realism and anti-realism, and all his philosophical writings, not just the later writings, partake in this endeavour. This, at least, is how one will read what he is doing if one takes seriously what he says about philosophy. If what I will argue is correct, one cannot understand Wittgenstein correctly unless one does take him seriously.

Whether one is reading Wittgenstein’s early or later writings, one cannot help but be struck by his insistence that philosophy does not advance any doctrines or theses and that one is confused if one thinks that it does. Already in 1913 he writes that "philosophy gives no pictures of reality" (NB: p. 106); years later in the Investigations he furthers this idea: "If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them" (PI: 128). Commentators often fail to take this view of philosophy seriously; consequently, they read Wittgenstein as if he were espousing doctrines, as if he were rejecting realism with some type of anti-realism. What is more, in failing to heed this conception of philosophy, they fail to take seriously the importance of the distinction between saying and showing. I will argue that Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy is
inextricably bound up with the concept of showing, and this is evident in the claim that philosophy is an activity of elucidation, not explanation.

Let us again consider the letter to Russell for a moment. It seems that Russell did not take this concept of showing seriously because he continued to think that philosophy could provide theories of meaning and that a "hierarchy of languages," as he was later to put it in his introduction to the Tractatus, is possible after all.\textsuperscript{5} It seems, in other words, that Russell conceived of philosophy in pseudo-scientific terms: philosophy is in the business of providing information; it discovers truths about reality. But that is just what Wittgenstein rejects throughout all of his writings. He rejects the notion that logic or grammar is in need of the services of philosophy and he does so because of his belief that "logic takes care of itself."

Think of it in this way. When we do philosophy we often attempt to position ourselves outside of our ordinary 'uses' of language and so outside of logic. We assume that from such an external vantage point we can theorize about meaning and thus justify language in some way. And we think that we can do so because we treat logic as if it were a fact or object which can be externally investigated. This holds for both realists and anti-realists: both disputants to this philosophical debate assume there to be a meaningful question about the relation between language and reality, a question to which they can provide answers. For Wittgenstein this is fundamentally misguided.

\textsuperscript{5}See page xxi of Russell's introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus.
One can use language to describe or represent the world, but one cannot explain or represent the logic of language itself, since all explanations already presuppose the logic or grammar one is seeking to explain. One cannot, that is, step outside of language in order to explain what gives language sense. For logic or grammar is \textit{internal} to language; it is something which is given to us and so something which we must understand if we are to say anything meaningful at all.

But is this not itself a philosophical thesis? One might say that my account of what Wittgenstein is doing here involves advancing a thesis. I do not believe, however, that Wittgenstein advances theses. On the contrary, what he attempts to do, in both the early and late writings, is change our point of view. He attempts to show us that refuting one philosophical thesis with another is precisely what causes all of the confusion in the first place. When one sees things through the lens of a philosophical theory, one has a tendency to distort certain features of the ordinary use of our concepts. Wittgenstein's whole philosophy is an attempt to show the philosopher a way out of this distortion and confusion. This, however, requires not refutation but sensitivity; it requires seeing things from inside a point of view.

And this is why the concept of "use" is so fundamentally bound up with Wittgenstein's view of logic and philosophy. Since logic or grammar is \textit{internal} to everything we say, no philosophical theory can explain how a sign has meaning independent of its \textit{use} in language. What we need to do is actually
look at the use of language, for it is here that a sign has its meaning. That a sign has meaning is something which shows itself in our understanding how to go on. Despite what some commentators contend, I will contend that the concept of use is central to all of Wittgenstein's writings. In the early writings, for example, Wittgenstein already insists that the reference of a word is given with its use in a proposition (T: 3.3), and the role of philosophy consists in clarifying the syntactical rules for the use of symbols so we can get clear about the symbolism.

Wittgenstein, of course, later comes to reject his earlier notion that philosophy can give a complete analysis of propositions and so with it the view that 'use' has only to do with the logical syntactical structure of a proposition. His earlier writings, he now thinks, had failed to really examine language as it is "open to view"; there was a tendency to "sublime the logic of our language" (PI: 89), and to that extent they were metaphysical. Thus is born the language game technique, a technique designed to emphasize the way language and action are interwoven: "I shall," he writes, "call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the language game" (PI: 7). With this technique Wittgenstein now attempts to show how the expressions of our language acquire their sense from the language games in which they are used and the forms of life in which these games are ultimately rooted.

Importantly, though, Wittgenstein continues to show us the kinds of problems we run into when we endeavour to say what gives a language game
its sense from a position outside of a particular language game. He thus continues to embrace the idea, formulated in his youth, that understanding is a capacity which shows itself in our use of logic or grammar. For it is only there, in the use of language, where a sign or a sentence has its meaning.

What Wittgenstein does not do, contrary to what some commentators think, is critique his earlier views because one finds there some metaphysical account about what is external to language. Such a critique of theories of meaning is already begun in the Tractatus itself. The therapy which Wittgenstein later describes the role of philosophy as providing is something the Tractatus itself already provides, albeit in a manner which Wittgenstein later holds to be inadequate. This is, after all, why he points out, in the above quoted letter to Russell, that the "whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary" to the distinction between saying and showing. In saying it is only a 'corollary', Wittgenstein emphasises not only the important link between philosophy and the concept of showing; he also emphasises the important role which philosophy plays in liberating us from philosophical confusion. From what does philosophy liberate us you might ask? It liberates us from the kinds of problems we get into when "the logic of our language is misunderstood", the kinds of problems which arise when we attempt to treat conceptual problems as if they were scientific problems.

Here is how I propose to argue for all of this. The first two chapters will be devoted to Wittgenstein's early writings. I will attempt to do two things:
first, I will examine what Wittgenstein means by his concept of showing; secondly, I will claim that only if we take this concept seriously can we see the early writings in their proper light: as undermining the tendency towards theories of meaning. In the first chapter, I will examine what Wittgenstein wrote prior to the *Tractatus*. My aim will be to trace the origins of the concept of showing and its connection to Wittgenstein's claim that "logic takes care of itself." The second chapter will focus on the *Tractatus*. I will concentrate on what Wittgenstein says about ordinary propositions with the aim of demonstrating just how important the concept of *use* is to Wittgenstein's early writings. I will attempt to show that, contrary to what some commentators think, the *Tractatus* is not a work in explanatory metaphysics.

Chapters three and four will examine how the concept of showing survives in the later writings. In chapter three I will concentrate on the significance of Wittgenstein's shift from logic to 'grammar' and how this connects to his account of following a rule. Grammar is like logic, I will argue, in that it too discriminates what it is possible to say and ask, and it too cannot be justified by a philosophical theory. But it is unlike logic in that it signifies how our use of language connects to life and culture. Chapter four will focus on *On Certainty*. My concern will be to examine how Wittgenstein continues to make use of the distinction between saying and showing in his quest to challenge the modern philosophical tradition, a tradition in which epistemology and psychology are central to philosophy.
I will conclude with a chapter on the therapy of Wittgenstein's later writings. My aim will be to show why it is wrong to think, as some commentators have, that Wittgenstein's view of philosophy leads to the "end of philosophy." What Wittgenstein is attempting to do in all of his philosophical writings, I will argue, is change our philosophical point of view.
Chapter One

The Origins of the Concept of Showing

In the first entry of the Notebooks 1914-1916, Wittgenstein writes that "logic takes care of itself." He then adds, a few sentences later, that this is an "extremely profound and important insight." But why is this such an important insight? The answer, I believe, can be found in what Wittgenstein wrote prior to 1914. It is here that we find Wittgenstein beginning to formulate this view of logic, and it is also here that we find the roots of the concept of showing. In this chapter I will examine some of these early writings. My aim will be to trace the origins of the concept of showing and its integral relation to Wittgenstein's conception of logic.

Russell's Theory of Types and Logical Objects

To begin let us briefly examine what Russell says about the nature of logic. It is well known that, beginning in 1912 and in the years immediately following, Wittgenstein and Russell had many discussions about the nature of logic and philosophy. In particular, they discussed whether there were logical objects or not. Russell seemed to think there were. Perhaps the most eloquent statement of this comes in the often quoted Preface to the Principles of Mathematics where he proclaims that:
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 some acquaintance with them which it has with redness or the taste of a pineapple. Where, as in the present case, the indefinables are obtained primarily as the necessary residue in a process of analysis, it is often easier to know that there must be such entities than actually to perceive them; there is a process analogous to that which resulted in the discovery of Neptune, with the difference that the final stage -- the search with a mental telescope for the entity that has been inferred -- is often the most difficult part of the undertaking. In the case of classes, I must confess, I have failed to perceive any concept fulfilling the conditions requisite for the notion of a class. And the contradiction discussed in Chapter X proves that something is amiss, but what it is I have failed hitherto to discover.

Here Russell treats the concept of a class as if it stands for some object. While the object of which he here speaks is not an empirical object, he does nonetheless see it as referring to an object of some sort, the sort which the use of a "mental telescope" might help one find.

This idea about logical objects is furthered in a chapter entitled "Logical Data" written in the 1913 manuscript Theory of Knowledge. Here Russell considers the possibility of an "epistemology of logic":

For the present I am content to point out that there certainly is such a thing as "logical experience", by which I mean that kind of immediate knowledge, other than judgment, which is what enables me to understand logical terms. Many such terms have occurred in the last two chapters, for instance, particulars, universals, relations, dual complexes, predicates. Such words are, no doubt, somewhat difficult...still they are understood, and this shows that those who understand them possess something which seems fitly described as "acquaintance with logical objects".¹

Russell here speaks of a "logical experience." Of what? Well, of logical objects. The logical objects or constants involved in such an experience have to do with what he calls "pure form," something which results when we remove the constituents of a proposition through logical analysis or "abstraction." Take, for example, the proposition 'Socrates precedes Plato': in order to understand this proposition we must, he argues, have acquaintance with not only 'Socrates', 'Plato' and 'precedes' but also with the "form of the complex xRy, where Socrates has the x-place and Plato has the y-place." He writes:

It is not at all clear what is the right logical account of "form", but whatever this account may be, it is clear that we have acquaintance (possibly in an extended sense of the word "acquaintance") with something as abstract as pure form, since otherwise we could not intelligibly use the word "relation".

What is more, according to Russell, our experience of logical objects includes not only terms for "forms" or logical types, but it extends also to logical connectives and operators:

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.

Implicit in all of these passages, then, is Russell’s conception of meaning

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3Ibid., p. 99.

and philosophy. Since there are logical objects with which we become acquainted and of which we have this logical experience, an epistemology or philosophy of logic is thus both necessary and possible. In fact, according to Russell, if philosophy is to make any progress at all, it must provide us with new information about these objects.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his famous theory of types. It is well known that Russell introduced the theory to overcome the famous paradox which he discovered in the mathematical notion of a class. The paradox arises from predicating of a class that it is or that it is not a member of itself. Most classes, for example, are not members of themselves -- the class of books is not itself a book. Other classes, however, do have this unusual property -- the class of classes, for instance, is itself a class. We seem thus to obtain two classes of classes: the class of classes that are members of themselves and the class of classes which are not members of themselves. If we ask with regard to this second class whether or not it is a member of itself we get the contradictory answer that if it is, it is not, and if it is not, it is.

This is a situation which Russell could, of course, not tolerate: if number is to be reduced to logic and there is a contradiction in the logical notion of a class, then it seems there is also a contradiction in arithmetic itself. To avoid this problem Russell set himself the task of eliminating such antinomies, and he did so by introducing the notion of a hierarchy of logical types for functions and propositions. Take, for example, the statement 'The class of all books is not
a book'; Russell argues that such a statement, rather than being true, is *meaningless* because it predicates of a logical type what does not belong to it. It is *meaningful* to say of an object that it is not a book, but not of a class of objects. And similarly what one can say of a class of objects one cannot say of a class of a class objects.

What we have, then, is a system in which propositional functions and so propositions are arranged in a hierarchy, with the objects satisfying functions at one given level constituting a particular type, and the objects at another level a different type. Importantly, according to this system, what one can say of the objects at one level one cannot say of objects at another level. In effect, then, Russell was advancing a set of rules which stipulated which combinations of symbols are to be regarded as meaningful.

**Wittgenstein's Critique of Russell**

This view of logic and philosophy is one with which Wittgenstein was in fundamental disagreement. We find Wittgenstein espousing this disagreement not only in the various letters written to Russell at this time, but also in the "Notes on Logic" written in 1913 and the "Notes dictated to Moore in Norway" a year later. Let us peruse some of these texts. The earliest expression of this disagreement comes in a letter written to Russell on June 22, 1912:

Logic is still in the melting-pot but one thing gets more and more obvious to me: The propositions of logic contain ONLY
APPARENT variables and whatever may turn out to be the proper explanation of apparent variables, its consequence must be that there are NO logical constants. Logic must turn out to be a totally different kind than any other science.\(^5\)

One thing is clear here: for Wittgenstein the logical constants do not refer to objects and logic has ultimately nothing to do with what happens in the world; it is different from the other sciences. Consequently, the notion that there exist these so-called logical objects (the objects about which Russell speaks) is being denied by Wittgenstein. He denies not only the supposed referents of words like 'and', 'or', 'not', 'some' or 'all', but also all the forms of propositions -- the idea of a 'predicate', 'dual relation', or any other kind of logical property Russell would have discussed. Later, in the Tractatus, he puts this even more succinctly: "My fundamental idea is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts" (4.0312).\(^6\)

About a half a year later Wittgenstein writes another letter to Russell:

Every theory of types must be rendered superfluous by a proper theory of symbolism...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 symbolised by different kinds of symbols which cannot possibly be substituted in one another's places.\(^7\)

\(^5\)LRKM: R. 2, p. 10.


\(^7\)LRKM: R. 9, p. 19.
Here Wittgenstein tells Russell that a theory of types, a theory which postulates the existence of a special realm of logical objects, is "superfluous." Particularly interesting, though, is what this letter tells us about Wittgenstein's view of philosophy: all we need do in philosophy is pay careful attention to the symbolism; we need not, nor can we, construct theories of meaning. I emphasize this because already in 1913 Wittgenstein seems to hold a conception of philosophy which he was never to abandon.

The question is: Why did Wittgenstein think logic "must" be completely different from the other sciences? And why did he hold the theory of types to be superfluous? The answer to these questions, I believe, has to do with Wittgenstein's claim that the propositions of logic are tautologies. Russell's account of logic, in Wittgenstein's eyes, had left logic in a precarious position. All of his talk about logical constants and the form of propositions, including his assumption that there are logical objects, seemed to deprive logic of its necessity -- it made logic accidental just like any other science. But that for Wittgenstein was intolerable. What he thus set himself the task of doing is eliminating all such talk of logical objects. Logic, he insisted, has nothing to do with what is in the world and cannot be said to be true or false or in any way contingent.

In another letter written to Russell in 1913 he expresses quite explicitly why he takes this to be so. He begins by remarking that:

All the propositions of logic are generalizations of tautologies and all generalizations of tautologies are propositions of logic. There
are no other logical propositions. (I regard this as definitive.)

He then continues:

As to what tautologies really are, however, I myself am not able
to say quite clearly but I will give a rough explanation. It is the
peculiar (and most important) mark of non-logical propositions
that one is not able to recognize their truth from the propositional
sign alone. If I say, for example, "Meir is stupid", you cannot tell
by looking at this proposition whether it is true or false. But the
propositions of logic — and only they — have the property that their
truth or falsity, as the case may be, finds its expression in the
very sign for the proposition. I have not yet succeeded in finding
a notation for identity that satisfies this condition; but I have NO
doubt that it must be possible to find such a notation.

We can see here that the picture of logical propositions which Wittgenstein is
beginning to develop in these early writings is this: if their truth can be seen
by a mere study of the symbols used to express them, then their truth is not
dependant on any empirical facts about the world (T: 4.463). Since they make
no claim upon reality, there is nothing corresponding to the proposition which
would make it true or false and consequently the proposition is uninformative,
empty and so tautologous.

But what led Wittgenstein to form such a conception of logic? We find
an answer in the "Notes on Logic" which Wittgenstein was writing at this time,
for it is here that we find him wrestling with issues which directly support

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9For an interesting discussion of Wittgenstein's development of this notion that
logical propositions are tautologies (a discussion which has helped me in seeing the
development of Wittgenstein's early ideas in the right light) see Burton Dreben and
such a view of logic. One question which seems to capture his attention more than anything else is the question regarding what it is to understand a proposition, especially a false proposition. Russell had thought, as we have seen, that there exist "false facts," and that the sign for negation derives its meaning by referring to a logical object of some sort. By reworking and restructuring Frege’s distinction between sense and reference (something which Wittgenstein was also working on in 1913), Wittgenstein contests Russell’s picture of a logical proposition. For Wittgenstein a proposition is truth functional:

Every proposition is essentially true-false: to understand it, we must know what must be the case if it is true, and what is the case if it is false. Thus a proposition has two poles, corresponding to the case of its truth and the case of its falsehood. We call this the sense of a proposition. (NB: pp. 98-9)

A few pages later he adds:

Let us consider symbols of the form 'xRy'; to these correspond primarily pairs of objects, of which one has the name 'x' and the other 'y'. The x's and y's stand in various relations to each other, among others the relation R holds between some, but not between others. I now determine the sense of 'xRy' by laying down: when the facts behave in regard to 'xRy' so that the meaning of 'x' stands in the relation R to the meaning of 'y', then I say that [the facts] are 'of like sense' ['gleichsinnig'] with the proposition 'xRy'; otherwise, 'of opposite sense' ['entgegengesetz']; I correlate the facts to the symbol 'xRy' by thus dividing them into those of like sense and those of opposite sense. (NB: p. 104)

What we find in these passages is the origins of his later view (the view of the Tractatus) according to which a proposition has a sense because it is a fact, not a name. To understand a proposition is to understand its sense; and
to understand its sense is to understand the "fact" which it presents. When one understands a proposition's sense one understands not only what it would be like for the proposition to be true, one also understands what it would be like for it to be false. For, as Wittgenstein says, a proposition has two "poles," one true and one false (NB: p. 94).

The point, in other words, is roughly this: while the names of a proposition refer to objects, there does not also exist some logical object for which the proposition itself is a name. Since a proposition is truth functional, understanding a proposition brings with it a grasp of both of its poles. Understanding the sense of a proposition brings with it an understanding of the components (the names) of which the proposition is composed. Negation does not introduce a new discrimination of fact, for once one has made a discrimination of fact, one merely operates with components which one has already given a meaning.\(^\text{10}\)

We can see, further, what this means by looking at the logical constant for negation itself. Suppose, for example, that the sign for negation introduced a new discrimination of fact. If that were so, if the word 'not' introduced a new fact into a proposition, then 'not not p' would be about something different than 'p'. But that is absurd: "It seems scarcely credible," Wittgenstein was later to write, "that there should follow from one fact p infinitely many others, namely --p, ----p, etc" (T: 5.43). Put differently, if one understands the sense

\(^{10}\)See McGuinness, p. 58-59.
of a proposition, then one understands what it would be like for it to be false, for both 'p' and 'not p' are about the same fact -- it is the same fact which verifies or falsifies each of them. This is why Wittgenstein insists that in an ideal symbolism the sign for p and the sign for 'not not p' would be the same, for they mean exactly the same thing and should therefore have the "same symbol" (NB: p. 94).

This concern with an ideal symbolism, his attempt to solve the problem of logic by proclaiming that logical propositions are tautologies, makes itself manifest in Wittgenstein's development of what he calls an "ab-Notation," a decision procedure which is essentially the same as the standard truth table method. In yet another letter to Russell at this time, he explains this notation as follows:

One symbolic rule is sufficient to recognize each of them as true or false. And this is the one symbolic rule: write the proposition down in the ab-notation, trace all the Connections (of Poles) from the outside to the inside Poles: Then if the b-Pole is connected to such groups of inside Poles ONLY as contain opposite poles of ONE proposition, then the whole proposition is a true, logical proposition. If on the other hand this is the case with the a-Pole the proposition is false and logical. If finally neither is the case the proposition may be true or false but is in no case logical.

The method he describes here is essentially a mechanical device which helps

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12LRKM: R.22, p. 36.
us see whether or not a proposition is a tautology. In the *Tractatus* this is
spelled out clearly: a complex proposition is a truth function of elementary
propositions, each of which is true or false. Replacing a logical constant with
a truth table is a way of showing "that the sense of a proposition is equivalent
to its truth possibilities," and that the logical constants do not therefore have
objects corresponding to them. As he puts it: "It is clear that a complex of the
signs 'F' and 'T' has no object (or complex of objects) corresponding to it, just
as there is none corresponding to the horizontal and vertical lines or to the
brackets. -- There are no 'logical objects'" (T: 4.441). The truth table is, in other
words, simply another propositional sign.

**The Concept of Showing**

Wittgenstein's choice and development of the truth table method, his
predilection for the idea of "calculation," is, I believe, important. Why? Because
it underlines just how repugnant he finds the endeavour to justify logic in
terms of anything as subjective and variable as the idea of self evidence or any
other so-called "logical experience" of the type Russell was advancing in these
early years. It underlines the importance he attaches to **paying attention to
the symbolism**. This is why a year later, in the *Notes Dictated to G.E. Moore*
in 1914, we find Wittgenstein taking direct aim at what he calls the "old

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13 Mounce, p. 41.
conception of logic." Interestingly, though, he does so by now introducing us to the distinction between saying and showing for the first time:

Logical so-called propositions *shew* the logical properties of language and therefore of the universe, but *say* nothing.

This means that by merely looking at them you can *see* these properties; whereas, in a proposition proper, you cannot see what is true by looking at it. (NB: p. 108)

With the notion that one can "see" the logical properties of a logical proposition merely by "looking" at it, Wittgenstein now attempts to show that logical (and so philosophical) justification is both superfluous and ultimately illegitimate. Thus a few paragraphs later he characterizes what such an endeavour at justification comes to and the problems it runs into:

This is the actual procedure of the *old* Logic: it gives so-called primitive propositions; so-called rules of deduction; and then *says* that what you get by applying the rules to the propositions is a logical proposition that you have *proved*. The truth is, it tells you *about* the kind of proposition you have got, viz that it can be derived from the first symbols by these rules of combination (=is a tautology). (NB: p. 109)

Wittgenstein is here reacting against Frege and Russell, both of whom had a conception of logic whereby logic is an axiomatic system in which logical truths are deduced from axioms which are themselves supposedly self evident. In Frege's system, for example, certain logical truths are taken as axioms and then by means of so-called rules of deduction one can deduce further logical truths. The system is hierarchical in that certain axioms are more essential than the logical truths which one can deduce from them.

What Wittgenstein finds problematic about such a conception of logic is
the view that deduction is "informative." Philosophers had traditionally viewed deduction as rendering explicit in the conclusion what was only implicit in the premises. But that, says Wittgenstein, is wrong. Logic (and so philosophy) does not provide us with any sort of information at all. Consider, for example, what he goes on to say in the above passage:

Therefore, if we say one logical proposition follows logically from another, this means something quite different from saying that a real proposition follows logically from another. For so-called proof of a logical proposition does not prove its truth (logical propositions are neither true nor false) but proves that it is a logical proposition is a tautology.

Wittgenstein draws a distinction between "real" and "logical" propositions in order to draw our attention to the fact that logical propositions are tautologies. What makes tautologies unique, and so different from ordinary propositions, is that they are their own "forms of proof" (NB: p. 109) -- they are neither true nor false and thus not informative.

Look at it this way: If p follows from q, it does so because the sense of p is necessarily contained in the sense of q (sense here is "internal"), and this is something the structure of these propositions makes manifest. No rule of inference is necessary to establish or justify that this is so. "The nature of the inference," as Wittgenstein was later to say, "can be gathered only from the two propositions. They themselves are the only possible justification of the inference" (T: 5.132). If such a justification were necessary not only would an

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I borrow this analysis from Dreben and Floyd p. 39. Also see the analysis by Mounce, p. 46.
infinite regress be inevitable, but logic itself would be contingent and so accidental: we could always insist that our rule of justification itself be justified by another rule and so on, and that, says Wittgenstein, makes "no sense." Furthermore, since every logical proposition is a tautology, and since "every tautology shows that it is a tautology" (T: 6.127), it makes no sense to say that some propositions are primitive, while others are derived. All propositions must be of an "equal status," since every logical proposition constitutes "its own proof," this being something we can see from the proposition itself. Philosophical justification is thus superfluous.

Here is another way of looking at it: in order to pick out the logical (and so formal) properties of a language, one would need to do so in a language which is itself devoid of these properties and so is illogical; otherwise, one would be simply presupposing an understanding of the very symbols one claims need explaining. But that is absurd: an illogical language is a contradiction; it is, as Wittgenstein says, "impossible to construct an illogical language" (NB: p. 108). It is, in fact, not something we would even know how to give a sense, since an illogical thought is not a thought at all. Logic is something which is given to us and something we must understand if we are to understand any language at all. We cannot stand outside of language and so logic, for logic is that through which we say everything we normally say, and all that "can be said" (NB: p. 109). This, I believe, is precisely Wittgenstein's point in saying:
Symbols like this are of a certain type. This you cannot say, because in order to say it you must first know what the symbol is: and in knowing this you see the type and therefore also [the] type of [what is] symbolized. I.e. in knowing what symbolizes you know all that is to be known; you can't say anything about the symbol. (NB: p. 110.)

In this passage Wittgenstein critiques Russell's theory of types. Russell had thought that it is possible to pick out a particular symbol and then go on and say what its formal properties are. But that, says Wittgenstein, is confused. In order to identify a symbol one must already "know" how it is that it symbolizes. And if one already "knows" this, then a theory of types is superfluous.

One must, though, be careful here. It is not that Wittgenstein did not believe in logical types. What he disagrees with is the attempt to say with a theory what can only be shown in the symbolism. And this is why Wittgenstein reduces the whole theory of types to logical syntax, suggesting that what symbol a sign takes shows itself in the structure of the proposition. Thus,

Instead of, 'The complex sign "aRb" says that a stands to b in the relation R', we ought to put, 'That "a" stands to "b" in a certain relation says that aRb'. (T: 3.1432)

It is nonsense to say that a stands in a certain relation to b, for the assertion 'aRb' says what it says because the sign 'a' stands in a certain relation to the sign 'b'. That there is such a relation need not be stated by another proposition. Take the proposition 'Peter loves Mary'. One could say that this proposition is the meaning of 'aRb', for 'aRb' is not a proposition but the sign for a proposition. However, it would be utterly redundant to say 'Peter loves Mary'
means Peter loves Mary. One either grasps what this particular arrangement of words means or one does not -- explanations add nothing to what is not already contained in the proposition itself. Wittgenstein nicely sums this up when he remarks that:

E.g., in "aRb", "R" is not a symbol, but that "R" is between one name and another symbolizes. Here we have not said this symbol is not of this type but of that, but only: This symbolizes and not that.

To put it differently, Wittgenstein is suggesting, as Frege had before him, that what transforms or breathes life into a sign is its logical syntactical "use," the relative position a sign has to other signs of a different logical type:

What symbolizes in $\phi\xi$ is that $\phi$ stands to the left of a proper name and obviously this is not so in $\neg p$. What is common to all propositions in which the name of a property (to speak loosely) occurs is that this name stands to the left of a name-form.

$\phi$ cannot possibly stand to the left of (or in any other relation to) the symbol of a property. For the symbol of a property, e.g., $\psi x$ is that $\psi$ stands to the left of a name form, and another symbol $\phi$ cannot possibly stand to the left of such a fact. (NB: p. 116.)

Both these passages make clear that what symbolizes is a sign's arrangement in a proposition, its syntactical position relative to other signs of a different logical type. What symbolises in the signs $\phi$ and $\xi$, and which can be seen from the symbolism, is their spatio temporal arrangement, the fact that they are to "the "left" of name form." Consider again the sentence 'Peter loves Mary'.

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15Mounce pp. 23-27.

The word 'love' is not itself a symbol; what symbolises is the fact that the word 'love' stands between two names in a particular order. If 'love' were the symbol, than 'loves Peter Mary' would be the same proposition as 'Peter loves Mary', which of course it is not.17

Perhaps we can now better see how Wittgenstein's all important distinction between saying and showing emerges from these early passages. The central point is that the very properties which render possible an understanding of language cannot be expressed in language -- a proposition cannot say what its own logical form is. And it cannot do so because any attempt to explain these formal properties of symbols is already contained in the explanation of what it is we are attempting to explain. These properties can only show themselves in the symbolism and therefore need no justification. Later, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein puts this succinctly:

Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it.(4.12)

The upshot is clear: logical form is something one must understand if one is to understand any language in the first place.18 It is not itself a fact

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18 This is why he says that "it is obvious that, e.g., with a subject predicate proposition, if it has any sense at all, you see the form, so soon as you understand the proposition in spite of not knowing whether it is true or false" (NB: p. 110.).
which can be represented or described in terms of a metalanguage, for such a language itself already presupposes an understanding of the very logic it seeks to explain. One can never, that is, step outside of language and logic in order to explain what gives language sense because one's ability to understand a propositions' sense is always bound up with the limits of logic.

Related to all of this, of course, is Wittgenstein's unconventional and radical view of philosophy. The distinction between saying and showing is already implicit in what he says about the role of philosophy in 1913 in "Notes on Logic":

In philosophy there are no deductions: it is purely descriptive.
Philosophy gives no pictures of reality.
Philosophy can neither confirm nor confute scientific investigation.
Philosophy consists of logic and metaphysics: logic is its basis.
Epistemology is the philosophy of psychology. (NB: p. 106.)

What stands out here is the idea that philosophy does not give us any new information (only something which can be said constitutes new information) - it gives us no pictures of reality which can be true or false and thus has nothing to do with a special realm of objects. And that is precisely the reason logic is its basis: logic is not an object in the world about which one can say anything true or false. On the contrary, logic, and therefore philosophy, has to do with the necessary features of any language whatsoever, and these can only be shown. Consequently, logic must restrict itself to a formal analysis and description of language, or to what Wittgenstein here calls a theory of symbolism.
We can see how Russell's theory of types directly contravenes such a conception of philosophy. Not only does the postulation of a realm of 'logical objects' contradict Wittgenstein's view that philosophy 'gives no pictures of reality', his appeal to 'logical experience' and to an 'epistemology of logic' also contradicts the view that philosophy has nothing to do with epistemology or psychology. Most importantly, however, Russell's theory of types runs into problems in its attempt to say by way of a theory, what is shown in the symbolism. It attempts to treat logic as something external, as a fact which we might investigate scientifically. And that, as Wittgenstein will tell us throughout all of his philosophical writings, is what creates philosophical confusion and misunderstanding.

Logic and the Concept of Showing

The culmination of all of these ideas is to be found, I believe, in the opening remarks of the Notebooks of 1914-1916. It is here that we find Wittgenstein linking his predilection for a "theory of the symbolism," rather than a "theory of types," to what now becomes his central insight -- the idea that "logic takes care of itself." He writes:

Logic must take care of itself.

If syntactical rules for functions can be set up at all, then the whole theory of things, properties, etc is superfluous. It is also all too obvious that this theory isn't what is in question either in the Grundgesetz, or in Principia Mathematica. Once more: logic must
take care of itself. A possible sign must also be capable of signifying. Everything that is possible at all, is also legitimate. (NB: 22.8.14.)

It must in a certain sense be impossible for us to go wrong in logic. This is already expressed by saying: Logic must take care of itself. This is an extremely profound and important insight.

Frege says: Every well formed sentence must make sense; and I say: Every possible sentence is well formed, and if it does not make sense that can only come of our not having given any meaning to certain of its parts. (NB: 2.9.14.)

'Logic must take care of itself' -- it can be said that much of Wittgenstein's early philosophy is packed into this cryptic remark. But what exactly does it mean? Generally, but also perhaps most importantly, it expresses Wittgenstein's idea, an idea which I believe runs through all of his writings, that logic is not in need of the services of philosophy. One cannot, he argues in these passages, formulate semantical rules, rules which stipulate whether a symbol is meaningful or not. Nor for that matter can one justify the rules of syntax by appealing to the meaning of the symbols (by, for example, appealing to the object the symbol stands for in the world). And in that sense it expresses a sentiment which is contrary to that of both Russell and Frege, for whom a philosophy of logic was both necessary and so possible.

Now Wittgenstein is opposed to a philosophy of logic (to all talk of 'relations', 'logical constants', 'properties', etc.) primarily because he holds that it is "impossible for us to go wrong in logic." If there were logical objects, if logic was made possible by some kind of reality, whether empirical or psychical, then a science of logic would indeed be necessary. It would be
necessary because logic itself would be based on something accidental and mistakes in logic would thus be conceivable. However, that is just what he denies: he denies the idea that mistakes are possible in logic, and he denies the idea that meaning has anything to do with the extralinguistic.

This is evident from his saying that: 'A possible sign must be capable of signifying. Everything that is possible at all, is also legitimate.' With this way of putting it Wittgenstein distances himself from the views of Frege and Russell. They would have said that certain kinds of sentences are not legitimately constructed in terms of their theory and therefore without sense. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, is saying that any possible sentence, as far as its construction goes, is well formed. If it has no sense, this can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its parts, even when we think we have done so. Philosophical justification is thus superfluous.

But if logical propositions are tautologies, why, then, is Wittgenstein so interested in them? The simple answer is that although logical propositions say nothing, they show us in a perspicuous way that logic takes care of itself. This is of great importance, for, throughout all of his writings, Wittgenstein was concerned with attaining clarity about the logic or grammar of language so as to rule out the possibility of metaphysical reflection.¹⁰ He insisted throughout

¹⁰This demand for clarity exemplifies itself in the later writings in terms of the concept of a "perspicuous representation," a concept which, according to Wittgenstein, "produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'" and which is thus of "fundamental significance" (PI: 122).
his life that we create philosophical confusion for ourselves when in
philosophizing we attempt to do anything more than this (when we, for
example, treat conceptual problems as if they were empirical problems). Such
a view of philosophy, however, is not arbitrary. It is linked to an array of
arguments (some of which we have looked at) which show that logic is not an
object to be investigated externally and so scientificaly. And so it is connected
directly with the distinction between what can be said and to what can only
be shown.

This demand for clarity is, I believe, summed up in the letter (quoted
earlier) written to Russell in 1919 in which he stresses the importance of this
connection between logic, philosophy and the concept of showing:

I'm afraid you haven't got hold of my main contention to which
the whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary. The
main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by
propositions -- i.e. by language -- (and which comes to the same
thing what can be thought) and what cannot be expressed by
propositions, but only shown (gezeigt); which, I believe, is the
cardinal problem of philosophy.\(^{20}\)

Notice that logical propositions are considered to be only a 'corollary' to what
is the 'cardinal problem of philosophy' -- the distinction between saying and
showing. This is significant, I believe, because it highlights that for
Wittgenstein what motivates the practice of philosophy is attaining clarity
about the language we use so we can avoid the problems we get into when "the

\(^{20}\text{LRKM: R. 37, p. 71.}\)
logic of our language is misunderstood. Part of the misunderstanding for which Wittgenstein's philosophical writings provide a type of therapy is the misunderstanding engendered by a philosophical theory such as Russell's theory of types. This is why he observes that:

Therefore a theory of types is impossible. It tries to say something about the types, when you can only talk about the symbols. But what you say about the symbol is not that this symbol has that type, which would be nonsense for the same reason: but you say simply: This is the symbol, to prevent a misunderstanding. (NB: p. 109.)

Here we have the origins of an idea which Wittgenstein was never to abandon: the assumption that the philosopher is engaged in the empirical construction of linguistic theories is not wrong, it is "nonsense." Since there are logical features of language which every proposition shows, but does not say about itself, the task of philosophy is nothing more than elucidation: it is important that we elucidate the symbolism in order to "prevent a misunderstanding." Russell's misunderstanding, as is evident from his "theory of knowledge by acquaintance", is thinking that we understand the meaning of logical expressions by acquaintance with their referents. But that for Wittgenstein is a mistake. Logic has nothing to do with epistemological or psychological considerations; the task of philosophy consists of nothing more than "describing" the syntactical rules for the use of symbols.

\[21\text{See the Preface to the Tractatus, p. 3.}\]
Conclusion

We can now see why Wittgenstein would say in 1912 that logic 'must be a totally different kind from the other sciences.' The point is this: any attempt to justify logic by means of a philosophical theory is destined to be circular, for all philosophical theories (all metalanguages) already presuppose the logic they seek to justify. Logical necessity has nothing to do with what is external to logic, since logical propositions are tautologies and thus fail to say anything. All of the relations studied by logic are internal to logic itself, unlike the sciences which study external relations, relations which are contingent because they can be true or false. Since logic is internal to everything we say, no philosophical justification, no theory of types, is necessary -- logic takes care of itself. Since it does take care of itself, philosophy becomes an activity restricted to describing the syntactical rules for the use of logical symbols, a theory of the symbolism, not a theory of types.
Chapter Two

Elucidation in the *Tractatus*

The *Tractatus* is often read as a work in explanatory metaphysics. What Wittgenstein is doing, it is said,¹ is 'explaining' language by showing how language is made possible by the nature of reality. After all, the *Tractatus* begins with what seems to be a metaphysical discussion about the nature of the world and then turns to the nature of a proposition. From this it is easy to conclude that Wittgenstein is advancing a theory of language according to which a name gets its meaning independently of how it is used in a proposition by some procedure of linking a name to an object and so the world. But is this what Wittgenstein is doing? I do not believe so. Such a reading of the *Tractatus* fails to take seriously what he says about the concept of "use" and its important link to his conception of philosophy as "elucidation." My aim in this chapter is to examine the role the notion of elucidation plays in Wittgenstein's first great attempt to undermine theories of meaning.

Ordinary Propositions and Names

We have already, in the last chapter, looked at what Wittgenstein says

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¹Norman Malcolm is perhaps the most famous proponent of such a view. See his book *Nothing is Hidden*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
about logical propositions. So to begin this chapter let us examine what kind of a sign Wittgenstein takes an ordinary proposition to be. Wittgenstein proclaims that a proposition is a 'fact', not a name (T: 3.14). This is an unusual way of putting it, but all that Wittgenstein is getting at is that a sentence is a fact because it is logically 'articulated'(T: 3.141). Frege, too, thought that a sentence, and any complex name, was logically articulated. What Wittgenstein disagrees with in Frege's way of putting it, however, is his assimilation of sentences to complex names.

But just what does it mean to say a proposition is a fact because it is logically articulated? One way of answering this question is to contrast a proposition to a name. Suppose a proposition were a name. Suppose also that the meaning of a name is its bearer. If this were so, then a false proposition would be meaningless; there would be no fact actually existing in the world which would imbue it with meaning. Yet false propositions are not without meaning. Why is this? The answer, I believe, goes right to the heart of the *Tractatus*: a proposition is a fact because, unlike a name, it has a certain logical syntactical structure; its sense is logically prior to its truth or falsity. But have I not just now, in saying that 'a fact imbues a proposition with meaning', made Wittgenstein look like he were saying that a proposition has a meaning because of what holds true of the nature of reality? I do not think so.

To see why let us look at some passages and see what he actually says.
In "Notes On Logic" he writes:

What corresponds in reality to a proposition depends on whether it is true or false. But we must be able to understand a proposition without knowing whether it is true or false. (NB: p. 98.)

A year later, in a note dictated to Moore, he once again makes this point:

That a proposition has a relation to Reality, other than that of Bedeutung, is shown by the fact that you can understand it when you don't know the Bedeutung, i.e. don't know whether it is true or false. Let us express this by saying "It has a sense" (Sinn). (NB: p. 112)

Both these early passages make clear that, since we can understand the sense of a proposition before we actually know whether it is true or false, its sense must be independent of any empirical considerations. When Wittgenstein makes this same point in the *Tractatus* he now ties it explicitly to the concept of showing:

A proposition shows its sense. A proposition shows how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand. (4.022)

To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true. (One can understand it, therefore, without knowing whether it is true.) It is understood by anyone who understands its constituents (4.024).

Briefly put, the point here is this: when we understand the sense of a proposition we understand its constituents. And we do so because the relation between a proposition and its sense is internal. Sense has to do with the logical structure of the proposition; it is not to be found in something external, in something which corresponds to that structure. And this is where the
concept of 'showing' comes in. A proposition shows it sense precisely because it is sense which makes a proposition articulate, and it is sense which connects a proposition to the world. This is something which can only be 'shown', for language can only refer to the world if it is already in operation, if it already has a sense. The sense of a proposition is, therefore, prior to whether the proposition is actually true or false and so requires no separate investigation of the world nor, as we shall see, does it require justification from philosophy.

And what are these constituents of a proposition? The simple answer is that they are 'names'.\(^2\) For Wittgenstein the word 'name' has a technical sense: a name cannot be further analyzed by any definition, and the objects to which it refers are simple and cannot be given by a definite description. Most importantly, though, Wittgenstein proclaims that names only have sense within the context of a proposition: "Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning" (T: 3.3). As commentators have pointed out, Wittgenstein makes use of Frege's context principle in saying this. Frege had said: "Never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition."\(^3\) We have seen how Wittgenstein employs this principle in his critique of Russell's theory of types: it is the

\(^2\)Wittgenstein follows Frege and Russell in treating a proposition as a "function" of the expressions it contains. (T: 3.318)

\(^3\)Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1953, p. X.); later, Frege elaborates on this by writing: "Only in a proposition have words really a reference (Bedeutung)...It is enough if the proposition taken as a whole has a sense (Sinn); it is this that confers on its parts also their content."
arrangement or position of a symbol which shows how it symbolises, not a theory of types. In the case of ordinary propositions the same holds true: reference cannot be determined independently of how we understand the sense of a proposition.

Metaphysics in the Tractatus

But, if the meaning of a sign is given with its 'use' in a proposition, why do commentators sometimes read the Tractatus as if it were actually advancing a form of semantic realism or what some have called a realism of possibility? The simple answer is that Wittgenstein seems to say so himself in the opening pages of the Tractatus. Just look at what he says about a proposition and its constituents. He tells us that

The possibility of propositions is based on the principle that objects have signs as their representatives. (T: 4.0312)

And further

The simple signs employed in propositions are called names. A name means an object. The object is its meaning. (T: 3.203)

Finally

Objects are simple.(2.02)

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Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely. (2.0201)

Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite. (2.021)

If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. (2.0211)

These passages seem to point to the possibility of explaining language by means of some sort of ontology, something non-linguistic. In particular, Wittgenstein seems to argue that propositions with sense are possible only because other more primitive correlations are possible — the correlation of names with objects, for example. And these correlations, in turn, are possible because the world itself possesses a certain logical form. Since possibility is prior to actuality there must be something 'real' in possibility which, rather than being contingent, is involved with necessary being, with what he here calls substance. The "substance" of the world must, in other words, be logically prior to the existence of any actual state of affairs; otherwise sense would not be prior to questions of truth or falsity.

But what is this substance of the world? This is not something which language can say. It is however an ontology which must be simply presupposed. We are to presuppose that there exists this realm of logical possibility (which objects presumably contain) which is ontologically prior to the material world, to what is the case in the world. The ontology hinges on the internal properties of objects, the so-called substance of the world: since
a name stands for or means an object, names will only combine and thus form a proposition if the objects which they represent are capable of combining in that way also. Objects thus govern which combinations of names are possible. It is not hard to see why Wittgenstein is construed to be furnishing a realism of possibility: since a proposition's sense is dependent on the combinatorial possibilities of objects, the logic of the world tells us what is possible, not actual. To see what is actual we must look to what is the case in the material world, not to logic. Here the agreement between a proposition and a fact is an agreement in fact, not in form, and it is this agreement which determines the truth of the proposition.

All of this, then, goes to make up Wittgenstein's so-called picture theory of language and so his conception of an elementary proposition. An elementary proposition is the end point of analysis because it pictures an atomic fact. It does so because 1) it is composed of names each of which stand for objects, and 2) the multiplicity of names of which it is composed correspond to the multiplicity of objects which make up the state of affairs which it depicts. Presumably the proposition and the state of affairs it depicts share this common logical form. The sense of an elementary proposition is determined by which combinations of names are possible, and possibility is written into the nature of reality itself. I say 'reality itself' because some commentators interpret Wittgenstein as if he were here presenting an ontology about the real world, as if he were saying that objects have some sort of real existence just
like concrete objects. Norman Malcolm is perhaps the most famous proponent of such a view:

According to the *Tractatus*, if a name is assigned to an object, the use of the name in sentences must duplicate the form of that object. The possibilities of combination of that name with other names, in sentences that have sense, are determined by and exactly match the possibilities of combination of that object with other objects. Language does not create what is thinkable. What makes sense in language is based on the possible combinations of the simple elements of reality. There is a profound difference here between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. In the latter work a distinction is drawn between what is 'conceptual' or 'grammatical' on the one hand, and what is empirical or contingent on the other. Wittgenstein speaks of 'grammatical propositions', or 'grammatical differences', and of the 'grammar' of a word. But in this second philosophy he rejects the idea that the grammar of language is determined by some underlying reality.⁵

On Malcolm's reading Wittgenstein advances a realism in the early philosophy and then changes his mind in the later writings by opposing this with an anti-realist sort of position. And so what we have here, on Malcolm's reading, are two Wittgensteins, each holding radically different philosophical positions (or theses, one might say) with no real continuity between them.

**Meaning and Use**

There is, it seems to me, something very suspect about this type of reading. If anything, such a view is precisely the type of metaphysics

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Wittgenstein is concerned with repudiating in the *Tractatus*. One thing is for sure: it contravenes his explicit admonition that philosophy *must* abstain from giving us doctrines or theories and so is incompatible with the central idea of the *Tractatus*, the distinction between saying and showing. In fact, the so-called picture theory of a proposition and the concept of showing pull in entirely different directions. It is the picture theory and the logical atomism which it entails which Wittgenstein ultimately seeks to undermine. In saying this, I find myself in partial agreement with Brian McGuinness who, in his article "The So-Called Realism of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,*" contends that the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* is in some sense meant to self destruct:

> It is a kind of ontological myth that he wants to give us to show us the nature of language...One of the chief results of the view of language so attained is the rejection of such myths.\(^7\)

Or, as Peter Winch puts it in his book *Trying to Make Sense*:

> Terms like *world, fact, object,* are terms of our language which on the *Tractatus* view, have a peculiarly fundamental role in the description of language...What the opening sentences of the *Tractatus* do is to establish certain fundamental features of the 'logical syntax' of these terms by exhibiting their use in relation to each other in sentences.\(^8\)

Put differently, one might say that Wittgenstein forces us to pay

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attention to the logical syntax of language so as to show us the kind of problems we get into when we attempt to construct such philosophical myths, when we endeavour to theorize about meaning. He is attempting to show how such myths have the illusion of sense, even though they actually fail to say anything. So, rather than constructing a metaphysical explanation for language, Wittgenstein is attempting to show us the problems we get into when we endeavour to do so.

Now part of the problem we get into when we engage in explanatory metaphysics is thinking that in philosophy we can survey the connection between language and reality from a position outside of a linguistic practice. In *Philosophical Grammar*, just to take one example, Wittgenstein was later to say that "the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language" (p. 162.); he also spoke of grammar being akin to what is arbitrary and to what is non-arbitrary. In these later writings Wittgenstein was expressing his opposition to the idea that our grammar can receive some sort of justification from a position outside of a linguistic practice, a position which somehow gives us insight into the connection between words and things. Although Wittgenstein later abandoned all of this talk about 'objects' and 'names', this later view is not unlike a view he already holds in the *Tractatus*. The *Tractatus* induces us to see the nonsense which results from any such philosophical attempt to theorize about the relation between language and reality. The central idea is that the meaning and so
understanding of a sentence flows from its logico-syntactical "use." It is this use which transforms a sign into a symbol, and no theory or formal rule can ultimately guide one in this.

Take what he says about the connection between a proposition, names and objects. Wittgenstein proclaims that the point of contact between language and reality has to do with comparing an elementary proposition with a state of affairs. Such a comparison presupposes that a proposition consists of names whose bearers are objects. Importantly, though, names and objects are a purely logical requirement which we must just accept. We cannot pose questions about their meaning, since our questions already presuppose that we understand what they mean. But how, then, is it that we come to understand the reference of a name?

Russell seemed to think that the answer to this question has to do with epistemology. We understand what a word means, according to Russell, because we are "acquainted" with the object to which the name refers. The object is the meaning of the name, and we can only come to know the meaning of the name by linking the name to the object (through an act of ostension as it later came to be called) while in the presence of the object. Through such a method of linking names with objects the meaning of a name can thus be established independently of its use in a proposition.9

This is a view with which Wittgenstein is in strong disagreement.

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Generally put, for Wittgenstein philosophy has nothing to do with empiricist epistemologies nor does it have to do with any sort of reductionism. Understanding the meaning of a name does not require being acquainted with the object in any empiricist sense of that term. An object is not identified through the act of pointing to it, nor does it have to do with some sort of sensory experience of that object. What is more, complex names describe all kinds of things and so the reference of a name can be all sorts of objects. So, how do we understand the meaning of a name for Wittgenstein?

The answer is elucidation, a process by which we come to understand the meaning and so reference of a sign by coming to understand the proposition in which it occurs. At 3.261-3.263 Wittgenstein makes exactly this point:

Every sign that has a definition signifies via the signs that serve to define it; and the definitions point the way...

What signs fail to express their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly.

The meanings of primitive signs can be explained by means of their elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain the primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are already known.

But just what is an elucidation? One way of answering this question is to examine what it is not. An elucidation is not a definition of a name. Wittgenstein is not suggesting (as Malcolm does, for example) that a sign means an object, and it is only because we know what that object is that we can subsequently use the sign in a proposition. He is not suggesting, that is,
that we first come to know the meaning of a name by means of ostensive definition, and only after we have linked a name to an object, can we then go on to put it together with other names to form a proposition. Nor is he suggesting that understanding a proposition presupposes an understanding of the names of which it is composed, and understanding a name presupposes an understanding of the proposition in which it occurs.\textsuperscript{10} Not only is this circular, but it assumes that understanding the reference of a name and understanding a proposition (understanding the elucidation) are two separate acts. It assumes that one can understand the meaning of a name in isolation.

For Wittgenstein such a philosophical view is nonsense. When one understands a name, one does so because one also understands the proposition of which it is a part. There are not two separate acts of understanding going on here. If these were separate acts, it would make no sense to say that it is only in the context of a proposition that a name has any meaning (T: 3.3); it would make no sense to say that "in order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense" (T: 3.326). And that is why any attempt to explain or communicate the meaning of a sign by way of an ostensive definition is one which already presupposes an understanding of the ostensive gesture and its connection with the words which are uttered. In short, the process of ostension already forms part of the symbolism, and it is

the symbolism which we can elucidate, not the meanings of individual signs.\textsuperscript{11}

But there is one further presupposition in all of this: if one can grasp the meaning of a sentence, then ultimately one needs to have a mastery of the calculus as a whole; one needs to be able to grasp any number of other combinations of names. For, as Wittgenstein says, "Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is" (T: 4.002). In saying this Wittgenstein is making reference to an idea which we looked at in the last chapter: the idea that 'one cannot go wrong in logic' or 'give a sign the wrong sense' (T: 5.4732). That we cannot do so stems simply from the fact that the sense of a sign is nothing more than the role it has in language.\textsuperscript{12}

Still one might ask: "How does one come to acquire such a mastery of language"? This kind of question is one which Wittgenstein never really takes up: he probably thought that this is a matter for empirical psychology, not philosophy. But, then, this is not something he needs to take up. With the notion that 'logic takes care of itself', Wittgenstein is attempting to show us that the use of a sentence brings with it the whole plethora of possibilities that it allows. These possibilities are not given by some extra-linguistic reality;

\textsuperscript{11}This idea is borrowed from Peter Winch, p. 10

there does not exist some mysterious and infinite realm of objects with which we might become acquainted and which determine possibilities of combination.

On the contrary, all logical forms are internal to language and have only to do with the rules of logical syntax. Since the sense of a proposition is not something external, any sort of empirical epistemology or science of logic becomes completely irrelevant to questions of meaning. At *Tractatus* 3.328-3.33 Wittgenstein makes this clear:

If a sign is *useless* it is meaningless. That is the point of Occam's maxim.  
(If everything behaves as if a sign had meaning, then it does have meaning.)

In logical syntax the meaning of a sign should never play a role. It must be possible to establish logical syntax without mentioning the *meaning* of a sign: only the description of expressions may be presupposed.

We can see from this remark that for Wittgenstein it is "possible to establish logical syntax without mentioning the meaning of a sign." If the meaning of a sign were its correlation with something non-linguistic, Wittgenstein would not here stress that we should be prohibited from mentioning what this something is which establishes a sign's use. If anything, it is Wittgenstein's point that a sign's logico-syntactical use is what establishes its meaning. This is not to suggest, though, that for Wittgenstein a sign does not stand for an object; of course it does. But how it does so and just what it is for a sign to
have a reference -- that seems to be the issue here.\textsuperscript{13}

That this is the issue is brought into sharp focus by what Wittgenstein says at 5.473:

Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its constituents.

(Even if we think that we have done so.)

Thus the reason why 'Socrates is identical' says nothing is that we have not given any adjectival meaning to the word 'identical'.

What we find in these words, I believe, is Wittgenstein's concern with philosophy as therapy. Logical analysis is an activity of rewriting sentences so we can see when it is that we are in the grip of a string of signs which appears to have sense, although we have yet to give it any. Take, for example, the words 'Socrates is identical'. This is a linguistic construction which, despite appearances to the contrary, fails to have sense -- the word 'identical' has not been given any adjectival meaning. In a sentence such as "Socrates is identical with the teacher of Plato" the word 'identical' is, syntactically speaking, a different symbol from its use in 'Socrates is identical' -- it appears as the sign for identity. The problem with the use of the word 'identical' in 'Socrates is identical' is that, while it does not have any adjectival meaning, it could be construed as not needing any meaning because the word resembles other uses

\textsuperscript{13}In saying this I agree with both Winch and Ishiguro who have also provided a similar interpretation of Wittgenstein on this matter.
of that word.\textsuperscript{14}

Although this may seem like a trivial example, it does show us the extent to which Wittgenstein’s views are fundamentally different from those of both Russell and the positivists. A string of words can only fail to have a reference, Wittgenstein is telling us, if for some reason or other one fails to impart sense to a string of signs. This is precisely why he says that a string of words which is without sense can have life breathed into it by an "arbitrary determination" (T: 5.473), by its having a use in our lives. That the determination is arbitrary attests to the fact that sense has nothing to do with empirical considerations, or with any sort of verification, as the positivists might have thought. It also, therefore, attests to the fact that Wittgenstein takes 'objects' to mean something quite different from what Russell took 'objects' to mean. Wittgenstein’s point is that a name cannot fail to have a reference, and so "means an object", because reference is given with the use a name has in a proposition. Logical analysis is designed (in principle at least) to let us see how every element in our sentences ultimately contributes to the truth value of the proposition.\textsuperscript{15}

So, when Frege says that a proposition is “legitimately constructed”

\textsuperscript{14}My discussion here has been influenced by what James Conant says in "Must We Show What We Cannot Say?" published in The Senses of Stanley Cavell, Edited by Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp. 258-59.

\textsuperscript{15}See McGuinness p. 68.
because its meaning is formed by the proper (logical) combination of names. Wittgenstein's response is to say that a "possible proposition is already legitimately constructed." Although that may seem like a truism, Wittgenstein puts it this way to underline the importance of the idea that 'possibility' lies in the use of language and need not be "imagined" as lying somewhere. Of course, he later criticizes his early philosophy for failing to completely examine language as it is open to view in its ordinary use. He does not critique it, however, because it advances a theory about metaphysical features of reality which are independent of language and which the logical syntax of language is somehow required to mirror.

If there is any doubt about this, perusal of some further passages should completely dispel it and also help us to understand it. As early as the Notebooks Wittgenstein already makes this sort of point:

But is language the only language? Why should there not be a mode of expression through which I can talk about language in such a way that it can appear to me in coordination with something else?

I myself can only write down sentences here. (NB: 29.5.15)

It is also a point he continues to hold years later when he composes the remarks which go to make up Philosophical Grammar:

If you say: "How am I to know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives"? then I say: "How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either?" What is spoken can only be explained in language, and so in this sense language itself cannot be explained.

Language must speak for itself. (PG: p. 40)
The general question posed by both these texts is: how does one use language to theorize about the meaning of language? The response is the same: one can only ever talk about language by means of language. This is why Wittgenstein asks rhetorically: "How do I know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives"? His response is to reject the question. Why? Because the question already presupposes the very understanding and meaning it calls into question and wants ultimately to explain. After all, in asking the question does one not already have an understanding of the signs used to make up the question? Of course one does; how, otherwise, could one mean anything by the signs used to make up the question. That is why Wittgenstein responds by saying: "How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either."

His point, in other words, is this: if one asks what 'meaning' is or what 'understanding' is, then in some sense there is already something wrong with the question. In asking this kind of question, one is looking for some object, fact or process which can ground and so explain 'meaning' or 'understanding'. For example, one thinks that an act of intending or meaning is what gives the signs of language their life. From this one then assumes that understanding must be some sort of process which accompanies the speaking, hearing and writing of language. But that, Wittgenstein insists, is a fantasy. The criteria by which we determine whether someone has understood a proposition is something very different from the criteria by which we discover the mental
processes which might accompany an act of understanding. In all of his writings, Wittgenstein attempts to show us the confusion which results from thinking that understanding is a process at all, from thinking that meaning has to do with the extra-linguistic.

How, then, does one think sense into a string of signs? Well, consider what Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus*: "We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written) as a projection of a possible situation. The method of projection is to think the sense of the proposition" (T: 311). One might think that Wittgenstein is here subscribing to some sort of mentalism or psychologism, as if he were saying that thinking is what imparts sense to a proposition. But that is wrong. "To think the sense of the proposition" consists in nothing more than using the signs of the sentence logically to form a proposition -- for to speak of a symbolism is to speak of a projective relation to the world.\(^{16}\) For, as we saw earlier, all logical forms are *internal* to language: since a proposition brings with it all of the possibilities that it allows, sense has nothing to do with an external investigation of reality or with any form of mentalism. Rush Rhees nicely sums this up when he says that: "the method of projection is what we mean by 'thinking' or 'understanding' the sense of the proposition."\(^{17}\) In *Philosophical Grammar*, despite certain

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\(^{16}\)McGuinness, p. 70.

fundamental changes of mind, Wittgenstein sounds a similar note: "How can one talk about 'understanding' and 'not understanding' a proposition. Surely it is not a proposition until it is understood" (PG: p. 39). Again, Wittgenstein's point here is to emphasise that it makes no sense to ask what a proposition is - - what are you trying to distinguish it from? You cannot talk of something as a proposition "unless" it is already understood, and this is the same as saying that a "proposition shows its sense" (T: 4.002) or that "language speaks for itself."

As we can see, then, all of Wittgenstein's early writings make the point that we understand a proposition because it is logically articulated, and this, as I have been arguing, has everything to do with this all-important concept of "use." There is, of course, a fundamental difference regarding what Wittgenstein conceives this concept of use to be in the later writings. In the later writings the notion of use becomes much more comprehensive, this being manifested in his concern with the role the expressions of language play in our lives rather than with the logico-syntactical structure of propositions whose only purpose it is to state truths. Nevertheless, it is clear that in these early writings Wittgenstein is already emphasizing the importance of the concept of use and the related idea that the act of naming makes sense only because there is a considerable amount of stage setting already in place. Consequently, it seems clear that Wittgenstein's explicit critique of St Augustine in the Investigations is not tacitly aimed at the Tractatus. On the view being
criticized in the *Investigations* each word has meaning by virtue of being a name which stands for an object (PI: 1). But, as we have seen, there are many expressions of the symbolism used in the *Tractatus* to which no reference is being ascribed: the T's and F's of the truth table and the negation sign are examples of this. If anyone is being tacitly criticized in the beginning sections of the *Investigations* it is Russell, for it was Russell who in the *Principles of Mathematics*, advanced the notion according to which a complete analysis is not reached unless each word has a meaning attached to it.

What Wittgenstein came to see in the later writings (and this constitutes his critique of his earlier view) is that his earlier critique of theories of meaning did not accomplish what he thought then to have accomplished -- there was a tendency in his early writings to "sublime the logic of our language" (PI: 89), to pay special attention to certain terms and thus to impose on language certain philosophical preconceptions about how language should be. One thing, though, seems certain: Wittgenstein always held that in order to understand the sense of a proposition, in order to specify a symbol, we need not say anything about semantics; we need not say anything about what object it might refer to in the world. Rather, what we need to do is look at its logico-syntactical "use."

So, when Wittgenstein says that a "name means an object" (3.203), he is not saying that there is a relation between two terms. This was the problem with Russell's approach; he attempted to treat the relation between a name
and an object as if it were something external; he treated logic as something which is external to what we are talking about (4.122). For Wittgenstein this is confused. The whole of logic is already internal to each proposition. Logical necessity has nothing to do with the existence of some state of affairs, since the relation between names and objects is internal to language.

This is precisely why one cannot talk about formal concepts, concepts like "name," "object," and "meaning". To say that 'x is an object' is for Wittgenstein to utter nonsense. Why? Because in saying this one really says nothing. But it is not merely nonsense because in saying this one attempts to say what can only be shown. Wittgenstein is not suggesting, that is, that there exist these metaphysical features of reality (the so-called substance of the world) which can only be shown but not said, because any attempt to say what they are leads to nonsense. He is saying, rather, that the proposition 'x is an object' just is plain nonsense; it is a proposition which fails to do any work and thus is without meaning. It is like 'Socrates is identical': a string of words which appears to have sense, even though we have not given it any.

And the same holds true of the propositions of the Tractatus itself: they too are propositions in search of sense (T: 6.54). What makes these propositions interesting, however, is that they have the appearance of profundity; unlike mere pieces of gibberish (say, 'Glum muk poo'), they do not make ordinary grammatical mistakes. But this is actually the problem. When we are tempted
by these propositions, we suffer from an "illusion of understanding";¹⁸ we project a sense onto propositions which have yet to be given a sense and are nothing more than pseudo-propositions. The central task of the Tractatus, in the end, it seems to me, is to elucidate why such propositions are actually misbegotten attempts to speak about the world.

The Tractatus and Nonsense

The problem is that commentators often take these propositions as expressions of philosophical doctrines which Wittgenstein is seeking to advance.¹⁹ But does Wittgenstein advance a theory of meaning in the Tractatus? I do not believe so. To see why one must take seriously what Wittgenstein says at 6.54, in which we find the commentary the Tractatus offers of itself:

¹⁸I borrow this term from James Conant, whose article "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder" has greatly influenced my interpretation of Wittgenstein. This article is published in The Yale Review, Vol. 79. (Nov, 1990), pp. 328-64.

¹⁹Russell is perhaps the first and most famous of the commentators to hold such a view. In his Introduction to the Tractatus he writes: "The inexpressible contains, according to Mr. Wittgenstein, the whole of logic and philosophy. The right method of teaching philosophy, he says, would be to confine oneself to propositions of science, leaving philosophical assertions to the learner, and proving to him, whenever he made them, that they are meaningless. It is true that the fate of Socrates might befall a man who attempted this method of teaching, but we are not deterred by that fear, if it is the only right method...What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a great deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there must be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit."
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 it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

Notice that Wittgenstein asks the reader here to seek an understanding of what he is saying, not what the propositions of the Tractatus are saying (that is why there is a contrast between "understanding me" and "recognizing them"). But, as he proclaims in the Preface, coming to such an understanding is no easy task: "Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it" (p. 3.) But just what are these thoughts that Wittgenstein asks us to understand? Once again the Preface hints at an answer: "the value of this work" is that "it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved" (p. 4.) If what I will now argue is correct, to throw away the ladder is for Wittgenstein not to throw away anything which climbing a ladder would have made it possible for one to have, and this is why he insists that very "little is achieved."

Unfortunately, however, there is a propensity by many a commentator to want to read the Tractatus as achieving much more than it actually achieves. Why? Because they fail to transcend its propositions; they refuse to completely heed its request to throw away the ladder and thus take it to be putting forward doctrines, albeit ones which are ineffable. And they do so for reasons that go something like this: when Wittgenstein talks about "seeing the
world aright," he is asking us, so they say, to see the world from a point of view whereby one abandons the attempt to articulate in language what can only be shown. On this view what 'shows itself' is this other dimension, this "it", which is beyond language but which language supposedly mirrors.\(^{20}\)

But is this the point of view Wittgenstein is attempting to elucidate in the Tractatus? In his biography of Wittgenstein, Brian McGuinness offers this as an answer:

> It is not unfair to see his whole philosophy as a kind of mystic revelation, remembering that mystic means what cannot or should not be spoken...The reading of the book, then, has a purpose: it is like an initiation into the mysteries, and when it is reached it can be forgotten.\(^{21}\)

McGuinness is absolutely correct in suggesting that after reading the book we should throw the book away and forget it. But what is this mystic revelation of which he here speaks? And what exactly does he mean by this notion of being "initiated into the mysteries"? Two interpretations come to mind.

First, throughout the Tractatus, as we have seen, Wittgenstein speaks of there being metaphysical features of reality. He speaks, for example, of the world being "the totality of facts, not things" (T: 1.1); he says that "objects fit

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\(^{20}\)Janik and Toulmin hold a view something like this. In their Wittgenstein's Vienna, they seem to suggest that the truths of ethics get shown indirectly by some sort of "poetical" or "mystical" communication: "Wittgenstein", they write, "is trying to set the sphere of the ethical off from the sphere of rational discourse, because he believes that it is more properly located in the sphere of the poetical" (p. 193); also see p. 191.

into one another like the links of a chain" (T: 2.03). What he does not do, however, is literally explain how all of this is so. If there is any explanation at all it is through the use of figurative language -- it is as if he were offering us some Platonic myth about how reality is and suggesting that it "initiates us into the mysteries". From this it follows, one could argue, that Wittgenstein holds the view that there are "metaphysical features of reality," but that these are features which cannot be said but only shown. So, in the end, those things which can only be shown and into which we are "initiated" are things which are features of reality.

Secondly, one could argue that Wittgenstein does not really hold the view that there are metaphysical features of reality which cannot be said but which show themselves. While talk about features of reality may be for a time useful, perhaps even essential, it is his view that such talk must also ultimately be overcome and seen for what it is -- plain nonsense. On this interpretation one must, if one is to really throw away the ladder, throw away the view that there are truths of reality which cannot be said but which can be shown.22

This latter reading, it seems to me, is the correct one. To "see the world aright" involves coming to see why it is that the Tractatus is not attempting to say anything at all. Its purpose is therapeutical. The doctrines which one

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22This way of reading the Tractatus was first brought to my attention from reading Cora Diamond's essay, "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the Tractatus" in The Realistic Spirit (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991), p. 181-82.
does find in the *Tractatus* are not doctrines it seeks to advance; they are rather expressions of the temptations to theorize which the work is attempting to help us overcome. To suggest, therefore, that there are these features of reality which can only get *shown*, because to *say* what they are leads to nonsense, is to read too much into the distinction between saying and showing — it is to detach the distinction from Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. What James Conant has to say on this matter is right on the mark:

The ladder we climb is one which draws us into an illusion of occupying a certain sort of perspective -- a perspective from which we take ourselves to be able to survey the possibilities which undergird how things are with us, holding our necessities in place... But the point of the work as a whole is to show us -- that is, to lead us up a ladder from the top of which we are able to see -- that the 'perspective' that we thus occupy is only an illusion of a perspective. So the only "insight" that the work imparts to its reader, in the end, is one about the reader himself: that he is prone to such illusions.\(^{22}\)

I think we can get a better sense of the 'point of view' which Wittgenstein is seeking to convey in the *Tractatus* with the help of a few more ladders. Consider, first of all, Wittgenstein's use of the "ladder" in *Culture and Value*:

I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by way of a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place

\(^{22}\)See the introduction to Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, Ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. xlii. Putnam now also reads Wittgenstein in this manner. In the chapter "Aristotle after Wittgenstein" he writes that "it is a misuse of the 'say/show' distinction to hold that the metaphysical propositions of the *Tractatus* are, at the end of the day, really supposed to express truths, or even thinkable thoughts" (p. 64). Also see Cora Diamond, "Throwing Away The Ladder: How To Read The *Tractatus*" in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 196.
I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now.

Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me. (C.V: p. 7.)

One might argue that what Wittgenstein here says in 1930 is fundamentally different from what he says in the *Tractatus*. The juxtaposition of the two "ladder" metaphors could be used to argue the view that there are "two Wittgensteins": the early metaphysical realist and the later anti-realistic. Such a reading, I believe, is misguided. While Wittgenstein did of course fundamentally change his mind on many matters, his change of mind is not really reflected in this 1930's remark. On the contrary, this remark captures a *spirit* which is already present in his earlier thought and, in many respects, can be used to shed further light on what he says at *Tractatus* 6.54. Let us again consider that remark.

The fact that one is asked by Wittgenstein to throw away the ladder after one has climbed it is another way of saying that the ladder does not take one to a place where one was not already at to begin with. The ladder does not facilitate an escape from the world or change anything in the world. Nor does climbing the ladder bring one to the realization that there are mysteries or truths which lie beyond the ladder but about which one cannot speak. The point, rather, of climbing the ladder is to be cured of the *philosophical temptation* which drives one to want to even look beyond one's ordinary practices as a way of coming to understand where necessity may lie. Once one comes to see that necessity lies right before one's eyes, in the *use* of ordinary
sentences, one presumably gives up the endeavour to imagine necessity as lying somewhere. One comes to see that the place one is attempting to get to is a place one is "already at now." It is only then that one transcends the propositions of the book and sees them for what they are: "elucidations", not theories. It is only then that one comes "to see the world aright."

In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein was later to describe the ideal of his philosophical writings this way:

> I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right. (p. 186.)

The idea about a mirror is completely relevant here. Each of the propositions of the work is like a mirror in which we can see our own philosophical temptations. Together these propositions attempt to induce a "form of vision,"24 one which fosters a recognition of the kinds of problems we ourselves get into when doing philosophy. What tempts us most in philosophy is thinking that we can adopt a position outside of our ordinary practices of saying and doing things from which we can theorize about the meaning of these practices. When we do so our words "idle"; we find ourselves using words which seem to us to have sense, although we have not yet given them any. It is this temptation, and the illusion of understanding which it engenders, from which the *Tractatus* attempts to liberate us.

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24M.W. Rowe, in "Goethe and Wittgenstein", makes a point similar to this. See *Philosophy* vol. 66, p. 301.
This idea of liberation is not all that different from what Nietzsche speaks of in *Human All Too Human* where we also find this metaphor of a ladder put to use. I will quote Nietzsche at length:

A few rungs down. One level of education, itself a very high one, has been reached when man gets beyond superstitions and religious concepts and fears and, for example, no longer believes in the heavenly angels or original sin, and has stopped talking about the soul’s salvation. Once he is at this level of liberation, he must still make a last intense effort to overcome metaphysics. Then, however, a retrograde movement is necessary: he must understand both the historical and the psychological justification in metaphysical ideas. He must recognize how mankind’s greatest advancement came from them and how, if one did not take this retrograde step, one would rob himself of mankind’s finest accomplishments to date. With regard to philosophical metaphysics, I now see a number of people who have arrived at the negative goal (that all positive metaphysics is an error), but only a few who climb back down a few rungs. For one should look out over the last rung of the ladder, but not want to stand on it. Those who are most enlightened can go only as far as to free themselves of metaphysics and look back on it with superiority, while here, as in the hippodrome, it is necessary to take a turn at the end of the track.25

While Nietzsche’s philosophical views are very different from Wittgenstein’s, there are clearly some parallels. Two points, in particular, stand out. Nietzsche speaks here of the "enlightenment" which comes from doing metaphysics; he also holds that metaphysics is something from which we must ultimately seek "liberation." But how does metaphysics enlighten us? Ironically, according to Nietzsche, one can only liberate oneself from metaphysics if one recognizes the danger of its appeal. But to come to such a recognition requires that one

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actually engage in metaphysical reflection. Only if one climbs the metaphysical ladder, only if one takes the metaphysical journey, will one come to recognize the "psychological" temptations which induced one to turn to metaphysical speculation in the first place. Only then will one have the 'will' to "liberate" oneself from metaphysics and thus take a "retrograde step."

But what has all of this to do with the therapy of the Tractatus? The Tractatus, I believe, also seeks to induce a liberation of the will. It asks of us that we examine the actual "use" of language so we can see what that use has to show us. Such a liberation of the will, however, comes only from first climbing the ladder; it is only by taking the journey up the ladder that we can see our own philosophical inclinations. To be truly liberated requires finally giving up the temptation to climb philosophical ladders in the search for higher truths of some sort. One should, as Nietzsche says, "look out over the last rung of the ladder, but not want to stand on it." Although Wittgenstein does not explicitly say this, in the end throwing away the ladder amounts to the same thing as taking a "retrograde step," of coming to see why we do not want to stand on philosophical ladders. It is coming to see that it is here, in our ordinary practices of using words in response to certain situations, that words have a proper use and hence meaning. Insofar as the propositions of the

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26The notion that philosophy fosters a liberation of the will is one which Wittgenstein makes reference to on a number of occasions in Culture and Value. In 1931, for example, he writes: "The very things that are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty to do with the will, rather than with the intellect" (p. 17e).
Tractatus induce us to see our own philosophical inclinations, they thus work towards ultimately liberating us from these inclinations. And that is their ethical deed\(^27\): they show us that "all of the propositions of our ordinary language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order" (T: 5.5563). They show us what philosophy should be: an activity of elucidation.

That the propositions of ordinary language are in perfect logical order just as they stand is something commentators often fail to see. It is something Russell did not see clearly in his introduction to the Tractatus. Russell thought that Wittgenstein was saying that ordinary language was not in perfect logical order and that philosophy could furnish a more perfect language:

Mr Wittgenstein is concerned with the conditions for a logically perfect language -- not that any language is logically perfect, or that we believe ourselves capable, here and now, of constructing a logically perfect language, but that the whole function of language is to have meaning, and it fulfils this function in proportion as it approaches to the ideal language which we postulate.

Russell is just wrong in saying this. Wittgenstein says quite explicitly at 5.5563 that ordinary language is in perfect logical order as it is. That Russell misunderstands Wittgenstein on this point is symptomatic of his not understanding the point of the distinction between saying and showing. Wittgenstein's point, as I have been arguing, is that philosophy does not provide anything new that ordinary language does not already contain; it does

\(^{27}\)In a letter written to Ludwig von Ficker, Wittgenstein actually says that "the book's point is an ethical one." This letter is quoted in Janik and Toulmin's Wittgenstein's Vienna on page 93.
not provide any information which is not already shown in language. It makes no sense to say that a proposition is not logically perfect. The point is that since one cannot go "wrong" in logic there is no need for philosophy to provide a justification of logic -- there is no such thing as an illogical thought which requires correction. If a sentence is possible, then it is well formed and in perfect logical order: logic takes care of itself.

The Role of Philosophy

One might object at this point that this reading of the Tractatus involves reading too much of Wittgenstein's later philosophy into his early writings. But to object in this way, I believe, is to not take seriously what Wittgenstein says about the role of philosophy and its connection to logic and the concept of showing. In the Tractatus he describes the role of philosophy this way:

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. (T: 4.112)

Two things stand out here: one is the idea that philosophy consists of elucidations, the other, that philosophy is an activity of clarifying. To say that philosophy is an 'activity' is of particular significance. It underlines the idea that philosophy is concerned not with discovering truths about reality or advancing doctrines, but with helping us in some way. How does it help us? It helps us in a negative sense: it helps us to see the misunderstanding we create
for ourselves when we treat conceptual problems as if they were scientific
problems. In the Preface, for example, Wittgenstein writes that "The book
deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason
why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is
misunderstood" (T: p. 3).  

I think Wittgenstein's point here is roughly this: in philosophizing, we
ask questions and "pose problems," problems to which we then seek to furnish
answers or solutions. But that we pose these "problems" is for Wittgenstein
itself the problem. Why? Because these problems are not genuine; they are
pseudo-problems which arise from a failure to look at how language is actually
*used*. This is where philosophy as an activity comes in: it helps us to *see* when
it is that we are in the grip of problems which arise from a misunderstanding
of the logic of our language.

Such misunderstanding is exemplified, in particular, in the tendency
towards scepticism: the tendency to assume that one can step outside of logic
and pose questions which call into question the very possibility of speech and
understanding. For Wittgenstein such an assumption is not wrong, it is
nonsensical:

Skepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical when it
tries to pose doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt
can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an

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*Wittgenstein makes a similar point at the end of the book when he suggests that
"metaphysical" claims involve a failure to "give a meaning" to certain of the signs
used in the proposition (T: 6.53).*
answer exists, and an answer only where something can be said (T: 6.51).

Not only is Wittgenstein’s insight here truly revolutionary; it is, I believe, an insight which he spent the remainder of his life developing and applying to a vast array of different philosophical problems. Skepticism, he is telling us, is not to be refuted or rejected with a philosophical thesis. On the contrary, it is to be dismissed as nonsensical.

Let us be clear here: Wittgenstein is not just saying that metaphysical questions and statements are nonsensical -- that is something the positivists may have said. He is saying, much more fundamentally, that the philosophical "problems" which motivate such questions and statements are themselves nonsensical. That is why thinking that sceptical doubts can be refuted is to walk straight into all of the epistemological confusions which Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy is designed to help us avoid.

Might one not object, however, that his conception of philosophy is just arbitrary? Absolutely not. His view of philosophy is inextricably bound up with his conception of logic. His point is this: when we "pose questions in philosophy," we think that we can treat a "form of representation" (that which shows itself) as if it were a fact which can be doubted and which can therefore be true or false. But that is misguided. Logic is not a fact in the world which can be negated or refuted; it is that through which we say everything that "can be said." Logic, in other words, excludes all sceptical doubts, and it does so because it makes no sense to say one can refute logic. Consequently, a'1 we
need do in philosophy is clarify the use of language with the aim of exposing the confusions we get into when we do transgress the rules of logical syntax, including of course exposing the confusions we get into in thinking that philosophy has anything to do with epistemological considerations. Put differently, philosophy is not in the business of saying what it is we cannot do; it is an activity of clarifying the rules of grammar in order to show that philosophy’s questions and problems are nonsense.

Again, one might object that if the propositions of the Tractatus itself are really nonsense, then surely one could not understand what they are saying. But to object in this way is to completely miss Wittgenstein’s point. Wittgenstein is not making a point about linguistics or about the rules of ordinary grammar. Obviously the propositions of the Tractatus do not break the rules of ordinary grammar (as do mere pieces of gibberish), for we must be able to understand these propositions if they are to perform there so-called elucidatory role. What Wittgenstein is doing, rather, is conveying a grammatical, not a grammarian’s, point of view. And that involves showing us why seemingly well-formed expressions lead us into conceptual confusion -- the confusion which results, for example, when one raises doubts about the logic of our language, about that which can only be shown.

Put differently, to say that philosophical propositions are without sense is to say that they do not have a proper use in our lives. Cora Diamond nicely sums this up when she says of both the Tractatus and the Philosophical
Investigations that:

They do not invite us to give up the making of philosophical propositions because such propositions are nonsensical (because they are a priori, or departures from some language game, or in whatever way they fail to meet some supposed requirement). They both treat philosophical propositions as constructions we make on the basis of linguistic analogies, patterns, or images in our language. We may come to see that we do not want to go on doing anything with these linguistic constructions; the satisfaction of our needs does not lie that way. We abandon them; we leave them unused; we say "These we do not want." To call them nonsensical is to exclude them from the commerce of our lives.²⁹

Once one comes to see that many of the philosophical questions one asks are without a proper use in one's life, one will be less inclined to want to continue in this way. One will come to see that philosophy is an activity which ends in silence. Not the silence which results from providing answers to philosophical questions. Rather, the silence which results when philosophy is no longer burdened by its questions.

Conclusion

The above discussion has focused on the closing remarks of the Tractatus for a reason: it is particularly here that Wittgenstein gives us clues regarding how we are to read the book; and that is crucial, for, if we are to understand the critique of metaphysics which we find in the later philosophy,

²⁹Cora Diamond p. 35.
then we will first have to properly understand what is going on in the *Tractatus*. If one reads the *Tractatus* as espousing some form of metaphysical realism, if one sees it as pointing to there being metaphysical features of reality independent of language, then the later philosophy will be read as opposing this with a form of anti-realism. Such a way of reading Wittgenstein, however, misses the point of his philosophy. If anything, Wittgenstein was seeking always to undermine any philosophical standpoint which leads to such a dichotomy in the first place. What Wittgenstein later came to reject in the early philosophy was its strict adherence to the idea that the concept of 'use' be construed logico-syntactically, not some form of metaphysical realism. Another way of putting it is to say that, while Wittgenstein's early philosophy already emphasized ordinary language as being in perfect logical order as it is (T: 5.5563), his obsession with logic, his view of logic as an overarching network, was an impediment to his seeing the phenomenon of language as it is "open to view." In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein was unable to resist the temptation to impose on language certain philosophical "requirements" (PI: 107) about the way language should be, and to that extent the work is metaphysical.

However, if what I have argued is correct, the *Tractatus* is not metaphysical because it is a classic work in explanatory metaphysics. On the contrary, in Wittgenstein's early writings we already find the roots of the idea, an idea Wittgenstein was never to abandon, that a science of logic is nonsense.
As I have argued in both chapters one and two, for Wittgenstein logic (or necessity) has nothing to do with epistemology or ontology. And that is why Wittgenstein conceives philosophy as an elucidatory activity: to clarify what it is for a proposition to be necessary is to clarify logical syntax. Hence the importance of the concept of 'use': the meaning of a sign is given with its use in a proposition. The objects to which a name refers are not in the mind, nor are they in the world -- in fact, they do not have any external existence whatsoever. It therefore makes no sense to say that they are something with which we can be acquainted and of which we can have an experience. To repeat: a sign can only refer to an object when it has a use in a proposition, which is another way of saying that a "proposition shows its sense." And it does so because the whole of logic is internal to a proposition. Propositions can describe the world, but they cannot say how it is that they do so without becoming self reflexive and hence nonsense, and this is why the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself are nonsense.

In the next few chapters, I will argue that it is not until the later works that Wittgenstein actually examines language as it is "open to view," and thus develops a powerful new methodology for doing so. This is, after all, why it can be said that Wittgenstein revolutionized philosophy twice, once in the early writings and then once again in the later writings. For what we find in the later writings is not just an attempt to develop a new method for dissolving philosophical problems, but also a powerful and compelling critique of his
earlier views. It is in the later philosophy that he rejects completely the attempt to impose on language certain "requirements" about the way it should be. It is here that he uses the revolutionary language game technique as therapy designed to make manifest that understanding does not show itself in terms of any logical ideal, but in an ability to act and do things. It is here that he abandons his early view of logic and begins to develop a new method for helping us to see the problems we run into when we theorize about meaning.
Chapter Three

Whatever Happened to the Concept of *Showing*?

When Wittgenstein returned to philosophy in 1929 he had clearly changed his mind about certain matters. The magnitude of the change and just what he changed his mind about is not at all clear, however Commentators often contend that Wittgenstein had come to completely reject the ideas of his earlier work. Such a view is, I believe, misguided. Earlier on in his life, as we have seen, Wittgenstein had remarked that the distinction between *saying* and *showing* was the "main contention" of the *Tractatus*, and that it was in fact the "cardinal problem of philosophy."¹ The question is: Did Wittgenstein also repudiate this important distinction? In what follows I will argue that he did not, and that the spirit of this distinction continued to play a prominent role in all of his later writings.

That Wittgenstein continued to embrace the concept of showing is exemplified by a remark he makes in *Culture and Value*:

Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning. (CV: p. 16e.)

This remark is reminiscent of the *Tractatus* view regarding the inexpressibility of logical form; yet, interestingly, it is made in 1931, a time when Wittgenstein had already abandoned some of the central ideas of his earlier period. What

¹LRKM: R. 37, p.71.
bestows meaning on an expression, he tells us here, is the background in which it is embedded -- it is this background, however, which is inexpressible.

Although it is not explicitly stated here, implicit in this remark is the all important notion of grammar. Grammar is what determines the limits of what one can meaningfully say and ask. When one has mastered the grammar of a particular language, one puts oneself into a position to discriminate what kinds of questions can be raised and settled by the use of language. It is the introduction of this concept which more than anything else marks a shift in Wittgenstein’s thinking. And yet the concept of grammar is, I will argue, also what most unifies his philosophical writings. In particular, this concept is directly linked to his view of philosophy. Wittgenstein always maintained that philosophy should abstain from constructing theories. In the early writings this expressed itself in terms of the concept of showing. Logic cannot say anything; but it does show itself in sentences which do say something. In the later writings the same theme, or something closely resembling it, is still in place. Each language game stands on its own and cannot be externally justified by a philosophical theory. What "shows itself" is the actual practice of applying words to things. To see how this is so we must now probe into what Wittgenstein says about 1) the connection between rules and their application; 2) the significance of the idea that grammar, like logic, is not a fact which can be true or false; and 3) how all of this, in turn, relates to his important idea that a "technique have an application in our lives" (PI: 520).
An Overview: Rules and Their Application

Let us first examine what ideas in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein took issue with when he changed his mind in the 1930's. Most notably, he rejected his earlier inclination to talk as if there was an essence to language, and so with it the inclination to suppose that a proposition is essentially "pictorial" and that the practice of applying words to things is associated with "primitive signs." In the appendix to *Philosophical Grammar*, just to take one example, he emphatically points out what he deems wrong with his earlier picture of language:

What gives us the idea that there is a kind of agreement between thought and reality? - Instead of "agreement" here one might say with a clear conscience "pictorial character". But is this pictorial character an agreement? In the *Tractatus* I said something like: it is an agreement of form. But that is an error. First of all, "picture" here is ambiguous. One wants to say that an order is the picture of the action which was carried out on the order; but also, a picture of the action which *is to be* carried out as an order. (PG: p. 212.)

Here we already have the makings of a view which Wittgenstein was later to develop more fully in the *Philosophical Investigations*: an order, he tells us, can be a picture of the action which carries out the order; it can also, however, be a picture of what one thinks ought to be done in response to the order. For, although one may do what one thinks constitutes following the order, one may not actually do what is intended. A picture or rule can thus be said to allow of more than one application and so is ambiguous. How, then, is the correct
application of a rule determined? One can see that the notion of identity seems now to pose a real concern.

Now identity never seemed to pose a problem in the *Tractatus* primarily because the notion of application was bound up with the view that a proposition is a picture of reality, a view which he thought could be best understood in terms of the language of a "method of projection." Consider what he goes on to say in the above passage:

We might say: a blueprint serves as a picture of the object which the workman is to make from it. We might call the way in which the workman turns such a drawing into an artefact "the method of projection". We might now express ourselves thus: the method of projection mediates between the drawing and the object, it reaches from the drawing to the artefact. Here we are comparing the method of projection with the projection lines which go from one figure to another. - But if the method of projection is a bridge, it is a bridge which isn't built until the application is made. - This comparison conceals the fact that the picture plus the projection lines leaves open various methods of application; it makes it look as if what is depicted, even if it does not exist in fact, is determined by the picture and the projection lines in an ethereal manner; every bit as determined as if it did exist. (PG: p. 213.)

As this analysis shows, Wittgenstein had thought that an atomic proposition reaches out to reality (in the *Tractatus* he used the metaphor of propositions having "feelers" to illustrate this), and it does so by analogy with the lines of projection in a geometrical diagram. According to this view a blueprint or workshop drawing must be translated into the object one is seeking to make from it. The method of projection is what is "intermediate" between the drawing and the object -- it, so to speak, reaches or stretches from the drawing to the object. That is why he tells us that the method of projection is like a
bridge from drawing to object, a bridge which, interestingly, "isn’t built until the application is made." In pointing out that one builds the bridge with the "application," Wittgenstein insists that a symbol can never contain its own rule of projection or interpretation.

Now one might think that, insofar as Wittgenstein rejects the notion that there is an agreement in "form" between a proposition and reality, that he is rejecting completely the ideas of his earlier work. But that is not so: in the Tractatus Wittgenstein never said that the correlation between a picture’s elements and the world are made by ostensive definition. In fact, what we find in the Tractatus is a critique of ostensive definition which bears a striking resemblance to the what he says in his later writings. This is to be found in connection with his remarks on the meaning of a "primitive sign." A proposition, he had thought in the Tractatus, is composed of words which name objects. What, though, keeps words attached to the same objects? What is it that preserves the sense of a sentence? The answer, he suggested, does not lie in a theory or definition. It lies rather in the use a sign has within a proposition:

Every sign that has a definition signifies via the signs that serve to define it; and the definitions point the way.

What signs fail to express their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly.

The meanings of primitive signs can be explained by elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain the primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are
already known. (T: 3.261-3.263)²

Wittgenstein is not telling us here, as I argued in chapter two, that one can learn the meaning of a name separately from other names by means of an ostensive definition. Nor is he suggesting that before one can understand propositions one must be able to understand the names that occur in them, and before one can understand names one must be able to understand the propositions in which they occur. On the contrary: he is saying that the understanding of propositions and names is simultaneous; it is only in the context of a proposition that a name has a meaning.³ This is precisely why a few lines later he adds: "in order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense" (3.326). For: "If a sign is useless, it is meaningless...(If everything behaves as if a sign had meaning, then it does have meaning)" (3.328). The point is clear: meaning is something which can only be shown in the use of a sentence; it cannot be explained by way of a philosophical theory.

This line of thought is of course carried further in the beginning sections

²This comparison between Tractatus 3.262 and the Philosophical Investigations was first drawn to my attention from browsing through A Wittgenstein Workbook put out by members of the Department of Philosophy The University of Leeds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). I am also indebted to David Pears who, in his paper "Wittgenstein’s Concept of Showing", makes the same comparison. See: Criss Crossing A Philosophical Landscape: Essays on Wittgensteinian Themes Dedicated to Brian McGuinness, (Wien: Bundesministerium fur Wissenschaft und Forshung, 1992), Ed. by Joachim Schulte and Goran Sundholm, p. 94-95.

of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein now builds on his earlier view that one cannot learn the meaning of a name in isolation from how it is used in language. As he now puts it: "the ostensive definition explains the use of the word -- the meaning -- of the word when the overall role of the word is clear" (PI: 30). What changes, though, is his conception regarding what falls within the proper domain of philosophy. In the *Tractatus* he had said that primitive signs can be understood, not because we are acquainted with their bearers, but because we use them in propositions. This view was based on certain problematic assumptions, however: he had assumed that a picture together with the lines of projection does not allow for more than one application. Why? Because his conception of a proposition was rigid: a proposition is either true or it is false; it either corresponds or it does not correspond to reality. The idea of correspondence seemed to pose no problem at all. Consequently, the problem of the continued identity of language over time was never conceived to be a problem either. It was simply assumed that the use of language remained constant and so how the use of a name communicates it reference to others was a matter for empirical *psychology*, not philosophy.

But that is precisely what he now considers to be a problem. The problem is this: while it was one of the principal tasks of the *Tractatus* to describe what language as a calculus looks like, it did not describe how language is actually used, how one acquires a mastery of language, and so what counts as applying a word in the same way again -- he had merely
indicated that a "proposition shows its sense." But, if the application is "ambiguous," what is it that brings about the correct application of a rule? It is not enough to say that we grasp the sense of a proposition; we need some criterion for what counts as applying the rule in the same way again. The later writings, I believe, respond to this problem, and they do so by continuing to employ the concept of showing. What now "shows itself," and so cannot be given in a translation, is the actual practice and grammar of applying the rule within our lives.

This idea is perhaps most clearly expressed in the long discussion of rule following in the Philosophical Investigations. Consider what he says at 201:

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

Here Wittgenstein poses the question: What is the connection between a rule and its application? The act of following a rule necessarily involves a leap between the rule and its application. How does one bridge this gap? One answer is that following a rule involves interpreting the rule. This type of response is one which Wittgenstein seeks painstakingly to reject. Why? Because it leads to a deep skepticism or indeterminacy: interpretations by

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4See Pears p. 94.

5Kripke is famous for arguing that Wittgenstein's philosophy leads to a deep seated skepticism. See his Wittgenstein On Rules And Private Language (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
themselves do not determine meaning, nor do they therefore "shew me what I have to do at any point," the result being "neither accord nor conflict." Yet, it clearly is the case that we do follow rules and that we, as Wittgenstein puts it, "grasp their use in a flash." How can this be? Well, the answer, in brief, is that following a rule involves understanding, not interpretation. The connection between a rule and its application is not something which another rule or theory can elucidate; it is a connection which must be seen or understood. But just what does this mean?

In one sense it means something not all that different from what he had said earlier in the *Tractatus* at 3.263. He had said that the meaning of a name can only be "explained by elucidation," an idea which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is bound up with the idea of 'showing' and the concept of 'use'. In the later writings he is saying something quite similar: any attempt to explain the meaning of a sentence by way of a paraphrase already relies on the "actual practice of applying the words used in the paraphrase to things." As he says, "if a person has not yet got the concepts, I shall teach him to use the words by means of examples and by practice. -- And when I do this I do not communicate less to myself than I know myself" (PI: 208). In Remarks on the *Foundations of Mathematics*, he makes a similar point: "I can of course paraphrase the rule in all sorts of different forms, but that makes it more intelligible only for someone who can already follow these paraphrases" (RFM:

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6Pears, p. 94.
VI 19). Common to both these earlier and later writings is thus the notion that philosophy cannot provide a justification for logic or grammar; it is redundant to produce philosophical theories purporting to explain how words or sentences have meaning. All such theories already presuppose that which they are attempting to explain. For the meaning of a "primitive sign" or of a sentence is always something which can only be shown in its application or use.

The shift from logic to grammar, however, brings with it the introduction of the language game technique: by "describing" the actual practice of applying a rule as it occurs in our lives, Wittgenstein now shows that following a rule has sense only within the context of a practice. "What belongs to a language game," he now insists, "is a whole culture" (LA: p. 8) It is only because following a rule is a practice which has an application in our lives that we have some criterion regarding what counts as going on in the same way again. In the Philosophical Investigations he thus writes that "the term language game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of a language is part of an activity, or a form of life" (PI: 23).

So, while there is clearly a change of focus from the early to the later writings, this much they have in common: the application of a sign always involves a leap which no theory can explain or assist one in making but which does show itself in the application. "We cannot", as Wittgenstein says in a conversation in 1931, "lay down a rule for the application of another rule." There are only rules and their applications; no third rule can serve as the
connecting link: "Things must connect directly, without a rope, i.e. they must already stand together like links in a chain" (W.V.C: 155). The notion that the need for such a leap can somehow be avoided is therefore a philosophical illusion. However, it is not until the later writings, when Wittgenstein introduces the idea of grammar and begins to pay careful attention to the way language is actually used, that he shows us that rules of grammar have their identity in a form of life. To see how this is so let us now look more closely at what he means by grammar.

The Importance of Grammar

The importance of this idea of grammar is particularly apparent in the *Philosophical Investigations* where he explicitly claims that philosophy is a grammatical investigation (P.I: 90); and where remarks concerning conceptual relations are said to be "grammatical notes" (PI 232) or "grammatical remarks" (PI 574). This emphasis on the importance of grammar is already apparent, however, in remarks made as early as 1929, when Wittgenstein first begins to change his mind about certain matters in the *Tractatus*. Let us examine some texts from this period.  

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7Compare this with what he says in *Philosophical Grammar* (p. 45.)

8For an excellent analysis of the importance of the concept of grammar as found in these early texts see: Robert Alva Nöe, "Wittgenstein, Phenomenology and What It Makes Sense to Say" published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, (Vol.
Wittgenstein's new emphasis on grammar is evident in his decision to begin Philosophical Remarks by writing that: "A proposition is completely logically analyzed if its grammar is made completely clear: no matter what idiom it may be written or expressed in" (PR: p. 51.). In a letter written to Waismann and Schlick around this time he makes this same point:

I think that we have only one language, and that is our everyday language. We need not invent a new language or construct a new symbolism, but our everyday language already is the language, provided that we rid ourselves of the obscurities that lie hidden in it. Our language is completely in order, as long as we are clear about what it symbolizes. (WVC: p. 45.)

What Wittgenstein here says seems similar to Tractatus 5.5563. In the Tractatus he writes: "all the propositions of our ordinary language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order." These similarities conceal fundamental differences, however. In the Tractatus the construction of a new symbolism was designed to render perspicuous a disguised and underlying logical order. In the above passage, however, Wittgenstein rejects the notion, characteristic of his earlier view, that such a symbolism is in any way superior to ordinary language. Though useful for certain purposes, such artificial symbolisms are not clearer than ordinary language and thus have no philosophical import. For if ordinary language symbolizes perfectly as is, then we need only get clear about how it does it.9 If there is any doubt about this, look at what he says in

LIV, No. 1, March 1994).

9Ibid., p 17-19.
other conversations with Waisman and Schlick:

The wrong conception to which I want to object in this connection is the following, that we can come on something which we cannot see, that we can discover something wholly new. That is a mistake. The truth of the matter is that we have already got everything, and we have got it actually present; we need not wait for anything. We make our moves in the realm of grammar of our ordinary language, and this grammar is already there. Thus we have already got everything and need not wait for the future. (WVC: p. 183.)

The message should thus be clear: while both logic and grammar are in some sense immediately present, the idea that there is anything to discover in language which could be uncovered by analysis is something which Wittgenstein now completely rejects. We already have in our presence everything we need to solve philosophical problems, for all problems arise because of misconceptions about the grammar of our language. To remove these misconceptions does not require digging beneath the surface; it requires attaining clarity about the grammar of the language in which we all "move"; it requires paying careful attention to the way language is actually used.

There is another important and related idea which emerges from the remarks made at this time: it is the idea that philosophy as a grammatical study is concerned with the "possibilities" of what it makes sense to say. Consider once again a passage from the *Philosophical Remarks*:

Physics differs from phenomenology in that it is concerned to establish laws. Phenomenology only establishes the possibilities. Thus, phenomenology would be the grammar of those facts on which physics builds its theories. To explain is more than to describe; but every explanation contains a description. (PR: p. 51.)
Wittgenstein here distinguishes physics from grammar (what he here also calls phenomenology) in order to make the point that grammar only "establishes the possibilities" of what it "makes sense to say."\textsuperscript{10} This echoes the *Philosophical Investigations* where he proclaims many years later that: "we feel that we had to penetrate phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the *possibilities* of phenomena" (PI: 90). It also, of course, harks back to what Wittgenstein had said in the *Tractatus*:

Nothing in the province of logic can be merely possible. Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts. (T: 2.0121)

The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. They have no 'subject matter'. They presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense; and that is their connexion with the world. (T: 6.124)

Common to all these passages is the notion that neither logic nor grammar is an object which can be empirically investigated or which requires explanation in order to be understood. On the contrary, both logic and grammar are presupposed in the very endeavour to theorize or to say anything in the first place, and both therefore have to do with the possibilities of what it makes sense to say. Although Wittgenstein abandons his earlier claim that

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 20. The notion that grammar 'establishes the possibilities of what it makes sense to say' permeates the lectures Wittgenstein gave at this time. See *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge*, 1930-32, ed. D. Lee, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980). For example: "Grammar is not an expression of what is the case but of what is possible" (p. 10)
there exists just one set of possibilities which are shown by the logic of language, he does continue to maintain that these possibilities are shown by the grammar of language. Let us examine this idea in more detail.

One way to see how this is so is to examine some of the many remarks on colour made by Wittgenstein around this time. Perhaps his most famous remark on colour is to be found in *Zettel* 354 - 364:

I want to say that there is a geometrical gap, not a physical gap, between red and green.

But doesn't anything physical correspond to it? I do not deny that. (And suppose it were merely habituation to these concepts, to these language games. But I am not saying that it is so.) If we teach a human being such and such a technique by means of examples -- that he then proceeds like this and not like that in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not that is the natural 'continuation' for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of nature.

We have a colour system as we have a number system.
Do the systems reside in our nature or in the nature of things?
How are we to put it? Not in the nature of colours or numbers.

Then is there something arbitrary about this system? Yes and no. It is akin to what is arbitrary and not arbitrary.

... has nature nothing to say here? Indeed she has -- but she makes herself audible in another way. "You'll surely run up against existence and non-existence somewhere!" But that means against facts not concepts.\(^{11}\)

Much of Wittgenstein's philosophy is contained in these passages. One central idea is this: If we have a sentence such as "The colour reddish-green is

\(^{11}\)See David Pears (p. 3.) for an interesting analysis of this passage. Also see Irving Block's remarks on Bernard Williams' interpretation of this passage in *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, 1975, p. 725-727.
impossible" what are we to make of such a sentence? Is it a factual sentence? Is it the result of some convention we adopt? Wittgenstein seems to suggest that in a sense it is neither. The impossibility of such a sentence has rather to do with what grammar determines that we can say. And it does so because, as Wittgenstein says, the grammar of a colour system is "akin to what is arbitrary and not arbitrary."

Grammar is Arbitrary

Take, first, the claim that grammar is arbitrary. In saying that grammar is arbitrary, Wittgenstein is not saying that it is a matter of individual choice or decision. What characterizes any form of representation or a linguistic practice is precisely its necessity. Through training we learn to use the expressions of our language and our arithmetic correctly. As a result, we are not free to decide how these rules are to be followed; it is not as though we decide to contract into them, nor are they dispensable or contingent. But what, then, is the claim that our rules of grammar are arbitrary aimed at? Primarily, the view that rules of grammar are accountable to, or justified by, some sort of reality. In a series of passages in Philosophical Grammar he puts this succinctly: "Grammar", he writes, "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” (PG: p. 133.). A few lines later he again makes the same point: "The only correlate in language to an intrinsic necessity is an arbitrary rule. It is the only thing which one can milk out of this intrinsic necessity into a proposition" (PG: p. 133.).

These are contentious remarks, to be sure; they target what most philosophers take to be the nature of rules. When doing philosophy we are often tempted to think that we can justify the rules of grammar of sentences like ‘there are only four primary colours’ by the nature of colours themselves. We construe advances in mathematics as discoveries about the nature of numbers. We take ~~p to follow from p because that is the nature of negation. In all of these cases we assume that our rules are correct because they express how things are necessarily in the world. Indeed, the history of philosophy is permeated with attempts to justify language in terms of some foundation which is given. Through innumerable examples Wittgenstein seeks to loosen the grip this picture has on us and to show us that grammar is not answerable to reality in this way.¹² He attempts to show that the attempt to justify grammar is ultimately senseless and circular.

Consider, for example, what he says at Zettel 331:

One is tempted to justify the rules of grammar by sentences like ‘But there really only are four primary colours.’ And the saying that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the

possibility of this justification, which is constructed on the model of justifying a sentence by pointing to what verifies it (Z: 331).

Here Wittgenstein attempts to show that the rules of grammar cannot be given a justification; they are not a fact in the world which can be empirically verified and which can therefore be true or false. Any attempt to justify grammar by means of some sort of verification amounts to a reiteration of the very grammar one seeks to justify. Suppose, for example, that one sought to justify a proposition by reference to reality. One would not get very far: in describing reality one would ultimately have to employ not only language, but a language with a grammar. If the justification employed the same grammar one was attempting to justify, the verifying facts would just presuppose the grammar in question. As he says in Philosophical Remarks:

Grammatical conventions cannot be justified by describing what is justified. Any such description already presupposes the grammatical rules. That is to say, if anything is to count as nonsense in the grammar which is to be justified, then it cannot at the same time pass for sense in the grammar of the propositions that justify it. (PR: 55)

Suppose, however, that one employed a grammar different from the language one is attempting to justify. If that were so, the facts one describes by means of this grammar would not constitute a justification of the grammar one is seeking to verify. Why? Because the facts one would now be describing would be different facts, and so not facts which would verify or "negate" the grammar in question. For something can only negate if it has the same grammar and so is within the same logical space as that which it negates. It
follows therefore that grammar itself is not something that can be falsified or verified, for grammar only establishes the criteria by which we make judgments of truth or falsity; it is not itself something which can be true or false. As he puts it in lectures in the early 1930’s:

You cannot justify grammar. For such a justification would have to be in the form of a description of the world and such a description might be otherwise, and the propositions expressing this different description would have to be false. But grammar requires them to be senseless.\textsuperscript{13}

Language can express one method of projection as opposed to another. It cannot express what cannot be otherwise...What is essential to the world cannot be said about the world; for then it could be otherwise, as any proposition can be negated.\textsuperscript{14}

The continuity in Wittgenstein’s thinking about logic should thus be clear: in both the early and later writings, he shows that it makes no sense to say that logic or grammar can be "negated" or revised. In the early writings, he tells us that logic is not a description of what holds true in the world; it is that through which we think about the world. Consequently, it is unthinkable that logic can be negated, since that would presuppose standing outside of logic -- and that is absurd since an illogical thought is not a thought at all. In the later writings this idea lives on. While Wittgenstein abandons his early idea that there exists some overarching logical network, he continues to hold that it makes no sense to speak of revising or negating grammar, since grammar


\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 34.
is that against which our actions have their sense.

This is also why he holds throughout all of his writings that there is nothing to discover about logic or grammar. Consider again, for a moment, a colour concept. How, for example, do we specify which colour red is? Our inclination is to suppose that red has certain properties which make it "specific" and so different from other colours. We suppose that we can justify this by comparing red to other colours and perhaps pointing out their differing shades. But this presents a problem: how do we know we have pointed to the right colour when we point to something we consider red? Well, we might observe that red has a darker shade than the colour yellow. But this just shows us something about our concept of red. For we do not point to the colour red and observe that it is darker than the colour yellow, unless we assume that we might have discovered that red could have turned out to be lighter than yellow. Such an assumption, however, makes no sense, since we could not have discovered a colour called red which is lighter than yellow.\(^\text{16}\)

The point is that, in attempting to justify the colour red by pointing to certain properties of that colour, we get no further than repeating the colour grammar we are using. We can never, that is, break out of the circle of grammar. As Wittgenstein puts it:

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"Red is something specific" -- that would have to mean the same as: "That is something specific" -- said while pointing to something red. But for that to be intelligible, one would have already to mean our concept 'red', to mean the use of that sample (Z: 333)

In other words, the use of the demonstrative 'that' in "That is something specific," said while pointing to a red colour, already presupposes one's use of the colour red -- it already makes use of the grammar one seeks to justify.

This is precisely why Wittgenstein says (in the passage from Zettel quoted above on page 91) that "there is a geometrical gap, not a physical gap, between red and green." Wittgenstein ascribes two different senses to the term geometry: there is the geometry of the physicist, a geometry which "doesn't have to do with possibility but with facts" and hypothesis, and there is geometry as an a priori. grammatical structure, one which cannot be investigated empirically (PR: p. 217). Grammar is arbitrary in just the sense that the gap between red and green is not something which can be physically justified -- it has to do with the rules for our use of these terms and so is a matter of logic. In conversations with Waismann and Schlick Wittgenstein nicely sums this up:

Now let us take the statement, 'An object is not red and green at the same time'. Is all I want to say by this that I have not yet seen such an object? Obviously not. What I mean is 'I cannot see such an object', 'Red and green cannot be in the same place.' Here I would ask, What does the word 'can' mean here? The word 'can' is obviously a grammatical (logical) concept, not a material one. (WVC: p. 67.)

\[16\] Noe, pp. 25-8.
The upshot, then, is that a sentence such as "there is no such thing as reddish-green" is not true because red and green 'cannot' be in the same place. Rather, the sentence is not 'true' at all, since it is a misleading expression of a rule of grammar, one which expresses that no sense can be attached to the words reddish-green. That is, after all, why Wittgenstein says in the above passage that the word 'can' is a grammatical (logical) concept, grammatical insofar as the combination of words 'reddish-green' is without sense and therefore not something we would even know how to verify. Conceptual confusion arises when we attempt to treat rules of grammar as if they were empirical statements, and this is something Wittgenstein attempts to show us in his remarks on colour.

Grammar is Not Arbitrary

It should now be clear why for Wittgenstein grammar is akin to what is arbitrary: one can never escape the ring of grammar or language (nor for that matter logic, as is the case in the Tractatus) in the hope of finding some sort of link between grammar and reality which is describable and thus

\[17\] This is also Wittgenstein's point in remarking on the use of the word 'not' that: "There cannot be a question whether these or other rules are the correct ones for the use of 'not' (that is, whether they accord with its meaning). For without these rules the word has as yet no meaning; and if we change the rules, it now has another meaning (or none), and in that case we may just as well change the word too" (PG: p. 133).
justifiable in "factual sentences."\textsuperscript{18} And that, I believe, attests to the continued employment of the concept of showing: for if grammar determines what it is possible to say, then this link can only be shown in the grammar of the language used. Could one not argue, on the strength of these views, however, that Wittgenstein is here advancing a form of linguistic idealism or conventionalism? After all, in saying that grammar is arbitrary, he seems to be telling us that truth is entirely dependant on our standards of judging and that there is no independent, external perspective from which to judge these standards. In fact, could one not argue that this claim about the arbitrariness of grammar is just that: a philosophical thesis or position?

I want now to argue that to read Wittgenstein this way misses the subtlety of the attention he gives to what we actually do -- it fails to account for his immensely important notion of "use." Part of his reason for saying that grammar is akin to what is not arbitrary is to dispel the notion that nothing whatsoever speaks in favour of a particular form of representation or practice, as if our practices or forms of life were mere conventions into which we decide to contract. In the later writings Wittgenstein frequently reminds us that the notion of 'use' has to do with how language connects with life, rather than the syntactical structure of a proposition. The expressions of our language, he tells us, acquire their sense from the language games in which they are used and the forms of life in which these games are rooted. There is, he insists, a

\textsuperscript{18}Pears, p. 103.
connection between grammar and the way things are in the world in this sense: if the world were fundamentally different, then the particular colour or number systems that we use might also become useless. Or, if human nature were fundamentally different, then our grammar would also differ and so too would what we say and do differ. One must be careful here, though: that a technique is natural does not mean that other techniques are unintelligible or that we are forced by this naturalness to carry on in just this way. It is rather tied to a whole complex set of considerations. It has, to put it quite generally, a great deal to do with our training, our education, our institutions, our existing practices and so is something which can change over time.

It has, in other words, a great deal to do with the role it plays in our lives. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein furthers this idea:

So does it depend wholly on our grammar what will be called (logically) possible and what not,—i.e. what the grammar permits?"—But surely that is arbitrary? -- It is not every sentence-like formation that we know how to do something with, not every technique has an application in our life; and when we are tempted in philosophy to count some quite useless things as a proposition, that is often because we have not considered its application sufficiently. (PI: 520)

Aside from reminding us of the dangers inherent in the claim that grammar is arbitrary, Wittgenstein once again claims that grammar has to do with what is "possible." Importantly, though, he now stresses the paramount importance

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10This is, I believe, what Wittgenstein is getting at when he speaks, for example, of our "natural reactions" (PI: 185), the "common behaviour of mankind" (PI: 206), of a "fictitious natural history" (PI: II p. 230.).
of the idea that a technique have an "application in our lives." Although grammar on its own cannot be justified and is arbitrary, what makes grammar non-arbitrary is the use we make of it in our lives. It is important how we understand this remark.

In the *Tractatus*, for example, Wittgenstein was also concerned with there being nothing arbitrary about logic. The rules of language, he seemed there to suggest, cannot simply be a human arrangement; they must also in some way correspond to reality if they are not to be arbitrary, if they are to be logical. He described the non-arbitrariness of logic in this way:

> We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and that some things are not. In logic it is only the latter that express: but that means that 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. (T: 6.124)

In the later writings, Wittgenstein comes to see this as a kind of fantasy. He rejects the notion of an "absolutely necessary sign" which "speaks for itself," claiming instead that it is *we* who determine the meaning of signs and rules by our "agreement" in how the rules are to be applied. Hence, rather than accounting for the normativity of logic in terms of the absolute necessity of logical form, Wittgenstein now attempts to show that the normativity of grammar is rooted in our linguistic practices.

To some this type of support for grammar may not seem very satisfying. As philosophers we demand more than this; we want our grammar to be rooted in and supported by reality in some clear way. By concentrating on how a
technique has an "application in our lives," Wittgenstein attempts to thwart such philosophical theorizing. He attempts to show that such a philosophical demand is not only an illusion, it is something which has no real sense in our lives.

Think of it this way. In philosophizing, we often fail to examine the actual use a technique has in our lives. Why? Because we think we are paying attention to the way things are while still in the grip of certain preconceptions about what it is we should find. We ask philosophical questions about our concepts but with certain conceptions in mind about what it is that would satisfy us as an answer. And when we ask such questions, it seems to us that we can meaningfully adopt a position in which we look down on the connection between ourselves and our practices. But herein lies the illusion. When we do this, according to Wittgenstein, we sever our use of language from its having any application in our lives: for here, from a position outside of a practice, our questions are not bound by the norms and constraints of the practices we are investigating. And so our questions idle, without any real work to do. Precisely this is the problem with the doctrines of philosophical idealism or realism -- both philosophical positions assume there to be a meaningful question about the relation between language and reality, a question to which they can furnish answers.  

20Compare this with what Wittgenstein says at Philosophical Investigations 128: "If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them." In Philosophical Remarks he puts it
It is to show us the nonsense of such philosophical questions that Wittgenstein thus puts such great emphasis on the idea of a practice. References to the idea of a practice abound in his writings. In Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, for instance, he compares language to a practice: "In order to describe the phenomenon of language, one must describe a practice, not something that happens once, no matter of what kind. It is very hard to realize this" (RFM: p. 335.). In the Philosophical Investigations he also characterizes following a rule as a practice: "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...And hence also obeying a rule is a practice" (PI: 201-202). And in Culture and Value he says, "Practice gives the words their sense" (p. 85e.). What are we to make of these passages?

Here is one way of looking at it. When doing philosophy we are often tempted into thinking that a rule determines its own application. We conceive there to be something intrinsic to the rule itself, some fact of the matter, which makes this possible. For Wittgenstein this is fundamentally misguided. Following a rule is a practice, and it is only within a particular practice of rule following activities that it makes any sense to say one is following a rule correctly or incorrectly. It is, however, as he says above, "very hard to realize this way: "From the outset 'Realism', 'Idealism', etc, are names which belong to metaphysics" (PR: p. 86).
this." Why is this so? Because as philosophers we have a certain "picture" in our minds (Wittgenstein says we are held "captive" by such pictures) regarding what it is that we demand from an explanation. We think that an explanation must be something "deep" (PI: 209); we think that language must be justified by something less haphazard than the actual use of language, and so we look to some sort of Platonic "shadow" for an explanation. This philosophical demand and the questions it engenders, it seems to me, is precisely what motivates Wittgenstein's calling attention to our practices; that is, by describing some of the concrete factors involved in our rule following practices, Wittgenstein endeavours to undermine this philosophical quest for a certain kind of explanation.

Augustine's story about how he first learned language is a perfect example of this. Augustine tells us that he knows how he first learned language -- he learned it through a process of ostension. His elders, he recounts, would point to an object while uttering a name, and he would come to grasp the meaning of the name by seeing what object it corresponds to. From this he theorizes that the meaning of a name must be the object it names. But that is precisely what Wittgenstein considers to be a mistake: what Augustine forgets is that his account of how he first learned language "already" presupposes a background understanding. After all, he presents his knowledge of how he first learned language as if it were not his first initiation into language. For built into his account of the name-object relation is already
an understanding of the grammar of the act of pointing (PI: 32); he forgets that it is grammar which "shews the post at which we station the word" (PI: 29).

His forgetting this is symptomatic of any attempt to theorize about meaning: dazzled by some "picture" of how we think language should be, we fail to see how language is actually being used. As a result, we think that there are certain problems which need answering; we think, for example, that there is something "paradoxical" about the nature of following a rule which requires philosophical explanation. This is something Wittgenstein reminds us of time and time again through his many and diverse descriptions of the ways in which we use language in our ordinary practices. In so doing, he attempts to undermine the questions which burden us in philosophy; he attempts to undermine the notion that there is something paradoxical about following a rule which requires explaining.

Consider, for example, the process of learning how to follow a rule. Learning how to follow a rule, Wittgenstein reminds us, involves being "trained" in a certain way. Take, for instance, how one comes to an understanding of the term '+' : one is given numerous examples and asked questions involving numbers, and one's responses to these questions are rejected, encouraged, or corrected in some way (PI: 208). At some point in this process one presumably learns and develops the capacity to follow the rule correctly -- one catches on to the "point" of the rule, as it were. There is actually something quite remarkable about this: from comparatively few
examples one is usually able to follow the rule correctly into the future. One's performance output is far more varied and goes far beyond the input of examples which make up one's past experience. How can this be?

According to many theories of meaning, the answer must be something like this: our ability to understand or follow a rule must "spring" from some mental state or process which reaches "beyond the examples" (PI: 209). It is not enough to say that the learner just catches on to the examples. As philosophers we want our explanations to have depth; we want to guarantee that our understanding is "secure" and properly grounded (PI: 87); we think it necessary that we justify these ordinary explanations in some way. And that is what many post-Cartesian philosophers have attempted to do by amending the Augustinian picture and turning to theories of mind. Locke, for example, replaces the notion of "metaphysical simples" with the notion of "psychological simples." A word gets its meaning, he tells us, not from the object it names, but from the idea in the mind that represents this object.21 On this view we know how to follow a rule correctly because we already have laid down in our mind an explanation of how to follow a rule. In the Blue and Brown Books Wittgenstein describes it this way: "We meet again and again with this curious superstition, as one is inclined to call it, that the mental act is capable of crossing the bridge before we have got to it" (BB: p. 143.). The mental intermediary is supposed to "explain" or "justify" how we know. It acts like a

21John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 3.2.2.
signpost -- it guides our course.

This demand that a philosophical explanation take on a certain form (if it is to have "depth") is precisely what Wittgenstein calls a "general disease of thinking" (BB: p. 143). There is an interesting passage in *Culture and Value* where he illustrates the nonsense of such a demand:

> It is true that we can compare a picture that is firmly rooted in us to a superstition; but it is equally true that we always eventually have to reach some firm ground, either a picture or something else, so that a picture which is at the root of all our thinking is to be respected and not treated as superstition. (CV: p. 83e)

The word "superstition" once again arises here. Interestingly, though, Wittgenstein does not reject the idea of a picture here; he tells us, rather, that a picture ceases to be a superstition when it reaches some "firm ground." Notice, however, that he gives us no criterion for distinguishing a picture which "is at the root of our thinking" from one which is a "superstition." That there is no criterion is important: it shows us the extent to which such a distinction is bound up with a practice or form of life and that practices change over time. It is not something reason can tell us independent of a practice. For whether a picture is superstitious is not in the nature of the picture itself; it is entirely dependant on how one uses it. But that is just the problem with "philosophical pictures": they spring from an endeavour to explain from a position outside of the limits of our practices, a position from which they are cut off from having a meaningful connection with our lives.
Wittgenstein nicely sums this up at *Investigations* 454, when, asking how it is that one follows a rule (in this case how one follows an arrow), he responds as follows:

"Doesn't it seem to carry in it something besides itself?--'No, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that.'--That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it.

This pointing is *not* a hocus pocus which can be performed only by the soul.

His message here is clear: there is no intrinsic *fact* about the arrow considered in isolation which determines the direction in which it points, nor is there some "psychical thing," some *fact* about our mental life, which gives it meaning and so determines its direction. None of these things explain or justify the arrow's pointing in a certain direction, for none of them interpret themselves. That it points at all is rather something which is *shown* in the application, in what a "living being" does with it within a particular practice. All of this is nicely summed up by Wittgenstein when he remarks in a lecture:

"Is grammar arbitrary? Yes, in the sense...that it cannot be justified. But it is not arbitrary in so far as it is not arbitrary what rules of grammar I can make use of. Grammar described by itself is arbitrary; what makes it not arbitrary is its use."\(^{22}\)

Grammar on its own is arbitrary, but what makes grammar non-arbitrary is the use it has in our lives, which is another way of saying that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (PI: 43).

\[^{22}\text{Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1930-1932, p. 49.}\]
A User's Point of View

To put it in different terms, I think we can say, then, that Wittgenstein is attempting to undermine our temptation to ask certain kinds of philosophical questions by asking us to embrace a user's point of view.\textsuperscript{23} He is asking us, that is, to explain the normative features of a linguistic practice from a point of view internal to the practice. There are some interesting passages in Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics where he makes this clear. He poses the question: "How does one describe the process of learning a rule?" He answers:

I can train someone in a uniform activity. E.g. in drawing a line like this with a pencil on paper:

\[
\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots
\]

Now I ask myself, what is it that I want him to do, then? The answer is: He is always to go on as I have shewn him. And what do I really mean by: he is always to go on in that way? The best answer to this that I can give myself, is an example like the one I have just given. (RFM: p. 320.) (emphasis mine)

A few pages later he gives another answer:

To what extent can the function of a rule be described? Someone who is master of none, I can only train. But how can I explain the nature of the rule to myself. The difficult thing here is not to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground. (RFM: p. 333.) (emphasis mine)\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23}Pears makes a similar suggestion (p. 97.).

\textsuperscript{24} In the Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein makes exactly the same point in writing: "If a person has not yet got the concepts, I shall teach him to use the
Notice that Wittgenstein's focus in both of these passages is not merely on how one comes to learn a rule; attention is also given to describing these rule following practices from the perspective of someone attempting to teach a rule to another. And that is important since it highlights that for Wittgenstein at issue is precisely what kind of explanation one can give in order to show another how to follow a rule. Common to both passages, therefore, is the idea that the best possible explanation one can give is "the answer or explanation one can give to oneself", and that this involves an example of an ordinary sort.  

But just what does this mean? Wittgenstein is often interpreted to mean something like this: he is taken as having shown us that one cannot follow a rule privately; otherwise, there would be no way of knowing whether one's thinking one is following the rule is actually in accord with the rule. Consequently, when one asks oneself what one means by "he is always to go on in that way," one cannot point inwardly, to some mental criterion, for an answer. One can, however, point to an outward criterion, such as the practices of one's community, to know what it is for something; to go on in that way. And from this one concludes that what is now important is not that philosophy

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words by means of examples and by practice.—And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself” (208). (emphasis mine)

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analyze our thoughts, but that it analyze our community practices. We move, as it were, from the inward to the outward.26

Such an interpretation, it seems to me, is misguided. Wittgenstein is not suggesting that looking at the use of language entails laying out certain criteria ("assertability conditions," as some say), criteria which determine what speakers can say and do in observable situations. He is not, that is, furnishing a "use" theory of meaning. On the contrary, Wittgenstein insists that philosophy does not analyze at all; rather, it "assembles reminders" of what we already know; it "describes" what lies open to view (PI: 127). To describe what lies open to view is not to theorize about how we "use" language; it is to describe practices in the use of language, something which involves getting us to see things from within our lives, from a user's point of view. For it is only here, in our lives, in the use of ordinary language, that language is meaningfully at work. And that is precisely why the best answer one can give is the one "I can give myself." If one understands how to follow a rule, and, if one shows another how to follow a rule by giving them examples of this, then this is the best explanation one can give, since it is the only meaningful explanation.

26See Michael Dummett, Truth and Other Enigmas (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1978), p. 176; also see Kripke: pp. 71-73. Both Dummett and Kripke read Wittgenstein as if he were moving from a "truth-conditional" account of meaning in the Tractatus to an account of "assertion-conditions" in the later writings. To explain meaning in terms of assertion conditions, they say, is to specify conditions under which a sentence is said to be true or confirmed.
It is of course tempting to suppose that there exists a better explanation, one which gets to the "essence" of the matter, which philosophy is capable of providing but which ordinary examples do not quite capture. But that is an illusion: it presupposes that one can stand outside the ring of grammar and justify grammar by some feature of reality, by some sort of criteria. But, as we have seen, it makes no sense to think one can break out of this ring and justify grammar or understanding in this way. When one understands how to follow the rule correctly, one does not do so merely because others regularly follow it that way or because the community does it that way. Following a rule is a normative practice; it involves understanding why the practice of following the rule is correct; it involves grasping the "point" (PI: 564) of the rule. One's mastery of a rule is manifested in one's ability to answer questions, to reject certain kinds of answers and to make corrections, to provide explanations, justifications and criticisms. These are normative criteria which transcend an appeal to mere "regularity" and which cannot be captured in any sort of reductive, naturalist, or empiricist explanation of how we use language.

In other words, to understand how to follow a rule is to take part in a form of life, for rules of grammar have their identity in a life, in a practice. Our agreement in following the rule the way we do is not something that can be abstracted from the life in which this agreement has its place. One can only explain the concepts and rules used in a language game by using concepts which have the same grammar as the concepts one is seeking to explain. For
in the end, the concepts of 'explanation', 'meaning' and 'understanding' are bound up, not only with each other, but with a large variety of normative criteria. Importantly, Wittgenstein's investigation of these criteria does not result in a theory or doctrine; nor is it an empirical investigation. It is, rather, a grammatical investigation, one concerned with "showing" the features of grammar from the inside, from a user's point of view.

From Agreement in Form to Agreement in Judgments

With the new focus on grammar, Wittgenstein thus abandons his earlier view that the agreement between thought and reality is an agreement in "form" and speaks instead of an agreement in "judgments." Importantly, though, he emphasizes the normativity of grammar in continuing to hold that this agreement in judgments has to do with "logic." At Philosophical Investigations 242, for example, he stresses the continued importance of logic:

If language is to be means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic but it does not do so.

Wittgenstein's concern here is to point out that we agree in our judgments because the grammar of our language carries with it a feeling that we must act in a certain way which is independent of our private or personal feelings. But just what is this agreement about which he here speaks?

Let us briefly (I say briefly because in the next chapter I will discuss
this in greater detail) look at some remarks he makes in *Culture and Value* about what it is like to understand humour for an answer. He writes:

Two people are laughing together, say at a joke. One of them has used certain somewhat unusual words and now they both break out into a sort of bleating. That might appear *very* extraordinary to a visitor coming from a quite different environment. Whereas we find it completely *reasonable*. (I recently witnessed this scene on a bus and was able to think myself into the position of someone to whom this would be unfamiliar. From that point of view it struck me as quite irrational, like the responses of an outlandish *animal*.) (CV: p. 78e.)

The question here is: why do we find it "reasonable" to react this way to humour? The answer, I believe, has to do with logic or grammar. If someone tells a joke, one knows how to carry on because one understands the grammar or logic of the language game of telling jokes. Understanding here has nothing to do with information about one's state of mind. One does not need to discover facts or construct theories to understand humour. One need only, as he says, see things from a certain "point of view."

But how does one come to such a point of view? Well, as we have seen, by living within a culture and being subject to a certain kind of training:

*Humour is not a mood but a way of looking at the world. So if it is correct to say that humour was stamped out in Nazi Germany, that does not mean that people were not in good spirits, or anything of that sort, but something much deeper and more important.* (CV: p. 78e.)

What is significant about this passage is the idea that humour is not a mood; it transcends the private and changing whims of an individual. If humour were a private thing, there would be no way of judging whether a particular
behaviour is "reasonable" or not. Yet, we do judge certain types of behaviour, such as the telling of jokes in certain circumstances, as being completely "reasonable," and we judge other types of behaviour as being animal like. Why is this? Importantly, because forms of life bring with them shared points of view which render possible judgments about what is reasonable or unreasonable. These points of view are not something we can just decide to embrace or adopt; they are, as he says, something "deeper" than this.

The depth Wittgenstein speaks of here is, I believe, essentially the agreement he speaks of at *Investigations* 241:

"So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" -- It is what humans say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (PI: 241).

Notice how he here conceives the idea of agreement. Agreement is not something we "decide" upon on a given occasion, nor has it anything to do with our opinions. It is not something which can be true or false either. We might say it is something which "shows itself" in our saying things which are true or false. It has to do, to use Stanley Cavell's suggestive phrase, with our being in "mutual attunement" with others. When we are attuned with others we know how to follow their lead because we understand the grammar or logic of the language game in question. And that is why when someone tells a joke we know how to react. When we react by laughing at the joke, say, we do not normally speak of such a reaction as reasonable or unreasonable. Sometimes, though, we do: we say it is inappropriate to express humour when someone
feels amused by the death of a close friend. But the point is that we could only make such a judgment because we are in agreement with others regarding what is reasonable or appropriate.

Conclusion

I think we can say, then, that in the later writings Wittgenstein continues to embrace the idea that philosophy has nothing to do with epistemological or psychological considerations. He never wavers in his opposition to Russell's idea that we need a "type of "logical experience" in order to understand the sense of a proposition. While he does abandon his early view of language by insisting that language has multifarious purposes, he continues to hold that logic or grammar is "inexpressible." As we have seen, in the later writings this manifests itself in terms of the idea that grammar is akin to what is arbitrary and non-arbitrary.

In saying, first of all, that grammar is akin to what is arbitrary he stresses that talk of truth and falsity, or what is reasonable or unreasonable, only makes sense within an inherited and agreed upon background of linguistic practices. To question whether a linguistic practice itself stands in a correct relation to something real or objective outside of the practice is nonsensical. It is to search for a justification of the grammar or logic of the practice itself. But that is nonsensical, since grammar is antecedent to truth and falsity and
therefore not something it would make any sense to negate or revise. In a remark made in the 1930's, not long after he had returned to philosophy, Wittgenstein sums this up perfectly:

The rules of grammar cannot be justified by shewing that their application makes a representation agree with reality. For this justification would itself have to describe what is represented. And if something can be said in the justification and is permitted in its grammar why shouldn't it also be permitted by the grammar that I am trying to justify? Why shouldn't both forms of expression have the same freedom? And how could one restrict what the other says? (PG: p. 186)

Secondly, Wittgenstein also insists that grammar is non-arbitrary, and in so doing he highlights the importance of the connection between grammar, philosophy and the notion of "use." The point is this: if all justification is from within a particular practice, one might be inclined to ask what gives the practice the authority to convince us to go on in a particular way. Wittgenstein's response to such a question, it seems to me, just comes to this: it is an extremely "important fact of nature" (Z: 354) that when we partake in a common training we do agree with one another; we agree in our reactions, our responses and particularly in our judgments. "If I have once grasped a rule," says Wittgenstein, "I am bound in what I do further. But of course that only means that I am bound in my judgment about what is in accord with the rule and what not" (RFM: 328).

To put it differently, that we "agree in our judgments," that we find certain techniques to be natural, is inextricably bound up with the fact that grammar has an application in our lives. It is a technique's having a use in our
lives which makes it non-arbitrary. And it is this "use" of grammar in our lives which gives grammar all the support that it needs and all that is possible. This is why Wittgenstein remarks that:

"How am I to obey a rule?" --if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way that I do. If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached the bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do." (PI: 217)

These words highlight Wittgenstein's attempt, in the later writings, to cure us of the fantasy that there is some standard of correctness in judgments, some logical ideal, some explanation, which transcends the methods of judging we actually employ in our ordinary practices. All judging emanates from within a particular practice, and it is here, in the practice with all of its constraints, that justification finds its end. At most one can say: "this is simply what I do." And that is all one can say: for, as I have argued, following a rule always requires a leap from the rule to its application which no further rule or theory can assist one in making. But we do make such leaps; we do know how to follow a rule correctly. And when we do our actions show that we have understood the logic or grammar of the use of a rule.
Chapter Four

Wittgenstein's Challenge to Epistemology

In the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes that:

What has to be accepted, the given, is -- so one could say -- *forms of life* (II p. 226).

With these words Wittgenstein voices his opposition to what might loosely be called rationalism or intellectualism. This is the view, common to both Rationalists and Empiricists, that if we are to know anything our beliefs must be based on a foundation which can be given a rational justification of some sort. It is the view that rational inquiry is necessary at every level of the knowing process. For if anything is to be known with certainty, than it must also be known how it is that we know. This is why the concept of "the given" is so important: if we can establish something as being absolutely certain, than we can proceed outwards secure in the knowledge that our further inquiries will be based on solid ground.

This common theme of attempting to justify ordinary beliefs, and the role of 'the given' therein, is one which Wittgenstein seeks to undermine. He does so by replacing the traditional conception of "the given" with what he calls "forms of life." The replacement, however, is complex: it is not as if Wittgenstein replaces one particular given with another. On the contrary, the notion that forms of life are something that "has to be accepted" is meant to
destroy the traditional function of this concept of "the given" altogether. Nowhere is this brought out more clearly than in his critique of Descartes and Moore in *On Certainty*, and it is here where I will focus much of my discussion in this chapter. I will argue that Wittgenstein's attempt to undermine the meaningfulness of the whole rationalist project is one which continues to make use of the distinction between 'saying' and 'showing'. I will also examine how what Wittgenstein says in *On Certainty* advances our understanding regarding what he takes logic to be in the later writings.

**The Disengaged Perspective**

The notion of a form of life is meant to call attention to the fact that the world of any agent is a lifeworld, one in which the agent's world is shaped by the practices, history and culture of a particular form of life. On this view the agent is conceived to be engaged with the world, engaged in the sense that practices in the use of language give purpose and meaning to one's life. This view is in sharp contrast with what one might call the disengaged perspective. Roughly speaking, according to this view the agent is conceived as someone who builds or constructs his or her particular picture of the world. The general idea is that one can look at the world from a vantage point outside of one's ordinary practices. The agent is someone who takes in impressions or 'bits of information', processes them in some way, and then emerges with a particular
picture of the world. It is a view shared by both Rationalists and Empiricists, and finds its modern manifestation in computational pictures of the mind. The idea is that if one processes the information properly, then one's picture of the world might turn out to be true. As Thomas Nagel says, it all amounts to an attempt to view the world from "nowhere":

The attempt is made to view the world not from a place within it, or from the vantage point of a special type of life and awareness, but from nowhere in particular and no form of life in particular at all. The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself. To grasp this by detaching more and more from our own point of view is the unreachable ideal at which the pursuit of objectivity aims.¹

Perhaps the most famous example of the attempt to achieve such a disengaged perspective is to be found in the philosophy of Descartes. Just look at the opening sentence of the Meditations:

It is now some years since I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had constructed on this basis; and from that time I was convinced that I must once for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences.²

Here we have Descartes being quite explicit about the need for a rational


procedure, a procedure by which we can scrutinize our beliefs with the aim of building our picture of the world on a secure foundation. We can only be said to have knowledge, according to Descartes, if a belief is "metaphysically certain" and that is possible only if one cannot "imagine the least ground of doubt." This is why he later goes on to proclaim that: "I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false."³

In one sense what Descartes here says seems correct. We do seek to escape the falsity of our too hastily acquired beliefs, and we do so by sometimes attempting to disengage ourselves from our practices. After all, science would not even be possible were we not to get beyond the subjectivity of a particular practice. The problem arises, however, when we "ontologize this procedure,"⁴ when we assume it is written into the very constitution of the human mind. And that is precisely what Descartes does, for even at his most skeptical Descartes never doubts the consciousness of his mental states. And for good reasons: if knowledge requires that one knows how one knows it, it only makes sense to suppose it lies in the mind, for the mind is, after all, something which is immediately accessible to the knower. Provided one judges

³Ibid. p 15.

⁴I borrow this way of putting it from Charles Taylor whose account of these matters greatly influenced this section of this chapter. See his book Philosophical Arguments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 61.
in accordance with the criterion of clarity and distinctness, one will never allow any falsity or distortion into the citadel of truth. One will have a trustworthy procedure with which to build properly and so objectively.

Implicit in this view, then, is the notion that one can only come to know how things really are if one scrutinizes one's beliefs by means of a procedure which is neutral; that is, a rational procedure which is free from the distortions of one's subjectivity and divorced from one's purposive nature. Once again what Nagel says is instructive here:

In trying to understand and discount for the distorting influences of his nature, he must rely on certain aspects of his nature which he deems less prone to such influence...The selection of what to rely on is based partly on the idea that the less an appearance depends on contingencies of this particular self, the more it is capable of being arrived at from a variety of points of view. If there is a way things really are, which explains their diverse appearances to differently constituted and situated observers, then it is most accurately apprehended by methods not specific to particular types of observers. Objectivity requires not only a departure from one's individual viewpoint, but also, so far as possible, departure from a specifically human or mammalian viewpoint. The idea is that if one can still maintain some view when one relies less and less on what is specific to one's position or form, it will be truer to reality.⁵

This foundationalist picture is of course not unique to the Rationalists; it informs the Empiricist attempt to justify "the givens" of experience in the same way. While Descartes used a process of systematic doubt and the criterion of clarity and distinctness to steer a path towards the truth, Locke concentrated on rules of believable evidence. He thought that if we are to trust

⁵Nagel, pp. 208-9
any of our beliefs, we must break them up into their simple components and so trace them back to their simple atoms or constituents. His "simple ideas" were precisely the so called givens of experience which resulted from such a procedure and from which all our other ideas were constructed. Hume also sought to question the very possibility of knowledge by tracing ideas back to their corresponding impressions, arguing that only those ideas which are so traceable are sound. And, as is well known, his strict empiricism forced him to recognize that no rational account can ultimately explain the concept of "necessary connection" and that we must turn to psychology if we want any justification at all.\(^6\)

The current trend towards computer models of the mind is perhaps the greatest manifestation of what Nagel speaks of here. Such models build on the ideas of these earlier philosophers in their construal of information processing: they combine an "atomism of input with a computational picture of mental function."\(^7\) In particular, they reinforce Nagel's point regarding the kind of detachment and neutrality necessary for attaining a perspective of objectivity:

\(^6\)Hume writes that: "Tis not only in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence. Objects have no discoverable connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of the other. See Humes' A Treatise of Human Nature (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1978), p. 104.

\(^7\)Taylor, p. 63.
for not only are computers detached from specific practices, they are also
detached from "a specifically human or mammalian viewpoint."

Subjective and Objective Certainty

This modern trend towards epistemology, and the quest for metaphysical
certainty and objectivity to which it gives rise, is something Wittgenstein calls
into question. This is particularly evident in On Certainty 193 and 194 where
he asks what it means for the truth of a proposition to be certain, or, more
specifically, what it means for a person to be certain about something. Central
to his analysis of certainty is precisely this distinction between subjective and
objective certainty:

With the word 'certain' we express complete conviction, the total
absence of doubt, and thereby we seek to convince other people.
That is subjective certainty.

But when is something objectively certain? When a mistake is
not possible. But what kind of mistake is that? Must not a
mistake be logically excluded.8

Subjective certainty involves a person's particular convictions, dispositions or
beliefs about something; it is marked by an absence of doubt. If one says 'I am
certain Steve is coming to the party tonight', one expresses a subjective belief
about which one could be mistaken -- it is conceivable that one's belief could

8Part of my discussion has been influenced by Norman Malcolm's excellent
206-11.
turn out to be false and that Steve fails to turn up to the party. Objective certainty is something different: here mistakes are said to be "inconceivable" (OC: 54), senseless and so "logically excluded." But just what is at the basis of one's being objectively certain? And what does it mean to say a mistake is logically excluded? These are questions which I will seek to answer in what follows.

To answer these questions let us look at one of Wittgenstein's favourite examples: the case of the school child learning mathematics. The child learns quickly through the practice of calculating that \(5 \times 5 = 25\). There comes a point when the child makes this sort of calculation as a matter of course -- the child knows how to go on without any doubt. In other cases this might not be so: if the child were asked to carry out a more complicated calculation, say \(12 \times 12 = 144\), she might not be certain and miscalculation would be a possibility. In time and with more practice, however, this too would become an equation the child accepts as certain, removed from any possible doubt, and so not something which must be checked. At some point in the child's development we would say that the child's attitude towards these kinds of equations was one of objective certainty. As Wittgenstein says,

In certain circumstances, for example, we regard a calculation as sufficiently checked. What gives us a right to do so? Experience? May that not have deceived us? Somewhere we must be finished with justification, and then there remains the proposition that this is how we calculate. (OC: 212)

But let us now take a different example -- the case of empirical
propositions. Unlike mathematical propositions which cannot be denied without contradiction, empirical propositions have traditionally been taken to be those propositions which can be confirmed or disconfirmed by experience. On this view empirical propositions are "hypotheses" which are subject to doubt. We know from Descartes, to take one of the more famous examples, that all empirical propositions are something we have grounds for doubting: whether one is talking about the existence of physical objects or how far the earth is from the sun, Descartes thought these are the kinds of things we could be mistaken about and which we should therefore call into question.

Wittgenstein disagrees: not only does this go against what we actually do in the many language games we play, but he insists it makes no sense to call into doubt all empirical propositions. Why is this? Well, consider what he says at 52:

This situation is thus not the same for a proposition like "At this distance from the sun there is a planet" and "Here is a hand" (namely my own hand). The second can't be called a hypothesis. But there isn't a sharp boundary line between them. (OC: 52)

Two important and related ideas stand out here. First, there is the point that not all empirical propositions are hypotheses. Some propositions clearly are. That the earth is a certain distance from the sun is something we do not know with absolute certainty; there could indeed be different and conflicting hypotheses here, and we have reasons for being uncertain about whether they are true or not. Others are not hypothetical. That there exists an earth at all is not a hypothesis; it is presupposed in the very endeavour to hypothesize
about the distance between the sun and the earth in the first place. And the same obviously holds true of one's hands; it just makes no sense to say the existence of one's hands is a hypothesis about which one could be mistaken. "It is not true," as Wittgenstein says, "that a mistake gets more and more improbable as we pass from the planet to my own hand. No: at some point it has ceased to be conceivable" (OC: 54). Notice that he says that mistakes become inconceivable, not merely improbable. This is meant to underline his central idea that there are some propositions which it simply makes no sense to doubt; they are propositions which become fixed and unshakeable.

Secondly, Wittgenstein insists that there is no sharp boundary separating empirical propositions which are hypotheses from those which can't be called a hypothesis. This is important because it illustrates one very fundamental difference between his early and later writings: in the *Tractatus* the boundary between the logical and the empirical was rigid; logic was considered universal; it determined what it is we could say. In *On Certainty* there is a shift away from the idea that logic constrains what we can "say" to the idea that context and grammar determines what it is we can meaningfully be said to "know." This is important because it marks a fundamental shift regarding what Wittgenstein now takes logic to be. Many of the propositions which in the *Tractatus* would clearly have been considered empirical propositions (propositions of natural science) are no longer considered to be empirical in the later writings, if by empirical one means a proposition which
can be confirmed or disconfirmed by experience. The shift in what Wittgenstein
takes logic to be is something I will come back to later. For the moment,
though, one thing is clear: for Wittgenstein both mathematical and empirical
propositions are on the same "level" of certainty insofar as both are objectively
certain. As he says:

But why am I so certain that this is my hand? Doesn't the whole
language game rest on this kind of certainty? Or isn't this
certainty already presupposed in the language game...

Compare this with $12 \times 12 = 144$. Here too we don't say perhaps.
For, insofar as this proposition rests on our not miscounting or
miscalculating and our senses not deceiving us as we calculate,
both propositions, the arithmetical one and the physical one, are
on the same level. (OC: 446-7)

But this still does not answer the question regarding what is at the
basis of this certainty. Has it to do with the existence of some rule to which
one can appeal in order to eliminate any possibility of error? No, says
Wittgenstein: even if there were such a rule, 'mightn't we (in turn) go wrong
in applying it?" (OC: 26). Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter, we might go
wrong: "if you demand a rule from which it follows that there can't have been
a miscalculation here; the answer is that we did not learn this through a rule,
but by learning to calculate" (OC: 44). But if that is so, if the rule itself can be
misapplied, then the question still remains: how is it that we just do
understand and follow rules correctly? For it seems paradoxical that a person
can understand a rule, be guided by it, without having an idea of the many
issues which must be resolved before the rule can guide one correctly. Or is it
paradoxical? In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein continues to undermine the philosophical propensity which makes it seem as if there is something paradoxical here. And that is why he focuses on objective certainty or what might be called our background understanding; it is such an understanding which makes these above issues seem irrelevant. For it just is the case that there are certain propositions which we do not seek to question nor would we want to. And our actions *show* this to be so. We only question them when a situation arises which might warrant such questioning.

**Grounds for Doubt**

Now it is interesting that for Descartes these were precisely the kinds of things we have grounds for doubting. It is also interesting that for Moore they were precisely the kinds of things we can be said to "know." Wittgenstein disagrees with both these claims. Let us take first Descartes’ idea about calling everything into doubt. In one sense Descartes and Wittgenstein agree: if one is to doubt anything there need to be grounds for doubting. But what are these grounds? Descartes thought he had offered reasons for doubt when he introduced the possibility that our senses were deceiving us, that we were dreaming, or that there might exist an evil demon whose job it is to deceive us.

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about everything, including the truths of mathematics and geometry. But is
this really a ground?

Wittgenstein does not think so. He rejects the notion that one can
introduce something speculative or hypothetical to provide the necessary
grounds for doubt. Indeed, he rejects the idea that universal doubt makes any
sense at all. To put it most generally, universal doubt flies in the face of
Wittgenstein's holism, the view that many of our beliefs are just accepted on
trust and cannot reasonably be called into doubt. More specifically, that we
cannot doubt everything stems from the fact that it just makes no sense to
doubt the kinds of things Descartes purported to doubt. Surely Descartes did
not doubt the existence of physical objects as he turned the log in the fire when
he felt a chill coming on. Suppose, though, that he could have meaningfully
doubted the existence of physical objects: could he also have doubted the
existence of the words used to write his Meditations? Did he, for example,
doubt the meaning of the word 'doubt' or 'deceive'? If his doubt was universal,
these too are matters he must have doubted.

But could he have doubted in this way? Absolutely not: at the very least
Descartes must have been certain of the words he was using to doubt: "If you
are not certain of any fact," says Wittgenstein, "you cannot be certain of the
meaning of your words either (OC: 114). "I am not more certain of the meaning
of my words than I am of particular judgments" (OC: 126). If Descartes had
really doubted everything, his philosophical enterprise could never have got
started. It is not possible to doubt the words used to express one's doubt, for the language game of doubting only makes sense if one does not doubt the game itself. Put differently, universal doubt is impossible because it brings about its own destruction. Consider once again the school child. If the child did not believe any of the things her teacher was saying, if she doubted everything, the language game of learning would never get off the ground. She would never come to learn basic mathematics nor anything empirical; she would be skeptical of everything she was taught. "It strikes me," as Wittgenstein says, "as if this doubt were hollow. But in that case -- isn't belief in history hollow too? No; there is so much that it connects up with" (OC: 313).

The skeptic might object, though, that some of the things we believe and learn just are false and therefore hollow. And the skeptic's objection is of course not incorrect; we should be on guard about what we accept as knowledge. But the question is: Can one introduce a methodological doubt, in the fashion of Descartes' *Meditations*, to eliminate such a possibility of error. Wittgenstein does not think so. For it is precisely such a methodology, and the conception of objectivity which motivates it, which he seeks to undermine. I say undermine rather than refute because Wittgenstein deems it to be nonsense. To repeat: Doubt only makes sense in the context of a language game, and the language game itself cannot be doubted, since it provides the very conditions necessary for doubting in the first place. As he says, "A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt" (OC: 450). "If you tried to doubt
everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of
doubting itself presupposes certainty" (OC: 115).

Unfortunately, however, this all-important point about language games
is often misunderstood. Moore clearly misunderstood it, and this is evident in
his attempt to refute skepticism by saying he knows various things. When
Moore asserts that he knows that this is a hand, that he is a human being or
that the earth has existed for a number of years, he expresses the view (the
thesis, as one might put it) that these are things it makes no sense to doubt.
But if it makes no sense to doubt these things, then, according to Wittgenstein,
it makes no sense to say one knows them either. He remarks:

If 'I know etc', is conceived as a grammatical proposition, of
course the 'T cannot be important. And it properly means 'There
is no such thing as doubt in this case' or 'The expression "I do
not know" makes no sense in this case.' And of course it follows
that 'I know' makes no sense either. (OC: 58)

Wittgenstein's point here is that Moore uses the words "I know"
erroneously. Normally the words "I know" are used when someone is
attempting to overcome doubt of some sort.10 For example, when a person is
uncertain about something, one may attempt to convince them by saying "I
know it is so, because..." -- one would then proceed to provide evidence to
support one's claim to know. Or, suppose a friend tells you about some event
which occurred that morning, to which you then respond: "I know, Steve told

10Malcolm, p. 211.
me about it already." Or, finally, suppose someone shows you the results of a
calculation, and you doubtfully respond, "Are you sure they are correct?". One
might then say "I know I am correct, I checked it over twice." Or, as
Wittgenstein puts it:

If I don't know whether someone has two hands (say whether
they have been amputated or not) I shall believe his assurance
that he has two hands, if he is trustworthy. And if he says that
he knows it, that can only signify to me that he has been able to
make sure, and hence that his arms are not still concealed by
coverings and bandages, etc. My believing the trustworthy man
stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure.
But someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects
makes no such admission. (OC: 23)

All these uses of the words "I know" have in common the fact that they
are opposing some possibility of doubt and thereby providing information of
some sort. They all express an empirical proposition and thus constitute a
move in a language game. But that is exactly what the words "I know" fail to
do in cases where doubt makes no sense and where mistake is logically
excluded. Where there is no doubt to oppose, there is no work for the kinds
of propositions uttered by Moore to do. One might claim, as does Moore, that
they do perform some philosophical work; after all, Moore uses the words "I
know" to make the conceptual point that there are some propositions (those
where mistake is logically excluded) which the skeptic cannot question or
doubt. But this is the ultimate confusion: in attempting to express this
conceptual point, Moore is in effect using the words "I know" to say that "I
know" is not something that can be said. In effect, he is attempting to say what can only be shown.

Examples of showing

Although it is not always obvious, the distinction between saying and showing actually lies at the heart of Wittgenstein's critique of both Moore and Descartes and indeed of the whole foundationalist project. If there is any doubt about this, perusal of a few passages should dispel it. Consider, for example, how he makes use of the concept of showing to undermine Moore's use of the words "I know".

"I know that a sick man is lying here?" Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively into his face.—So I don't know, then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the assertion makes sense" (OC: 10).

Wittgenstein insists that it is "nonsense" to affirm or deny that one "knows" there to be a sick man lying here. His reasons for saying this actually hark back to what he had said in the Tractatus. He had said:

The existence of an internal property of a possible situation is not expressed by means of a proposition: rather, it expresses itself in the proposition representing the situation, by means of an internal property of that proposition. It would be just as nonsensical to assert that a proposition had a formal property as to deny it." (T: 4.124) (emphasis mine)

The knowledge that the man is sick is an "internal feature" of the language

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11See Malcolm, p. 212.
game. Consequently, it is nonsensical to say one "knows" that he is sick; this is something which shows itself in one's actions and in what one says: for example, one may seek to comfort the man, or ask if he is feeling any better or take his temperature, and when doing these things a knowledge of his sickness is already presupposed. This is also why he remarks in another passage that: "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," or "Shut the door," etc. etc." (OC: 7); or when he observes that:

"I know that this room is on the second floor, that behind the door a short landing leads to the stairs, and so on." One could imagine cases where I should come out with this, but they would be extremely rare. But on the other hand I shew this knowledge day in and day out by my actions and also in what I say. (431)(emphasis mine)

The point in all of these passages is the same: certainty is something which shews itself in one's life, in what one says and does; it is not the result of philosophical theorizing, for one can never justify what is internal to a language game.

More specifically, Wittgenstein is telling us, as he had already back in 1912, that logic cannot be given a philosophical justification. Just days before his death he once again says so quite explicitly:

I might also put it like this: the 'law of induction' can no more be grounded than certain particular propositions concerning the material of experience.

But it would also strike me as nonsense to say "I know that the law of induction is true". Imagine such a statement made in a court of law! It would be
more correct to say "I believe in the law of ..." where 'believe' has nothing to do with surmising.

Am I not getting closer and closer to saying that in the end logic cannot be described? You must look at the practice of language and then you will see it. (OC: 499-501)

Here we have perhaps the clearest example of the survival of the concept of showing: the practice of arguing inductively is not grounded on any kind of factual statement; it is rather an attitude which shows itself in the practice of drawing inductive conclusions and so cannot itself be said to be true or false. It is also clear that Wittgenstein here echoes his early claim that "logic takes care of itself" (NB: p. 1.) when he says that "logic cannot be described." 12

What is not so clear, however, is what Wittgenstein now means by logic.

The later view of logic

One way of understanding what Wittgenstein means by logic in the later writings is to once again consider a Moore type proposition. Take, for example, the proposition "Physical objects exist." This is not an empirical hypothesis which can be true or false; it belongs rather to our frame of reference and is more appropriately called a framework (grammatical) proposition. A simple way of understanding the difference between these two different kinds of propositions is this: if the contrary of a proposition makes sense, it is not a

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12See Kenny, p. 218. Kenny claims this is an "unmistakable echo of the first entry in his 1914 Notebook."
framework proposition but rather an empirical hypothesis whose truth is dependent on the way things are in the world. However, if the contrary of a proposition makes no sense, it is descriptive not of the world but of our conceptual framework; it is, as we saw in the previous chapter, a part of logic (OC: 93, 155). In a remark reminiscent of the Tractatus Wittgenstein makes exactly this point:

Are we to say that certainty is merely a constructed point to which some things approximate more, some less closely? No. Doubt gradually loses its sense. This language game just is like that.

And everything descriptive of a language game is part of logic. (OC: 56)

No such proposition as 'There are physical objects' can be formulated, for concepts such as 'physical object' (colour and quantity) are logical concepts (OC: 36); they belong to the frame through which we say everything that can be said.

Framework proposition are thus not the kinds of things we can be said to "know," for they do not describe a body of knowledge; they rather describe the way we understand the world. Consequently, they are not learned through an investigation of the world (OC: 138), nor are they verified by checking to see whether they agree with reality. It just makes no sense to say that one can produce evidence for the proposition "I have two hands" expressed without an

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appropriate context. It is only within a framework which we accept as certain that we carry out our experiments and where the notion of verification even makes any sense. As Wittgenstein says,

If a blind man were to ask me "Have you got two hands?" I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don’t know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn’t I test my eyes by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? \textit{What} is to be tested by \textit{what}? (OC: 125) (Also see OC: 250.)

The point, then, is that not doubting some things, accepting them as given, is an essential part of a language game. What we accept as given does not result from some rational procedure. One could not rationally carry on in any language game if one did not simply accept some things as given and so removed from doubt (OC: 329). And that is precisely why doubt must stop somewhere; for, as Wittgenstein says, "Doubting and non-doubting behaviour. There is the first only if there is the second" (OC: 354).

Anyone who seriously thought it possible to doubt everything, anyone who thought that physical objects might not exist for example, would not merely be regarded as having made a mistake; he would be regarded as "demented" (OC: 155), mentally disturbed and in need of help. Wittgenstein draws a sharp distinction between mistakes and other types of false belief in order to elucidate the importance of framework (grammatical) propositions. Correcting a mistake is actually something quite different from talking someone out of a mad belief. Consider these examples:
For months I have lived at address A, I have read the name of the street and the number of the house countless times, I have received countless letters here and have given countless people the address. If I am wrong about it, the mistake is hardly less if I was writing Chinese and not German. If my friend were to imagine one day that he had been living for a long time past in such and such a place, etc. etc., I should not call this a mistake, but rather a mental disturbance, perhaps a transient one. (OC: 70 - 71)

Further,

If someone said to me that he doubted whether he had a body I should take him to be a half-wit. But I shouldn't know what it would mean to try and convince him that he had one. And if I had said something, and that had removed his doubt, I should not know how or why. (OC: 257)

Mistakes are the kinds of things which can be corrected because they are grounded in the context of the practices and language games in which agreement in judgment has its place. Suppose one were mistaken about the date of some historical event. This would be something which could be corrected by evidence or reasons. We might, for example, tell that person that their mistake was the result of confusing two different historical events with each other. With some explanation we could get them to understand where they had gone wrong because they belong to the same conceptual framework.

Mental disturbance, however, is something completely different: someone who thought the earth did not exist would not be someone we would know how to convince or correct. Absent here would be the requisite agreement in our basic beliefs and judgments which would make such a correction possible.

The point is that unless we agree in our judgments with others there are
no criteria available from which to judge whether someone is making a mistake or not. For a mistake involves a false judgment, a mental disturbance no judgment at all. The problem inherent in the notion that one can doubt everything is that it would undermine the very conditions necessary for making any judgments at all. As Wittgenstein says: "We do not learn the practice of making empirical judgments by learning rules: we are taught judgments and their connexion with other judgments. A totality of judgments is made plausible" (OC: 140). It is because we "agree" in our judgments that we are able to rationally communicate and use language. The presence of such agreement is akin to what Wittgenstein, in the later writings, now calls logic.

And he says so quite explicitly at 242 of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

If language is to be means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.

The domain of logic is now considerably expanded. It includes those propositions Moore claimed to know. It includes those judgments such as that 'The earth has existed for a long time'. It includes those propositions which Wittgenstein now aptly calls propositions of natural history. Consider, for example, what he says in other passages from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: "they do not think, and that is why they do not talk" But--they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language--if we except the most primitive forms of language.--Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing. (PI: 25)
What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark because they are always before our eyes. (PI: 415)

Once logic (in the strict sense in which he used it in the Tractatus) is replaced by grammar, philosophy becomes concerned with providing what Wittgenstein calls "remarks on the natural history of human beings." The facts included in this "natural history" would have fallen within the domain of natural science in the Tractatus. After all, they belong to the world as it actually is and would therefore have been described as only contingently true in the sense that they might not have been true. Ironically, though, in these later writings they perform a unique role: they are the kinds of facts with regard to which it is inconceivable that we might be mistaken; as such they have a "peculiar logical role in our system of empirical propositions" (OC: 136).

The earlier distinction between propositions of natural science and those of philosophy is thus transformed in the later writings. Wittgenstein now distinguishes between natural science and natural history. Natural history is what philosophy is concerned with describing: it consists of those facts which "no one has doubted," which "are always before our eyes" and which are "fused into the foundation of our language games" (OC: 558). They are facts which differ from those examined by natural science in that they are purely "descriptive": they have nothing to do with "natural necessity," explanation, proof or hypothesis. They are facts which become "hardened" into a logical grammar and so become part of a system of beliefs or world picture.
Logical Grammar and World Pictures

In emphasising the importance of facts of natural history, Wittgenstein attempts to dismantle the foundationalist view regarding how it is that we come to form a system of beliefs. Many philosophers have thought, as I outlined at the outset, that we can disengage ourselves from our practices and build our world picture up from the ground through some sort of rationalist procedure. Such a procedure requires us to break down our beliefs into their components, and then scrutinize them in order to see if they can be trusted. Those beliefs which can be trusted are treated as axioms; they form part of the foundation and so have a claim to unconditional truth. Not so says Wittgenstein:

When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (OC: 141)

It is not single axioms which strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support. (OC: 142)

Wittgenstein here advances a kind of holistic picture of how we acquire our beliefs; he reminds us time and time again that a world picture is a way of looking at the world which we accept on trust. As children we are taught a great many facts from our parents, friends, teachers and the books we read. Much of what we are taught we simply believe and "swallow down" with a host of other beliefs (OC: 144). With time these beliefs form a system which gives form to all of our further questions and curiosities. Wittgenstein describes it
this way:

The child learns to believe a host of things. I.e. it learns to act according to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakeably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it. (OC: 144)

Those beliefs which "stand fast" are not something we would normally consider giving a justification, unless of course there were some reason for so doing. And even then our efforts to justify the system could go only so far. Descartes' attempt to provide a metaphysical justification for all of our beliefs, for example, is a huge misconception. His idea that an individual can doubt everything is spurious: Descartes never did doubt everything; he only pretended to do so. As we saw earlier, he never doubted the meaning of the words used to express his skepticism, nor did he doubt the consciousness of his own mental states. As a result, the kind of detachment from our practices he thought he had achieved was a myth. It is a myth which Wittgenstein attempts to explode.

And this is why he so frequently provides examples which show that our knowledge depends to a large degree on things we just believe and accept on trust. Here are a few more examples:

As children we learn facts; e.g. that every human being has a brain, and we take them on trust. I believe that there is an island, Australia, of such and such a shape, and so on and so on; I believe that I had great grandparents, that the people who gave themselves out as parents really were my parents. (OC: 159)
What kind of grounds have I for trusting text-books of physics? I have no grounds for trusting them. And I trust them. I know how such books are produced -- or rather, I believe I know. I have some evidence, but it does not go very far and is of a very scattered kind. I have heard, seen and read various things. (OC: 160)

I really want to say that a language game is only possible if one trusts something. (I did not say "can trust something").(OC: 509)

Must I not somewhere begin to trust? That is to say: somewhere I must begin with non-doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable: it is part of judging. (OC: 150)

All of these passages point to the inexorability of trusting something, of accepting what is given because such acceptance lies at the basis of one's very ability to judge at all. Wittgenstein's insistence that trust lies at the bottom of all our judgments and language games is in direct opposition to the idea that by means of some rational procedure we can attain metaphysical certainty.

Nevertheless, he does stress that it is imperative that something be "given" and that this is independent of our private inclinations and interpretations. Just consider what he says at On Certainty 95- 98:

The propositions describing this world picture might be part of a mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically without learning any explicit rules.

It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.

The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river bed and the shift of the bed itself;
though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

But if someone were to say, "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.

In these passages Wittgenstein offers us his understanding of the world and our place in it. Interesting is the fact that he calls his description of our place in the world a kind of mythology. This is interesting because it underlines his concern to show us that our practices and systems of beliefs have a flexibility to them which does not allow of any traditional analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In fact, Wittgenstein is concerned with undermining the epistemological stance which motivates such a quest for necessary and sufficient conditions in the first place. The division between the conceptual and empirical is not rigid, eternal or somehow carved into the nature of reality itself; it is context dependent and is something which can shift with time. For frameworks change: what was at one time an empirical hypothesis to be tested, at another time hardens into a "rule of testing." Thus, it is not true "unconditionally"; "it is the truth inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of our language games" (OC: 403).

Importantly, though, we cannot make sense of the world without some sort of framework or background to give form to our judgments. Once an empirical proposition hardens into a framework proposition it is not something one can meaningfully doubt: one accepts it as a matter of course; it goes "unmentioned" (OC: 167), becomes part of one's conceptual framework and so
gives form to everything one says and does. This is precisely why Wittgenstein proclaims that there must be an "agreement in judgments" and that such an agreement is only possible because of the "logical" role played by these background propositions (PI: 242).

The relation to the *Tractatus*

Now compare these remarks with what Wittgenstein says about logic in the *Tractatus*. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein also offers us a kind of mythology about what he takes logic to be. He writes:

Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite.

If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false). (T: 2.021-2.0212)

While it is not at all clear exactly what Wittgenstein meant by logic in his early writings, he did, as Newton Garver has pointed out, seem to use it in a "broad sense rather than one limited to formal logic." ¹⁴ That is, he saw it as much more than just a "formal account of truth functions and of

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quantification." As we have seen, in the later writings logic or grammar is construed as the background which makes all our judgments and propositions possible. The reason we know how to follow rules, even though we have not another rule to guide us correctly, is because rules are set in the context of certain practices which give them their sense. Otherwise the regress of interpretations would never come to an end. In the Tractatus he seems to be saying the same sort of thing: we need to presuppose this mythology about the substance of the world in order to account for why a proposition has a "determinate sense"; this mythology is a kind of "transcendental postulate" which we must just accept.

The great change in Wittgenstein's thought came about when he began using the term 'grammar' rather than 'logic'. With this change, as we saw in the last chapter, Wittgenstein began describing our practices as they are open to view rather than laying down certain philosophical requirements. This expansion of what he now took logic to be no longer required the introduction of any sort of transcendental postulate; necessity lay right there in our practices, in the use of ordinary language. No longer was there a need for imagining necessity as lying somewhere.

Despite these differences, however, one idea which remains continuous through all of Wittgenstein's writings is the idea that logic cannot be given a justification. Logic stands at the limit of the world and is that through which

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15 Ibid.
we say everything that can be said. Consider, for example, what he says at

*Tractatus* 6.51:

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*.

Rather than seeking to refute skepticism, Wittgenstein attempts to show that
skepticism is nonsensical: as we saw in chapter two, logic excludes all skeptical
doubts, since logic is not something that can be meaningfully doubted. What
we, therefore, find in the *Tractatus* is the same sort of strategy later used to
undermine Moore’s common sense realism and philosophical skepticism in
general. For just look at what he says in *On Certainty*:

- The questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact
  that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like
  hinges on which those turn. (OC: 341)

- The choice of analogies here is important. Both the hinges and the
  riverbed analogies point to the need for a framework which circumscribes and
  gives sense to the rest of our empirical claims (and so the basic idea of the
  *Tractatus* remains intact). Both analogies also wonderfully capture the
  evolution in Wittgenstein’s thought on these matters: for rather than seeing
  logic as static and universal, he now describes it as something which can
  change with time.
Wittgenstein’s relation to Kant

Now it is often thought that Wittgenstein’s rejection of classical empiricism and rationalism is based on a unique version of what Kant earlier described as a transcendental argument. And all of this above talk about conceptual frameworks and grammar not being subject to justification or doubt may make Wittgenstein look that way. But is that what Wittgenstein is doing? There are, no doubt, affinities between Kant and Wittgenstein. Kant too thought that there are certain features of our knowledge that cannot be rationally doubted, and he too objected to rationalism. Our descriptions of the world, he thought, are always constrained and shaped by our conceptual framework and choices. In fact, he is often considered to be the pioneer of the view that a background understanding is presupposed in our ability to know anything at all. With his claim that "we can know a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them," Kant revolutionized what we take philosophical justification to be all about: philosophy, he proclaimed, is

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16Bernard Williams, for example, is one commentator who interprets Wittgenstein in this way. See his "Wittgenstein and Idealism" in Moral Luck (Cambridge, 1981).

17Charles Taylor writes that: "The transcendental deduction, and the related arguments in the Critique of Pure Reason, can be seen as a turning point in modern philosophy. With hindsight, we can see it as the first great attempt to articulate the background that the modern disengaged picture itself requires for the operations it describes to be intelligible, and to use this articulation to undermine the picture.(p. 72.)

concerned with the limits of intelligibility, and this has to do with marking out synthetic, a priori truths. As he put it in the Critique of Pure Reason: "I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori."¹⁹

Common to both Kant and Wittgenstein, then, is an attempt to change the way we see things: both stress the importance of the idea that we must accept some things as given, and that this reduces to absurdity the plausibility of any disengaged, intellectualist perspective. There are, of course, also obvious differences between these two great thinkers. For Kant all knowledge and experience is conditioned by the structure of the mind, while for Wittgenstein it is grammar or language which determines what it is we can meaningfully say and know. Wittgenstein rejects the notion that our conceptual frameworks are fixed once and for all by the transcendental structure of reason, and that is precisely why he looks at the practice of language "use."

But their differences go even further than this. While Kant goes a long way towards recognizing that our descriptions of the world are shaped by our conceptual frameworks and by human nature, he opens the door to great confusion by introducing the idea of a "thing in itself." With this idea he seems to suggest that, while our concepts are shaped by human interests, they do not,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 59.
for that very reason, describe the object as it really is. But that is confused.
What would it mean to describe the object as it really is in itself? Would it
involve describing the world in the world’s own language? Surely not:
Wittgenstein shows us that such an idea makes no sense, for, as we saw in the
last chapter, all we have is language used for our various purposes.

Look at it another way. Kant draws a distinction between the
phenomena and noumena to mark out what we can know from what we cannot
know. The making of such a distinction, however, requires standing outside of
the limits the distinction is designed to draw. But that creates problems: in
attempting to draw the bounds of sense from outside of these bounds, he in
effect leaves himself nowhere to stand, thus violating his own critical
principles.30 He attempts to say something about the "thing in itself," while
at the same time insisting that the "thing in itself" is unsayable or
unknowable. Recognizing this problem, he responds by saying that we must
construe the "thing in itself" as a "regulative idea." But that, it seems to me,
does not solve the problem. For the real problem is that, in talking about a
"thing in itself," Kant is really saying nothing – he is speaking nonsense.

In his recent book Pragmatism Putnam has described the problem this
way:

Wittgenstein, true to his strategy of not offering "theses", tries to
convince us that there is no interesting thesis in this area. For
Wittgenstein, the negation of a pseudo-proposition is a pseudo-

proposition; the negation of nonsense is nonsense. If we are persuaded that it is unintelligible to say "We sometimes succeed in describing reality as it is in itself", then we should realize that it is equally unintelligible to say "We never succeed in describing reality as it is in itself", and even more unintelligible (more, because it introduces the peculiar philosophical can't) to say "We can't describe reality as it is in itself."²¹

Putnam contends that what Wittgenstein does is to "naturalize Kant," and that this naturalization is best described as "a deflation." This is correct. Not only does Wittgenstein undermine completely the meaningfulness of the thesis regarding a "thing it itself," he shows us how such a thesis derives from the attempt to stand outside of our practices and reflectively draw the limits of sense from that position. But if such a position cannot be attained (if it is nonsense), then it is also nonsense to say that our descriptions of the world do not capture the way things really are.

What, then, is Wittgenstein's alternative to a transcendental deduction? Well, by describing our practices of using language, he shows us the extent to which propositions which "stand fast" are bound up with our actions, our natural history and our "animal" behaviour. He shows us, in other words, the extent to which practices in the use of language are bound up with a form of life. That Wittgenstein does not see this practice of "describing" language use as involving transcendental reflection is made clear by what he says at On Certainty 475:

²¹Hilary Putnam, Pragmatism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 39. Putnam's chapter on Wittgenstein has been of great help in getting me to see the connection between Wittgenstein and Kant in what I take to be the right light.
I want to regard man as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instincts but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.

This remark is significant for what it tells us about Wittgenstein's naturalistic view of people. We may differ from animals in many ways, but our capacities for reasoning and understanding emanate from more primitive capacities which we share with other animals. Not only is our world shaped by forms of life or our natural history, it is also shaped by our bodily or animal existence. Our body is not merely something external; it is not merely the executor of our goals. Our understanding itself is "embodied" and thus cannot be given a justification. As he puts it elsewhere:

Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (OC: 358)

But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC: 359)

One must be careful in how one interprets these passages. One might, for example, take them to be supporting some sort of behaviourist or reductionist reading of Wittgenstein. Nothing could be further from the truth. Wittgenstein's so-called naturalism is intimately bound up with his endeavour to "do away with all explanation," for what is needed in philosophy, he tells us,

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22 My remarks here are based on Taylor's interpretation of Wittgenstein. Taylor argues that Wittgenstein "puts the role of the body in a new light. Our body is not merely the executant of the goals that we frame, nor just the locus of causal factors shaping our representations. Our understanding is itself embodied" (p. 170.).
is not "new information" but an "arranging of what we already know" (PI: 109). This is why those propositions which philosophy describes are of no real use to the anthropologist, ethnologist or scientist. These propositions are not something we would ever doubt and therefore have no intrinsic significance. Their significance is rather rooted in the "therapeutical" work they perform in curing us of philosophical pictures (like, for example, thinking that "certainty" and "knowledge" do not belong to different "categories" (OC: 308); thinking that the category of knowledge applies to pain (PI: 246); and, in general, thinking that all our beliefs are subject to scientific scrutiny).

To this one might respond: "You are saying that these propositions have no empirical or scientific interest, nor are they amenable to scientific verification. But are they, then, not just transcendental truths? After all, they are synthetic in that they are about the world and so contingent, and a priori in that they are presupposed in all scientific in. ry."

Such an objection, I now want to argue, fails to take seriously what Wittgenstein says about philosophy and its relation to the concept of "use". It makes Wittgenstein sound like the traditional philosopher he was so at pains to divorce himself from. When Wittgenstein points out the importance of these framework propositions, he does so by describing practices in the use of

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23 Bernard Williams interprets Wittgenstein in this traditional sense in claiming that Wittgenstein is a "transcendental idealist". He writes: "The new theory of meaning, like the old, point* in the direction of transcendental idealism, and shares also the problem of our being driven to state in forms which are required to be understood, if at all, in the wrong way ( p. 163.).
language as they are open to view, not by advancing theses. He does not set out, for example, to chart the boundaries of sense, nor is he doing empirical research.

On the contrary, his numerous descriptions of language use show us that what "stands fast" is "held in place" because we make judgments and act in particular ways. For example: we celebrate birthdays, attend lectures, reflect on past events, visit with old friends -- and when we do these and innumerable other things our actions make manifest that we are "objectively certain" that the earth has existed long before we were born. Our certainty is not the certainty of transcendental truths; it does not result from "some kind of ratiocination." It is rather bound up with our actions, judgments and forms of life. This is why he says, "You must bear in mind that the language game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there -- like our life" (OC: 559). And this is why "justifying evidence comes to an end -- but the end is not certain propositions striking one immediately as true; it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is acting which lies at the bottom of a language game" (OC: 204).

More about philosophy as showing

The idea that certainty is immanent in our practices of using language attests, I believe, to the continued employment of the concept of showing. That
we are objectively certain is something which "shows itself" in the interconnectedness of our linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. Our certainty is not something we doubt and therefore not something which we would consider giving a philosophical justification either. Our being certain, our following rules as we do, just is something using language within a form of life brings with it. At 347-348 of On Certainty Wittgenstein makes such an observation:

"I know that that's a tree." Why does it strike me as if I did not understand the sentence? though it is after all an extremely simple sentence of the most ordinary kind? It is as if I could not focus my mind on any meaning...As soon as I think of an everyday use of the sentence instead of a philosophical one, its meaning becomes clear and ordinary. (OC: 347)

Just as the words "I am here" have a meaning only in certain contexts, and not when I 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 a determination. (OC: 348)

Here we have an excellent example of the distinction between saying and showing, albeit a transmuted form of that distinction, being used in the later philosophy to undermine the meaningfulness of metaphysical "uses" of words. I say transmuted because the distinction is now tied to Wittgenstein's immensely important idea of a language game. When sentences have an "everyday use" their meaning is "clear and ordinary." For in their "everyday use," sentences are bound by language games which "determine" their meaning.

Contrast this with a metaphysical or philosophical use of a sentence:
when we use a sentence in this way, the "arbitrary determination" (T: 5.473) which establishes the meaning of the sentence has yet to be made -- meaning is not "determined" by the situation, as Wittgenstein says. Since nothing is shown (since the situation does not determine the meaning), all philosophical attempts to say anything lead to nonsense. As he puts it in another passage:

It is queer: if I say, without any special occasion, "I know" -- for example, "I know that I am now sitting in a chair", this statement seems to me unjustified and presumptuous...

In its language game it is not presumptuous. There, it has no higher position than, simply, the human language game. For there it has a restricted application. (OC: 553-54)

The difference between the philosopher's statement and the same words used in ordinary life is that the latter have a "restricted application." Something is shown (namely the background of the language game), and this circumscribes and restricts what can be said. So, when Moore asserts that he knows these various things, his statements are "presumptuous," for they are philosophical statements which are not conditioned by the norms of a practice. Since there is no restriction on their use, they make a claim to "unconditional" truth (OC: 403). And to make such a claim is not only confused, it is, as I have been

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24 These ideas already have there roots in the Tractatus. At 5.473 he writes: "Logic must look after itself. If a sign is possible then it must also be capable of signifying. (The reason why 'Socrates is identical' means nothing is that there is no property called 'identical'. The proposition is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination, and not because the symbol, in itself, is illegitimate.)" Already in the Tractatus Wittgenstein is elucidating why the propositions of philosophy fail to say anything. While they do not break any grammatical rules, they do subvert the syntax of ordinary language use and so are a form of disguised nonsense.
arguing, really to say nothing.

So, while Wittgenstein follows in the footsteps of Kant in recognizing the importance of the idea that something "given" must be accepted if we are to communicate rationally at all, he parts company with Kant concerning what it means to "accept the given." For Wittgenstein logic or grammar has its life in the use of language and cannot be given a philosophical justification from "outside" that use. Descartes thought he could do so when he attempted to build knowledge up from the ground by means of a rational procedure. But, if Wittgenstein is correct, this attempt was nonsensical. Moore attempted to refute Descartes' project, but he too landed himself in problems. By taking Descartes seriously, he attempted to refute one piece of nonsense by replacing it with another piece of nonsense. For he too attempted to stand "outside" the language game and view it externally.

Such a quest to disengage ourselves from our practices is what ultimately underlies the quest for any metalanguage or theory of meaning. As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, this is something Wittgenstein opposed his entire life. In the *Tractatus* he argued against the notion that one could explain the connection between language and reality by means of a metalanguage. With the idea that "logic takes care of itself," he repudiated the idea, inherent in Russell's theory of types, that logic needs justification from philosophy. A sign can only be given a meaning, Wittgenstein maintained, when used in the context of a meaningful proposition; it is the use
of a sign which transforms it into a symbol. In *On Certainty* he critiques the need for (and possibility of) a foundationalist epistemology for the same sort of reasons. Moore's common sense propositions are nonsense because they too fail to have a proper use in a language game. Both Russell's theory of types and Moore's commonsense attempt to refute skepticism therefore have something in common: in attempting to provide some form of philosophical justification for language they attempt to say what can only be shown.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps we are now in a better position to ascertain what Wittgenstein's conception of objective certainty is about and why it is a conception not only radically different from the representationalist picture held by both the Rationalists and Empiricists, but also uniquely different from Kant's transcendental approach. When we hold a system of beliefs (our world picture) to be objectively certain we do not do so because we have subjected that system to scrutiny in terms of some representationalist model of understanding. We do not accept a "world picture" because we have made some rational choice or decision to do so. On the contrary: that it "stands fast" is meant to suggest that it becomes a sort of second nature, and this makes itself manifest in our actions, judgments and our agreement in the use of language.

That is not to say, however, that one can never provide any justification
for what one does. Wittgenstein is not, for example, making the absurd claim that we cannot engage in scientific inquiry or do linguistic research. What he is rejecting is the modern trend towards scientism in philosophy. He is rejecting the view that all of our beliefs, to be meaningful, must be scientifically verifiable. His point is that all scientific research already presupposes a whole variety of beliefs which themselves do not admit of verification. They are beliefs which have a peculiar logical or grammatical status, beliefs the acceptance of which makes rationality and science possible. In short, Wittgenstein is rejecting a certain philosophical ideal about what a proper justification should look like, an ideal driven by a quest to explain, from some perspective detached from our practices of language use, how it is that we know.

Wittgenstein's challenge to this epistemologically centred picture is perfectly summed up in his famous quote from Goethe: "Im Anfang war die Tat." (OC: 402). If what I have argued is correct, this is a remark which expresses, albeit in different language, the basic idea behind the concept of "showing." That we are objectively certain is something which shows itself time and time again in everything we do and say. And it is here, in our natural actions and deeds, that justification finds its end.

It is through the continued use of this concept of showing that Wittgenstein thus also changes our conception regarding what it would mean to "accept what is given." We cannot really come to terms with what he takes
the role of the given to be unless we take absolutely seriously what he takes the practice of philosophy to be. Philosophy is neither an empirical investigation, nor is it transcendental. In fact, philosophy does not furnish any theses at all. It is, rather, a grammatical investigation, one which proceeds by "showing" the grammatical features of a practice from a point of view internal to a practice, from what I have called a user's point of view. For what Wittgenstein, like Kant before him, seeks to do is to change our point of view. He seeks to persuade us why philosophy conceived as metaphysical theorizing is bad for us. Some have said that in saying this, Wittgenstein is advocating "the end of philosophy." But that, I believe, is mistaken. Why I take such a view to be mistaken is something I will address in the next and final chapter, where I investigate how the concept of showing is bound up with what I take to be the ethical and therapeutical aim of Wittgenstein's writings.
Chapter 5

Changing Our Philosophical Perspective

One thing one cannot help but notice when reading Wittgenstein's early or later writings is his repeated insistence that he is not putting forward philosophical theses or doctrines. In some famous passages in the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, he remarks:

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is. (PI: 124)

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.---Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. One might give the name "philosophy" to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions. (PI: 126)

It is easy to ignore passages such as this and read Wittgenstein as if he were actually advancing philosophical theses. Alternatively, one might argue that such passages should not to be taken literally, and that they are just stylistic flourishes on Wittgenstein's part. In this final chapter I will argue that one cannot understand what Wittgenstein is doing unless one does take him seriously. Wittgenstein often said that what he was doing in philosophy was changing our philosophical perspective or "point of view." In what follows, my aim will be to synthesize the conclusions of the previous chapters in order to seek an understanding of just how Wittgenstein attempts to change our point of view.
Some General Remarks On Method

I will begin with some general remarks on Wittgenstein’s method. In particular, let us look at a remark Wittgenstein makes at *Philosophical Investigations* 133:

> For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But that simply means that the philosophical problems should **completely** disappear. The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of doing philosophy when I want to.--The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question.--Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.--Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem. There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies. (PI: 133)

Some commentators read Wittgenstein as if he were here advocating “the end of philosophy.” It is easy to see from this remark why Wittgenstein might be read in this way -- he does, after all, talk here of having problems “completely disappear.” What is more, throughout his later writings he frequently speaks of the confusion, misunderstanding and puzzlement which comes from doing philosophy. Is it not plausible to argue, therefore, that all of these remarks are part of some general case Wittgenstein is making to support the 'thesis' that we must put an end to philosophy? Have we not found a sort of anti-philosophy in Wittgenstein’s writings?

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1Richard Rorty is perhaps the most famous proponent of such a view; see "Keeping Philosophy Pure" in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
I do not think so. First of all, Wittgenstein is not advancing a thesis against philosophy, for philosophy, he tells us, does not advance any theses at all. Moreover, in saying (in the above remark) that "the series of examples can be broken off," Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems will inevitably arise again. When we are tormented by philosophical puzzlement, as we are once in a while, we must seek clarity, for it is clarity which will bring us peace from the torment of philosophies' questions, not another philosophical thesis. Nowhere does Wittgenstein say that once we have brought peace to a philosophical problem, that we have peace forever. I believe that in some sense Wittgenstein conceived philosophy as Kant did: philosophy is part of the human condition and therefore not something we can put to rest once and for all.² Here is how Kant puts it in a famous passage in the Critique of Pure Reason:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.³

Kant speaks here of the propensity we all have, as human reasoners, to ask metaphysical questions. Notice that for Kant we ask such questions because they are "prescribed by the very nature of reason itself"; they are

²For an interesting comparison of Wittgenstein to Kant see the introduction by James Conant to Hilary Putnam, Realism with a Human Face (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

questions reason is not able to "ignore," and therefore not merely questions we think about when writing philosophy papers -- such questions are an unavoidable part of the human condition. Notice also the way in which Kant seeks to change our philosophical point of view: rather than attempting to answer these kinds of metaphysical questions with a counter thesis, Kant insists that they do not admit of answers -- such questions are hopelessly metaphysical. Here is how one commentator has described the point of Kant's philosophy:

Kant's lifelong interest in the manifold and various character of the Schwarmerei . . . was as pervasive in Kant's basic motivations as was his interests in technical metaphysics. I believe, indeed, that the two interests go so much hand-in-hand as to be fundamentally indistinguishable. Kant's epistemologizing of metaphysics ought to be seen as part of a larger programme of bringing generalized mental health to human beings distracted by the many aberations of dream and phantasy, privilege and position, neurosis and psychosis, that beset them. 4

Both Kant and Wittgenstein, I believe, have in common this desire of "bringing mental health to human beings." In the later writings of Wittgenstein, images of philosophical error are frequently cast in terms of disease, entrapment, and mental suffering: "The philosophers treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness" (PI: 255); "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our language by means of language" (PI: 109); "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (PI: 123). A

picture held us captive. And we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language and seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (PI:115). All of these remarks give us images of mental suffering and confusion. Accordingly, Wittgenstein compares his method of philosophy to a kind of therapy aimed at helping us in some way. What is important for Wittgenstein (and herein lies the therapy) is attaining a proper perspective in philosophy, one which helps us to see the "the fixed point of our real need" (PI: 108). And that is something Wittgenstein thinks philosophy, as traditionally conceived and practised, has failed to achieve.

That we are all trapped by philosophical errors from time to time, and that philosophy can thus never come to an end, stems in one sense from the nature of language itself: we are, Wittgenstein says, misled by certain "analogyies between the forms of expression in different regions of language" (PI: 90). "Language," he points out, "sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings" (CV: 18e). Not only does language set the same traps for "everyone," but we are all, in some sense, made philosophers by language:

As long as there is a verb 'to be' which seems to function like 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long as there are adjectives like 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as one talks about an expanse of space, etc, humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and stare at something which no explanation seems able to remove. (PO: pp. 186-7)

One of the great sources of philosophical confusion, however, is the temptation to be puzzled by certain kinds of questions. We ask: "What is
time?", "What is thought?", "What is meaning?", "What is a number?", "What is knowledge?" and, when we ask such questions, we think we can find the answer by looking for some sort of essence. We think, for example, that there must be something essential to the meaning of a concept which accompanies the concept in all of its uses and determines how it is that we use the concept. But this is just the problem: we think that a concept must be this way, without looking to see how it is actually used:

Consider for example the proceedings we call "games". I mean board games, card games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?--Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'"-- but look and see whether there is anything common to all.--For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look. (PI: 66)

Wittgenstein repeatedly admonishes us to "look and see," and he does so because he recognizes just how difficult it is to stop thinking that there need be something common to all language games. But why is this so difficult? In large measure it has to do with the fact that in philosophizing we have a "craving for generality," something which stems from our preoccupation with the methods of science. In the Blue and Brown Books he describes this as follows:

When we talk of language as a symbolism used in an exact calculus, that which is in our mind can be found in the sciences and in mathematics. Our ordinary use of language conforms to this standard of exactness only in rare cases. Why then do we in philosophizing constantly compare our use of words with one following exact rules? The answer is that the puzzles which we try to remove always spring from just this attitude towards
language. (BB: pp. 25-6)

This preoccupation we have with science, this "attitude" we have towards language, has also to do with what Wittgenstein calls the "spirit of our times," a spirit which manifests itself in our tendency to strive to make progress, to want to get things done, to attain results; and so in philosophy we also think that to progress we have to provide information and develop theories. In Culture and Value, for example, he tells us just how "foreign" this modern view is to the spirit of his own writings:

Our civilization is characterized by the word 'progress'. Progress is its form rather than making progress one of its features. Typically it constructs. It is occupied with building an ever more complicated structure. And even clarity is sought only as a means to this end, not as an end in itself. For me on the contrary clarity, perspicacity are valuable in themselves.

I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundation of possible buildings. (CV: 7e)

One can see from this passage why Wittgenstein was constantly at odds first with Russell and then later with the Vienna Circle: he did not share their ideal of "progress" and so their conception of philosophy. Russell, as we saw in chapter one, conceived philosophy in quasi-scientific terms: philosophy is in the business of providing us with information; it advances hypotheses and theories; it attempts to discover truths about reality -- and it does all of these things in its quest to make progress. 5

5Russell advances these ideas in "On Scientific Method in Philosophy" in Mysticism and Logic (London: Longmans Green & Company, 1918) and "The Value
Such a conception of philosophy is anathema to what Wittgenstein thinks the proper role of philosophy should be. Clarity, he tells us here, should not be sought as a means to something else -- it is valuable in itself. When we suffer from philosophical puzzlement, confusion or misunderstanding what we are in need of is not additional information, but a "perspicuous view" of what lies before us. He writes: "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words" (PI: 122). As long as we continue to think that we must explain and theorize in philosophy, we will never command a clear view of language, for theorizing causes us to reflect on language and logic in a certain way: it takes our attention away from the particulars of the way language is actually used; it constitutes an attempt to explain from a perspective external to a language game and so logic.

And this is why attaining clarity about the questions we ask is what more than anything else motivates what Wittgenstein is doing in the later writings. Wittgenstein, I believe, had a great respect for someone who was truly and deeply puzzled by a philosophical problem. The test of whether one was truly puzzled was reflected in the type of questions one asked and in how one responded to what others might have taken to be solutions. It is just nonsense to say that Wittgenstein wanted us to stop doing philosophy. No one is immune to the temptations of language, for philosophical problems are "deep disquietudes" (PI: 111) which will never be eliminated. As long as we are

tempted by language, there will always be philosophical problems. But there are better and worse ways to think about these problems, and I believe that Wittgenstein thought that philosophical puzzlement could best be resolved not by seeking out more information, but by attaining clarity about the questions which puzzle us. Thus he would say that the problems and questions of philosophy are solved not by hunting "out new facts; it is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we in some sense do not understand" (PI: 89).

In other words, what is needed to show someone a way out of their misunderstanding and confusion is not refutation by way of a philosophical thesis. Someone who suffers from philosophical puzzlement requires a different sort of help: they require someone who listens, someone who shows patience and sensitivity, someone who seeks to understand the temptations which lead one to see things in a certain way in the first place. That is, after all, what we normally take therapy to be, and this, I believe, is what Wittgenstein's writings attempt to do: rather than denouncing or negating, they lay before us an array of different examples all designed to attain a perspicuous view of language. Clarity becomes a type of philosophical therapy designed to get us to see that when we theorize in philosophy we are often in the grip of a piece of language which seems to us to have sense even though we have yet to give it any. Wittgenstein describes his aim in philosophy this way:
What I want to teach you isn’t opinions but a method. In fact the method to treat as irrelevant every question of opinions...If I’m wrong then you are right, which is just as good. As long as you look for the same thing...I don’t try to make you believe something you don’t believe, but to make you do something you won’t do.⁶

We can see here that the important thing for Wittgenstein is developing a method, not changing our beliefs or offering opinions. Of importance is not the answer one gives, but one’s willingness to look. But that, as I have been attempting to show, is much more difficult than one may think -- one is often unwilling to relinquish a certain way of thinking.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein takes his task to be nothing short of changing our way of thinking: "Much of what we are doing", he points out in his Lectures on Aesthetics, "is a question of changing the style of thinking" (LA: 28). At other times he describes his method as changing our way of seeing things:

Working in philosophy -- like work in architecture in many respects -- is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's own way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them.) (CV: 16e)

And then there are times when he says that this amounts to a struggle against a resistance one might have within oneself:

What makes a subject hard to understand -- if it’s something significant and important -- is not that before you can understand it you need to be specially trained in abstruse matters, but the contrast between understanding the subject and what people want to see. Because of this the very things which are most

obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect. (CV: 17e)

All of these passages suggest that for Wittgenstein philosophical misunderstanding is not just part of some "clever game" (CV: 19e) which can be corrected easily. Philosophical confusion is rooted in something much deeper than this: it is rooted in the will and in one's feelings. When we are in the grip of a philosophical "picture," when a picture holds us "captive," we want to see things in a certain way. We demand that our explanations take on a particular form because we are under the illusion that this is what our explanations must look like if they are to have "depth." And so we think, for example, that in order to get clear about the meaning of a term we must look for some "common" element that accompanies it in all of its applications. All of Wittgenstein's writings attempt to transform our manner of seeing; they attempt to cure the philosopher of this craving which induces him to "want to see" things a certain way.

Wittgenstein nicely sums up his philosophical ideal when he observes that:

I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right. (CV: 18e)

Here he describes his own writings as a mirror in which one can see one's own temptations and deformities. It is only when one comes to see these temptations that one can recognize them as temptations which one ought to
avoid. It is only when one is "helped in this way" that one can "put it right."
We can see just how differently Wittgenstein conceives the idea of progress
here: when one is helped in philosophy: one obtains understanding, clarity and
insight, not information or discovery. To 'put it right' involves changing one's
philosophical point of view, and this involves being liberated from the
propensity to think everything needs an explanation. Wittgenstein's writings
thus strive to engender a form of progress which culminates not in a
philosophical thesis, but in a change of perspective or point of view.

Rules and Grammar

Unfortunately, however, this point of view is easily misunderstood. That
is not at all surprising, though, for Wittgenstein never really expresses this
change in terms of a philosophical thesis. Consequently, when he speaks of
wanting to "understand something that is already in plain view" (PI: 89), it is
tempting to interpret Wittgenstein to be suggesting that we become
empiricists. It is easy, for example, to read Wittgenstein as if he were engaging
in an empirical investigation of the actual use of ordinary language. And it is
no doubt easy to see why one might hold such a view; after all, in the course
of his criticisms of philosophy, he frequently draws our attention to the use of
"ordinary language" or "everyday language." He proclaims that "what we do is
to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PI: 116).
Such a way of reading Wittgenstein, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, misses the point of what he means by a "grammatical investigation" (PI: 90). In fact, Wittgenstein tells us quite explicitly that this is not what he is doing:

If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?--Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history -- since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes. (PI: II xii)

Here we have perfectly illustrated Wittgenstein's abiding concern not to conflate conceptual (grammatical) and empirical investigations. The task of investigating the "causes of the formation of concepts," of asking why our language has this grammar and not another, is better left to linguists and anthropologists. While philosophers do look at "general facts" of nature, they only describe those general facts which we would never consider doubting or questioning -- they are the kind of facts which "do not strike us because of their generality."

Which facts you may ask? Well, as we saw in the last two chapters, those facts which have a "peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions" (OC: 136); those facts which make up the background of our shared understanding and with which we agree in our judgments. When Wittgenstein says that "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling
reminders for a particular purpose" (PI: 127), he is talking about assembling reminders of these general facts which we all know. But, if we know them and agree with them, then what is the "purpose" of being reminded of them?

The answer to this question goes right to the heart of what Wittgenstein takes philosophical therapy to be. In philosophizing, as we saw above, we have a tendency to abstract the concepts we are investigating from the lives in which they have their use. We spend much of our time thinking about how things must be without really looking at how they are. This leads us to construct all kinds of false pictures, theories and hypotheses about the way things are; it leads, in short, to the problems of philosophy. All of Wittgenstein's writings seek to undermine this tendency towards theoretical abstraction. In the later writings his message to the philosopher is always: "don't think, but look and see." Thus he remarks:

One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a stupid prejudice. (PI: 340)

His purpose in assembling reminders, one can see then, is to remove the prejudices which stand in our way of seeing things clearly. The development of the language game technique, in particular, is a methodology Wittgenstein employs in his later writings to illuminate certain of our concepts. In doing so, he shows what logic is; what "internal relations" are; he shows the use of

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I borrow this way of putting it from Rush Rhees whose paper "The Philosophy of Wittgenstein" greatly influenced this chapter. See his Discussions of Wittgenstein,
concepts in a different light. By showing them in a different light, he hopes we might "learn" something: we might learn that in theorizing we were looking in the wrong place.

I say he shows logic, rather than saying what it is, to underline a fact which can easily be overlooked: and that is the fact that in the later writings Wittgenstein takes quite literally the idea of the Tractatus according to which the philosopher has nothing to say, only something to show. I believe it is important to see this because, as I argued in chapter three, it is tempting to read Wittgenstein as if he were advancing some "use" theory of meaning in the later writings. It is tempting, for example, to read him as some sort of "linguistic idealist" or "anti-realist." But that, it seems to me, is completely misguided. In the later writings, Wittgenstein abandons completely any attempt to say something with pseudo-propositions. Hence he remarks: "This is what disputes between Idealists, Solipsists and Realists look like. The one party attack the normal form of expression as if they were attacking a statement; the others defend it, as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being" (PI: 402). Wittgenstein does not attempt to refute any of these philosophical positions or theories (he offers no opinions of his own). His point rather is that neither party to any such philosophical dispute is holding a position which has any real application in our lives -- philosophical theories involve a form of words still in search of sense. This is
why "what we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards . . ." (PI: 118).

And this is also why his purpose in assembling reminders is therapeutical, not scientific or empirical. That his purpose is therapeutical is evident from his saying that we "can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes." We can, that is, set up language games as "objects of comparison" (PI: 130) with the aim of breaking the grip philosophical pictures have on our way of thinking.

One picture which has a hold on our thinking is the idea that the rules of logic or grammar are like empirical statements. But why not treat grammatical rules as if they were empirical statements? For this reason: when we ask questions about concepts such as 'meaning,' 'understanding,' 'language' and 'rules,' we are asking questions about the grammar of our language, questions which involve us using the very concepts we are wanting to explain. More specifically, we cannot explain the words we use in our language games without using concepts which are already connected to the concepts employed in the game. And if there are no internal connections, then the grammar we are attempting to translate or explain will be a grammar different than ours, a grammar we may not understand or be able to translate at all.

This is an idea which has its roots in the Tractatus. At 5.551 and 5.552, for example, Wittgenstein tells us quite explicitly that there is nothing to discover in logic and that logic therefore has nothing to do with any empirical investigation:
Our fundamental principle is that whenever a question can be decided by logic at all it must be possible to decide it without more ado. (And if we get into a position where we have to look at the world for an answer to such a problem, that shows that we are on a completely wrong track.)

The 'experience' that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something is: that, however, is not an experience. Logic is prior to every experience--that something is so.

Logic, he tells us here, is prior to any experience or to what is the case in the world. In chapters one and two, we saw why: logic is something which is given to us and something we must understand if we are to understand anything at all; it is that through which we say everything that can be said. Consequently, it is just wrong to think of logic in terms of an object which is contingent and so true or false. Understanding a proposition has nothing to do with "knowing whether it is true" (T: 4.024). For "a proposition shows how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand" (T: 4.022).

And the same holds true of grammar. Grammar establishes the possibilities of what it makes sense to say, but it is not itself something which can be true or false. Wittgenstein insists that concepts (grammar) cannot be explained independently of the language games in which they have their life. Someone knows grammar, and can therefore distinguish between sense and nonsense, if they have learned to speak the language and can understand the "point" of the rules. Even if we could discover by some future experiment that our distinction between sense and nonsense was all wrong, this would really mean nothing: we still need to understand the experiments we are using; we
cannot, that is, break out of the ring of the grammar used to report and conduct our experiments. To suppose that there is something to discover, to suppose that a grammatical investigation is an empirical investigation, is precisely the temptation we have to overcome when doing philosophy. To repeat: we are investigating concepts, not phenomena (PI: 383); and since we are investigating the use of words, it is not a question of why our language has these rules and not others.

At this point one might object: "Surely Wittgenstein's later writings are significantly different -- Does he not radically change his mind about logic and philosophy?" Such a response is of course not entirely incorrect. What is important is how we see that change. The big change comes, as we saw in chapter three, when Wittgenstein abandons the conception of logic he had held in the Tractatus and turns to the idea of grammar. The language game, as he now puts it, is the "primary thing" (PI: 656). "It isn't a question of explaining a language game by means of our experiences," he adds, "but of noting a language game" (PI: 655). Notice that he speak here of "noting" a language game, not "explaining" it by means of "experience." This is important because it shows Wittgenstein continuing to hold onto the idea that logic cannot be explained or justified by a philosophical theory -- the normativity of logic (or grammar) manifests itself in what we say and do and so has nothing to do with any sort of empirical investigation.

I think we can say, therefore, that what changes is not so much his
conception of philosophy. He continues to hold the view that one can only ever come to understand the meaning of language from inside the limits of language. What changes, however, is his view regarding what he takes those limits to be. Hence the shift from the idea that the limits of sense have to do with some overarching logical network, to the idea that each individual language game determines what it makes sense to say. The move to language games does, however, bring with it a new methodology: the methodology of comparing the indefinite diversity of language games with each other. The purpose: to loosen the hold of philosophical pictures which, to use the language of his youth, cause us to "misunderstand the logic of our language," including the picture of logic which induced him to impose on logic certain "requirements" regarding how language should be (PI: 107).

A User's Point of View

What Wittgenstein asks us to embrace in the later writings, in other words, is what in chapter three I called a 'user's point of view', a point of view according to which concepts are described in their use within a language game and a form of life. Language, he now stresses, is not used fundamentally to state true and false facts; it has multifarious purposes, and it is therefore only within a language game that our concepts or expressions have a life and hence meaning. Grammar is thus not something which exists independently of a form
of life; it does not exist independently of a community of language users.

Take, for example, the concept of 'calculation.' I think Wittgenstein would say that this concept would have no sense to someone who lived in a culture in which there were no established practices of doing mathematics. If an outsider wanted to explain this concept to someone in this culture, it would be an extremely difficult (if not impossible) task: one could not explain the concept of calculation by pointing to something and saying, "You see, this is what a calculation is." One could not do so because the example would in no way be "connected" to these people's lives -- consequently, it would be unlikely that they would catch on to the "point" (PI: 564) of the example. For only within an established practice of mathematics do we call this calculation -- only within such a practice can we see how it connects to other related concepts, such as the concept of 'regularity' for example.  

I believe that this is what Wittgenstein's is getting at when he writes that:

One human being can be an enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. (PI: II xi)

Mastering the language of a culture far different from our own is not always enough to make understanding another culture's rules possible. We do not

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8I borrow this example from Rush Rhees p. 48.
understand how to follow a rule by merely being able to provide a list of their rules or just by learning their language. For, as we saw in chapter three, understanding a rule involves an ability to satisfy a whole variety of normative criteria. This is why it is often so difficult to "find our feet" with other cultures -- our lives are, and so our grammar is, fundamentally different from the culture we are seeking to understand.

In fact, it could be that two languages are just not translatable into each other at all. Translating another cultures' language into one's own would involve completely altering their form of communication. This, however, might seem to raise a problem: if we have no grasp of what for them distinguishes sense from nonsense, does this mean that our distinction is just arbitrary? Well, one might say it is arbitrary, but only if one were under the assumption that there must be something "common" to all forms of speech. And that is just the kind of assumption we make in philosophy: we think there must be necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of a concept; we think that the concepts we are investigating must have the same grammar as our own, despite the absence of regularities. Why do we think these things? Because we think of logic in terms of some "ideal" (PI: 81); we think there must be an essence to language which all forms of speech must share if they are to be language.

That we think this way stems, according to Wittgenstein, from our failure to examine the application a technique or concept has in our lives (PI:
520). It is interesting that when we actually carry out a calculation in our daily lives it never occurs to us to think that our following the rule the way we do is arbitrary. Within our lives this is how we understand and follow the rule; our using the concept the way we do gives grammar all the support it needs. Problems only seem to arise when we think logic needs a different sort of support. But why a different sort of support? Why hypothesize about logical necessity at all -- this is Wittgenstein's question to the philosopher. Wittgenstein's method in the later writings is aimed at showing the philosopher why imagining necessity as lying anywhere is a wrong road to travel down.⁹

And this is why the notion of "seeing connections" is so central to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. He writes:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. -- Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'. (PI: 122)

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Wittgenstein always held that the application of a rule is not something which another rule can explain or justify. All we can do is give examples of rules being used correctly or incorrectly, for the internal relations or connexions which are established by grammar are something which must be seen, not explained by way of a theory.

Again and again Wittgenstein reminds us that a theory is of no use in helping us to see connections. In fact, if anything, theories get us to look in all of the wrong places. One of the reasons Wittgenstein is so vehemently opposed to theorizing in philosophy (and this is why he speaks of the philosopher's "craving for generality") is because it takes our attention away from particulars. While it may be the aim of philosophers to attain clarity through theorizing, Wittgenstein shows that theorizing actually does the opposite: it distorts our vision, thus taking our attention away from the particulars of language use.

Theorizing also has ethical consequences. Consider, for example, Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Wittgenstein is opposed to what Frazer was doing because he thinks Frazer was imposing his scientific Weltanschauung on the views of these people; he was attempting, that is, to explain their practices in terms of ours. But that, Wittgenstein shows, is not at all conducive to understanding these people. What Frazer should have done is present the facts which he had collected without foisting on them any sort of theoretical explanation:

I can set out this law in an hypothesis of evolution, or again, in analogy with the schema of a plant I can give it the schema of a religious ceremony, but I can do it just by arranging the factual material so that we can easily pass from one part to another and have a clear view of it -- showing it in a perspicuous way...

This perspicuous presentation makes possible that understanding which consists just in the fact that we 'see the connections'. (RFGB: p. 69)
Look at the method Wittgenstein proposes here: rendering perspicuous internal connections involves arranging and describing the factual material, not theorizing about it. The facts should be arranged such that their relationships with each other can be shown.

Importantly, Wittgenstein insists that the framework for understanding this factual material is internal to the material itself -- internal insofar as we need to look at the application a people make of the material facts in order to understand them. We must, in other words, show empathy towards their way of doing things. The ethical aim of Wittgenstein's method of philosophizing should thus be clear: rather than denouncing or negating with a thesis, he seeks always to understand a world-picture from the inside, from inside a point of view.

Connected to all of this is the all-important notion of a 'form of life'. Internal relations, Wittgenstein insists, can only be seen from within a 'form of life', for that is where concepts have their application -- we even might say this is where they are shown. Of course Wittgenstein never quite puts it this way. Here, however, is what he does say:

"So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" -- It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (PI: 241)

What Wittgenstein says here is a continuation of what he had said in the Tractatus. In the Tractatus he had said that the relation between a proposition and its sense is internal to the proposition and cannot be found in something
external to the structure of the proposition (T: 4.124). In the *Philosophical Investigations* he says the same sort of thing: "human agreement" cannot be abstracted from our lives; it can only be seen in our lives. For instance, as he puts it with respect to the concept of pain:

> The concept of pain is characterized by its particular function in our life" (Z: 532)
> Pain has *this* position in our life; has *these* connexions; (That is to say: we call 'pain' what has *this* position, *these* connexions). (Z: 533)

Pain, he says here, has this position in our lives; that it has this position "shows itself" in its being connected "internally" to various of the other things which we do. Only in our lives can it be seen, only there do we call *this* pain.¹⁰ Hence the importance of a users point of view: we cannot stand outside of a culture different from our own and explain the meaning of the concepts from an external perspective. In the end, we must come to 'see the connections' from inside their language games; we must see practices in the use of language. This is not something that can be explained or justified "externally" with a theory -- it shows itself when we do "find our feet with them."

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A New Form of Criticism

Some commentators have objected that such a philosophical method leaves no room for criticism. When Wittgenstein says that "philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it" (PI: 124), he is interpreted to be saying that we must accept uncritically those facts which lie openly before us, and thus he is accused of perpetuating a kind of intellectual conservatism. I believe such an accusation is misguided. Wittgenstein is not opposed to advances in science, nor is he suggesting that we should not adopt a critical stance towards many of the things we say and do. What he is opposing is a certain philosophical view about what it would mean to criticize or change ordinary language. I think we can best see why by looking again for a moment at what he says about following a rule.

Following a rule, as we saw in chapter three, does not involve interpreting a rule. When we are given examples and receive a common training with others in the course of our ordinary lives, we usually, at some point, come to understand how to follow the rule; we, as it were, catch on to the "point" of the rule. That would not be so, however, were we to doubt the rule, or withhold assent, at each step. But does it even make any sense to say one can play a language game, follow a rule, while at the same time withholding assent? I do not think so. As we saw in chapter four, unless one
assents to something, one will not be capable of playing any sort of language game -- after all, the language game of withholding assent (the language game of doubting) is based on our assenting to something.

To call it assent is actually misleading. It suggests that our agreement in following rules is based on some sort of a decision we make. "Forms of life," however, are not something we contract into or decide to accept as the result of some rational procedure; they are something we just "do" accept -- our acceptance is "shown" in everything we do and say. In fact, disengaging oneself from a form of life would be tantamount to dropping out of the human race, and that is nonsensical or just sheer madness.

Still, we see such an attempt at disengagement in the critical strategies of many a philosopher. Convinced that our ordinary language is imprecise and in need of revision, convinced that a world picture is something which need be built from the ground up (if it is to be secure and objective), philosophers think they can develop a rational procedure for doing so, a procedure which entails a form of disengagement from our practices. We have seen (in chapter four) how Wittgenstein criticizes such an approach: rather than offering an alternative worldview (or thesis, one might say), he seeks to undermine it; he seeks to show the philosopher that such a procedure is without sense -- he shows us, for example, that "the game of doubting presupposes certainty" (OC: 115). Showing that a form of words is without sense -- that, it seems to me, is not to accept anything "uncritically," nor is it to put an end to philosophy; it
is, as Stanley Cavell puts it, to develop "a new category of criticism."\footnote{Stanley Cavell "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy" in \textit{Must we mean what we say?} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 55.}

Wittgenstein once remarked:

One keeps forgetting to go right down to the foundations. One doesn't put the question marks deep enough down.\footnote{(CV: 62e)}

One thing Wittgenstein teaches us is how important it is to 'put the question marks deep enough down' and just how difficult it is to do so. One can think depth lies somewhere and cause oneself considerable confusion and misunderstanding just because one does not know when to stop digging. But that is just the point: one must know \textit{when} to stop digging, \textit{when} one's questions are without sense.

There are, however, no rational \textit{criteria} for this. And this is just the sense in which Wittgenstein's critical method differs from that of Kant. As we saw above, Kant was also concerned with reason's temptation to transcend the bounds of sense. What Kant attempted to do, however, was chart the limits of reason by providing criteria for what we can be said to know. Hence the role of the "thing in itself," that postulate of reason which served to mark the legitimate uses of reason, including the boundaries of what we can know.

However, Kant's method is not Wittgenstein's method. Wittgenstein never furnishes criteria regarding what we can or cannot know. On the contrary, he shows that the "thing in itself" is itself a fiction, something we have not really succeeded in giving a sense. As he says:
The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one couldn't do. As if there were an object from which I derive its description, but I were unable to shew it to anyone -- And the best I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use the picture, but then investigate how the application of the picture goes. (PI: 374)

Notice that Wittgenstein's form of criticism consists precisely in an investigation of "how the application of a picture goes." He does not reflectively rule out any pictures, nor does he lay down any criteria: in fact, he tells us "to yield to the temptation to use the picture." Importantly, though, he seeks clarity, the clarity which can only come from investigating the application a picture or way of thinking has within our lives. And that, as I have been arguing, is a form of investigation which is neither scientific, empirical or transcendental -- it is a grammatical investigation, an investigation which does not impart information or say anything, but which does give us a technique for unravelling philosophical confusion and misunderstanding. As he puts it in a Notebook:

As I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy requires a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect. And maybe that is what makes it so difficult for many. It can be difficult not to use an expression, just as it is difficult to hold back tears, or an outburst of anger. (PO: 161) (my emphasis)
Some Closing Remarks

Perhaps we can now say this much: throughout all of his writings, Wittgenstein seeks to attain clarity and understanding about the structure of what lies open to view, no matter what that structure happens to be. And he does so because of his belief that understanding is always dependent on our accepting that structure uncritically. To some this may seem philosophically dissatisfying. After all, in philosophizing we think that we can attain a certain critical perspective, a perspective which makes it possible to analyze how it is that our language connects with the world. If Wittgenstein is correct, such a perspective is unattainable. One can never stand outside of logic or break out of the ring of grammar, and one is confused if one thinks that one can.

In chapters one and two we examined the roots of this idea; we examined the connection between the concept of "showing" and the idea that "logic takes care of itself." According to Wittgenstein, logic shows itself in every referring proposition, in everything one says. One cannot, however, say what logic is with a theory, since that would presuppose standing outside of logic—and that is absurd since an illogical thought is not a thought at all. Put differently, philosophical theories are redundant since they already presuppose the very logic they are seeking to explain and justify. Moreover, since there is nothing accidental or variable about logic (since one cannot "go wrong in logic"), it makes no sense to think that one can negate logic with a
philosophical theory. To repeat: logic is presupposed in one's rational ability to say anything at all and cannot therefore be given a philosophical justification.

In chapters three and four, we saw how the spirit of this idea lives on in the later writings. Although Wittgenstein does not explicitly mention the term 'showing' in the later writings, he continues to hold that the possibility of saying and doing always depends on something being "shown." Take the case of following a rule. The connection between a rule and its application is not something that another rule or theory can explain; it is a connection which must be seen or understood. All theories purporting to explain how we follow a rule already presuppose the very understanding which they are wanting to explain. The point is that since the application of the rule reaches beyond past experience, something is always left to human nature, reinforced by a certain kind of training within a form of life. A form of life, however, is not an object in the world, nor is it in any way hypothetical. It is, rather, the structure which gives sense and form to everything one says and does. In the end, understanding a rule involves grasping the structure or grammar of the rule, and this is something which cannot be captured in a philosophical theory.

This is precisely the reason that Wittgenstein insists throughout his life that in philosophy one does not advance doctrines or theses. What he says in the *Philosophical Investigations* perfectly sums up his lifelong view towards philosophy: "If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them" (PI: 128).
Theorizing of any kind generally starts when people have doubts about what everyone has hitherto believed; it suggests an alternative way of looking at something, one which admits of disagreement. Logic (or grammar), however, is not something over which there can be disagreement, for it is presupposed in all rational activity, including of course one’s ability to formulate any sort of theory about which there can be disagreement. We cannot disagree in our theories unless we are using the same concepts (unless we are using the same grammar), and that presupposes agreement in our judgments and in a form of life. Logic or grammar thus excludes all skeptical doubts and epistemological questions.

That we agree in our judgments manifests itself in the fact that we do follow rules and understand each other. Such agreement cannot be justified philosophically by abstracting it from our lives; it can only be seen from within our lives, from a user’s point of view, a point of view in which practices in the use of language are described. Wittgenstein writes:

How could human behaviour be described? Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed, together. What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is not what one man is doing now, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see any action. (Z: 567)

'Describing the background against which we see any action' -- that is what Wittgenstein thinks the proper role of philosophy should be. To describe this background is to describe logic. And while his conception of logic alters fundamentally from his early to later writings, he always holds that logic has
to do with the possibilities of what it makes sense to say; he always holds that these possibilities can only be seen in our use of language.

Is Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy arbitrary? Absolutely not! His question to the philosopher is always: 'Does what you are doing meet our real needs?' I think one can say that throughout all of his writings Wittgenstein shows us that philosophy conceived as a pseudo-science does not meet our real needs. That is why he begins his 1914 *Notebook* by saying that "logic takes care of itself." As I have argued in this dissertation, this is a view of logic and philosophy which Wittgenstein never abandons. Throughout his life he shows us that logic or grammar cannot be, and need not be, given a philosophical justification. Throughout his life he shows us that logic or grammar is not a fact to be investigated scientifically. Wittgenstein nicely sums up his lifelong attitude towards philosophy when he remarks in 1949: "I may find scientific questions interesting, but they never really grip me. Only conceptual and aesthetic questions do that. At bottom I am indifferent to the solution of scientific problems; but not the other sort" (CV: 79e). Wittgenstein's solution, one might add, is getting us to see how treating conceptual problems as if they were scientific problems is precisely the problem we get into when doing philosophy.
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