

Ludwig Nagl/Chantal Mouffe (eds.)

The Legacy
of Wittgenstein:
Pragmatism or
Deconstruction



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Foreword

'The Legacy of Wittgenstein: Deconstruction or Pragmatism', was the title of the conference in November 1999 at which the essays collected in this volume were originally presented. The conference was sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Institute in London and hosted by the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster.

Our aim as organizers was to bring together a group of distinguished scholars interested in Wittgenstein to discuss the relevance of his work for contemporary debates. This was not, however, a traditional philosophy conference. We did not look for Wittgenstein 'experts' who would engage in very technical and specialized discussion. The idea was to have a broader discussion among theorists who had found the philosophy of Wittgenstein of particular significance for their work in different fields. We therefore invited people from a variety of disciplines: political theory, aesthetics, comparative literature, as well as philosophers. These scholars were also chosen to represent both the Anglo-American tradition of pragmatism and the continental one of deconstruction. The affinities between those two traditions and Wittgenstein's thought have recently been acknowledged and it seemed timely to scrutinize them.

What is striking in the current reception of Wittgenstein is how wide-ranging his influence has become among those who are trying to elaborate an alternative to the dominant rationalistic framework. Pragmatists and deconstructionists are of course at the forefront of such a movement and it is no surprise to find that several of them have turned to Wittgenstein and have opened up new perspectives on his work. This joint interest has created a very welcome bridge between post-analytic and continental philosophy, which for too long almost completely ignored each other. A promising dialogue is now developing, one to which the engaging discussions among the participants in this conference can testify. Of course the question of who are the true heirs of Wittgenstein, the pragmatists or the deconstructionists, remained open and no final conclusion was drawn. But a lively and productive debate did take place that will no doubt go on and this is certainly not the least important part of Wittgenstein's legacy.

This conference would not have been possible without the help of Dr Emil Brix, director of the Austrian Cultural Institute at the time we presented the proposal, and we would like to thank him especially for his keen interest in our project. We are also grateful to his successor Dr Michael Zimmermann and to

Professor John Keane, director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, for their collaboration. Furthermore we would like to thank Daniel Hahn for his editorial assistance.

Chantal Mouffe and Ludwig Nagl

Hilary Putnam

Rules, attunement, and "applying words to the world"

The struggle to understand Wittgenstein's vision of language

Wittgenstein's writing produces two sorts of controversy: on the one hand, there are controversies between those who, like myself, think that Wittgenstein was very likely the greatest philosopher of the century and those who think him the most overrated philosopher of the century. (Saul Kripke represents an interesting middle position: Wittgenstein was great but misguided, if his reading is correct.) These are not the controversies I wish to discuss today.

The second sort of controversy is a controversy *among* philosophers of the first kind. Such controversies are a familiar phenomenon in the history of philosophy. They arise because different "lines of thought" can arguably be supported by various statements and arguments in the text of a great philosopher. On the surface, the question as to which of these lines of thought best represents what the great philosopher meant to teach us may seem to be a purely "textual" one, but it almost never is. Since interpreters quite properly apply the Principle of Charity, each side attributes the line of thought that it finds strongest in its own right. I believe that that is what was going on in a wonderful exchange between Steven Affeldt and Stephen Mulhall in the pages of *The European Journal of Philosophy*.¹ And it is proper that it should be, for the important question raised by these papers is whether one or another view of how language and the world connect is correct, and secondarily whether the preferred view is really Wittgenstein's.

For the most part I shall focus on Mulhall's paper, because it represents what he himself regards as an "orthodox" interpretation of Wittgenstein, and I believe that seeing what is wrong with the "orthodox" view as a view can not only prepare us to entertain the possibility that an interpretation like Stanley Cavell's² (which is the interpretation Steven Affeldt defends) does more justice to the subtlety and originality of Wittgenstein's later philosophy than the "orthodox" view (which Mulhall associates with the names of Baker and Hacker), but can

1 Steven G. Affeldt, "The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 1 (April 1998), pp. 1-31; Stephen Mulhall, "The Givenness of Grammar: A reply to Steven Affeldt," same issue, pp. 32-44.

2 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

also help us to appreciate deep issues about our linguistically-mediated intercourse with one another and the world which do not even come into sight if one accepts the "orthodox Wittgensteinian" view as the right view in philosophy.

I described this exchange as wonderful, and I used the laudatory epithet not just because the intellectual quality of both papers is so high, but because in many ways the exchange was a model of what a philosophical criticism and a response to it ought to be, but too rarely is. Both papers are learned, thoughtful, serious, inspired by a search for truth and not rhetorical advantage. Moreover, both papers are courteous – Mulhall's fairness and courtesy towards someone who is, after all, criticizing a book he wrote are exemplary. I hope that I shall manage to display the same traits in this response.

Although I shall be defending substantially the view that Affeldt defended, I shall approach the issues in my own way, and, as I just indicated, I shall focus on the defensibility of the "orthodox Wittgensteinian" view as a position in philosophy, rather than on the textual evidence for and against it as a reading of Wittgenstein.³ I have chosen Mulhall's paper not only because I was so impressed by its quality, but because it contains some extremely clear and concise statements of the claims that debate is all about. In the next section I shall quote a few of these statements, and in the subsequent sections I shall argue that, taken at face value anyway, they lead to a disastrous epistemology.

The "orthodox" view of criteria and rules

The word that occurs again and again in Mulhall's account of the "orthodox" view is "rule", e.g., in "criteria as rules" (33), "uncovering a framework of rules" (33), "orthodox rule-based accounts of grammar and criteria" (40). Although Mulhall is the author of a sympathetic (in fact, highly laudatory) account of Cavell's Wittgenstein-interpretation, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*⁴ (henceforth SC), he does not accept Cavell's criticisms of the idea that criteria provide a "framework of rules", or Cavell's rejection of the idea (beloved of "orthodox" Wittgensteinians) that philosophical nonsense is to be diagnosed as the result of a misguided attempt to make sense outside of the framework. In fact, he writes:

3 That it is the correct interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is argued by Stanley Cavell (op. cit.) and (on independent grounds) by Charles Travis in *The Uses of Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

4 Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

"I was of course aware [when writing the book] of the two texts of Cavell's...articulating his hostility to the idea of grammar as a framework of rules, but I gave little detailed attention to either since neither seemed to me to provide any clear and detailed justification for this hostility" (33); and "It became clear to me that Cavell was deeply suspicious from a very early stage of his work of any such talk of Wittgensteinian criteria as rules, or of grammatical investigations as uncovering a framework of rules; but it was not at all clear to me what the grounds of this suspicion were, and it was equally unclear to me that anything significant in Cavell's reading of criteria and grammar was threatened by reformulating it in the Baker & Hacker terminology and turns of phrase with which my writing has been inflected." (33)

Of course, we cannot rule out in advance the possibility that the disagreement between Cavell, on the one hand, and "Baker & Hacker"⁵, on the other (or even the disagreement between Affeldt and Mulhall) is a purely verbal one; the possibility, that is, that there is an understanding of "rule" on which the claim that criteria are rules of grammar says nothing that Cavell need disagree with. To avoid being caught in what might be a purely verbal controversy, I shall, therefore, avoid taking "are (Wittgensteinian) criteria rules?" to be the question at issue. Instead I want first to look at what Mulhall thinks rules *do*.

Rules, in Mulhall's sense, do not tell us how to process "marks or features" which are themselves not already conceptualized. (Mulhall says that Affeldt misunderstood him on this point.⁶) One must already be within the schema to proceed on the basis of criteria. Mulhall writes as follows:

"So my saying that criteria constitute the marks or features on the basis of which we judge whether something counts as a chair is not meant to suggest that, whenever we encounter chairs (whether familiar or exotic), we first recognize the presence of criteria for something's being a chair and then go on to call it a chair.... *My claim concerns the order of justification, not that of perception or judgment*: the point is that if my judgment that something is a chair were to be subject to question or contestation, then I must be able to, and would, justify it by reference to certain features of the the object itself, and of the ways in which it is intended to be or can be employed." (p. 35; emphasis added)

The idea that criteria figure only in the "order of justification" is not repeated, however, and is difficult to square with what follows. (It is also difficult to square with Cavell's point, with which Mulhall seems to agree with in SC, that the judgment that something is a chair or an inkwell, etc., is not ordinarily a *claim*,

5 G.P. Baker. And P.M.S. Hacker, *Scepticism, Rules and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

6 Cf. p. 35 of Mulhall's paper, "as Affeldt has it in his footnote 31".

and that in an ordinary "non-claim context", the question of justification does not so much as arise.) For example, on the very next page Mulhall writes:

"Neither is my claim meant to imply – as Affeldt at another point suggests – that criteria are 'assertability conditions' (p. 3). To be sure, someone might gloss my idea in such terms, and thereby invoke a complex machinery of meaning-theoretic analysis of the kind that informs disputes between Davidsonians and Dummettians; but any such gloss would be entirely foreign to the spirit of SC as a whole, and is certainly not built in to the simple idea that criteria are what we go on when we apply words to the world." (36, emphasis added)

Here (and throughout Mulhall's paper, apart from the one sentence about criteria and "the order of justification") it certainly sounds as if all talk about the world employs criteria, whether a "claim" has been "contested" or not. Indeed, a few pages further on, Mulhall himself seems to explicitly contradict his assertion that "My claim concerns the order of justification, not that of perception or judgment". Thus he writes, responding to Affeldt's view (which is itself an interpretation – a correct one, I believe, of Cavell's) that talk of our criteria only arises in connection with specific philosophical or empirical confusions (that the question "what are the criteria for the use of such-and-such a concept?" has no sense apart from a specific philosophical or empirical confusion), that:

"These statements conjure up a sense of criteria as forged when, and only when, we encounter specific confusions or crises in going on with our words – as if criteria are absent in the absence of such problems, as if our uncontested or unconfused linguistic judgments are not already shaped or informed by criteria, as if in such circumstances we have judgments without criteria." (39; emphasis added)

Not only is Mulhall here claiming that we never have "judgments without criteria" (not even uncontested and unconfused ones), but he is putting forward what he sees as a serious dilemma for the Cavell-Affeldt view: if Cavell and Affeldt reject the idea that criteria are a "framework of rules" that we "go on" in judgment, then mustn't they think of them as *created* by the philosopher's investigation? But let me quote the passage in full (this will be the last of these quotations from Mulhall's paper, for it contains a crucial argument – one that it will be my aim to rebut. I shall repeat the previously quoted sentence to remind you of the context:

"These statements [Affeldt's] conjure up a sense of criteria as forged when, and only when, we encounter specific confusions or crises in going on with our words – as if criteria are absent in the absence of such problems, as if our uncontested or unconfused linguistic judgments are not already shaped or informed by criteria, as if in such circumstances we have judgments without criteria. This would not only make it hard to comprehend Cavell's and Wittgenstein's

frequent talk of being recalled to or reminded of our criteria by philosophical and nonphilosophical confusions – talk which seems to imply that while criteria may be discovered through such confusion, *they are not created thereby*. It would also leave little room for talk of our everyday judgments as normative, as open to evaluation as correct or incorrect. For *such talk presupposes the existence of standards of correctness, of norms*; it must be possible for us to justify how we go on⁷, and as Wittgenstein tells us 'justification consists in appealing to something independent of what is being justified' (PI, 265). *It is that justification that, on my account, criteria provide*; but its very possibility seems threatened by some of Affeldt's more unguarded remarks." (39-40, emphasis added)

Going on without rules

Evidently, on the "orthodox" (or "Baker & Hacker") view, going on without criteria – criteria construed as rules which belong to a framework of rules which is independent of the particular judgment that those rules "justify" – is making sounds to which no "normativity" attaches, in effect, mere babble. Let us see if this is so.

Probably I do not need to remind this audience that I began my philosophical career as a philosopher of science, and for the next few minutes I will return to philosophy of science. From very early on, what impressed me about the great events in science in the first third of this century was the way in which what once were taken to be "a priori" truths, perhaps even "conceptual" truths, had to be given up one after another. In "It Ain't Necessarily So", a paper I published almost forty years ago⁸ (but one I still agree with), I tried to explain just how important this fact is for all of epistemology. Imagine, for example, that in, say, 1700 Jones had said, "There is a triangle both of whose base angles are right angles." Would these words have been intelligible? At best this would have been taken to be a riddle. Perhaps Smith would have replied, "Oh, I get it. You mean a *spherical* triangle." But let us imagine that Jones says, "No, I don't mean a triangle on a sphere. I mean a triangle on a plane, on the locus of all straight lines that intersect two given straight lines." Perhaps Smith tries again to "guess the riddle". "Are you perhaps considering a finite line segment as a degenerate case of a

7 Here again, Mulhall assumes that the question of *justifying* how we go on always makes sense, whereas the claim that it does *not* is central to Cavell's discussion of skepticism in *The Claim of Reason*.

8 "It Ain't Necessarily So," *Journal of Philosophy*, lix, 22 (October 1962); collected in my *Mathematics, Matter and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

triangle, one whose third angle is zero degrees?" But Jones says, "No, I mean a triangle all three of whose angles are positive, and two of whose angles are right angles." At this point, Smith would doubtless say, "I give up. What's the answer?" And if Jones could say no more than, "I just mean that there is a triangle whose base angles are both right angles and whose third angle is positive", then he would have been utterly unintelligible. We would have had no idea what he was doing with his words.

Another example I used in the same paper is the following: it is now conceivable that space is finite. Again, if Jones had said this in 1700, Smith might have said: "Oh, you are going back to the Aristotelian view? You believe that if we could travel far enough we would encounter a boundary, a sphere that surrounds the whole cosmos, and that the question "What lies beyond the sphere" makes no sense?" (Note that, strangely enough, by Kant's day – and perhaps already in 1700 – this view, which had been accepted for two millennia, already seemed inconceivable! What seems to make sense can *stop* making sense.) But if Jones says, "No, there is no boundary. Space is *finite but unbounded*," Smith – that is to say, our former selves – would have said "You are talking gibberish." Or, perhaps, more charitably, Smith might have first asked, "What do you mean by 'finite and unbounded'?" We suppose Jones gives our present day answer: "By 'finite' I mean just the obvious thing: that there are only finitely many distinct nonoverlapping places the size of, say, this room to get to, *travel as one may* (even if one were allowed to travel instantaneously from any one place to any other). And by 'unbounded' I mean that no matter which direction one travels in, one never encounters an impassible barrier to continuing to travel in that direction." Again, if Jones had been unable to say more than this, if he could only repeat this explanation without satisfactory elaboration, then he would have been utterly unintelligible. We would have had no idea what he was doing with his words.

Today every educated person knows at least the outlines of what happened to make these strange assertions intelligible. In the usual quick story, which is indeed correct as far as it goes (except for overlooking Thomas Reid's remarkable anticipation of non-Euclidean geometry in 1764)⁹, at the end of roughly the first quarter of the nineteenth century a German mathematician, Riemann, and a Russian mathematician, Lobachevski, independently discovered two different sorts of "non-Euclidean" geometries. Each of them, moreover, at once concluded that a

9 In his *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. The story of this anticipation is beautifully told in Norman Daniels, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry: The Geometry of Visibles and the Case for Realism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

non-Euclidean geometry (rather than the traditional Euclidean) might well be the one to describe physical space – that is, the space in which all physical objects are located – correctly. The propositions "the sum of the angles in *any* triangle is always *greater* than two right angles" and "space is finite but unbounded", both hold true in any "Riemannian" space, any space described by Riemann's (original, ungeneralized¹⁰) non-Euclidean geometry. Indeed, in Riemannian space, if one constructs two straight lines both perpendicular to a third straight line and prolongs them sufficiently they will eventually meet (there are no parallels, in a Riemannian world, any two straight lines meet) and when they meet they will form a non-zero angle. Thus the kind of triangle Jones described does indeed exist if space is Riemannian.

The extent to which a space deviates from the Euclidean is measured by a quantity called the "curvature" of the space (note that "curved" space does not literally *bend*; the intrinsic curvature of a space might be called its "non-Euclideanness" rather than its "curvature"). The more the sum of the angles of a triangle of a given size is greater (or smaller) than 180° , the greater the "curvature" of the space. Already in the nineteenth century, models of spaces in which there is "variable curvature" [i.e., the space approximately obeys Euclidean geometry more closely in some places than in others] had been constructed, and the speculation had even been advanced by Clifford that physical space might have variable curvature.

But, some "Wittgensteinian" philosophers might suggest, the fact that some scientists talked this way doesn't show that they were (fully) making sense.¹¹ Perhaps these nineteenth century speculations only made the kind of sense that a science fiction story makes; the kind of sense that we can indeed enjoy, but might nevertheless find to be incoherent if someone were to "take it seriously".

In the twentieth century, however, the idea of applying non-Euclidean geometry to physical space was elaborated into a highly successful physical theory by Einstein in his General Theory of Relativity. (The main paper¹² was published in 1916.) And in the subsequent decade, the scientific community came to accept this theory (with minor modifications). While there were "holdouts" against this consensus for a number of years (Whitehead went so far as to propose a rival

10 Riemann's generalized geometry is a mathematical formalism for representing arbitrary geometries, including ones with "variable curvature", while "Riemannian geometry" *sans phrase* usually refers to the geometry of constant curvature in which there are no parallels (constant positive curvature).

11 Cf. my *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 98-100, the section entitled "on lacking full intelligibility".

12 *Über die Grundlage der allgemeinen Relativitätstheorie*, in *Annalen der Physik*, August 1916, 769-822.

theory); today the theory is regarded as well confirmed by virtually every competent astrophysicist. And this theory implies that the two propositions I imagined Jones uttering in 1700 *may* be true (whether they are depends upon the average mass-density of the universe, a quantity which has proved difficult to estimate.) That "Jones's" propositions may be true, and that they "make sense", is something that every astrophysicist today believes.

The title of the present section of this paper, I remind you, is "going on without rules". And it is time to connect all this to Wittgenstein. Perhaps the following quotation from Stanley Cavell's *Claim of Reason* can serve as a connector:

"This is how, in my illiteracy, I read Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*: that only a master of the science can accept a revolutionary change as a natural extension of that science, and that he accepts it, or proposes it, in order to maintain touch with the idea of that science, with its internal canons of comprehensibility and comprehensiveness, as if against the vision that under altered circumstances the normal progress of explanation and exception no longer seems to him to be science."¹³

In accepting the General Theory of Relativity as "a natural extension" of physics, physicists were treating assertions like "Jones's" as intelligible ways of "going on", indeed as the *right*, the *justified*, ways of going on, given the totality of data-cum-theory to date. Indeed, the possibility of this kind of scientific revolution was already implicit in Einstein's earlier (1905) Special Theory of Relativity. For accepting the Special Theory involves giving up the idea of an "absolute" simultaneity, as we all know. And what is it to "give up" absolute simultaneity? It is precisely to allow that, in certain circumstances, there is literally no fact of the matter as to whether A happened before B or B happened before A or they happened simultaneously (and not just because they happened so close together that our watches are not good enough to distinguish, as might happen when two horses reach the finish line in a race). Even putting aside uncertainties as to the precise second when something happened, there are enormously many cases, if Special Relativity is correct, when there just isn't a *fact* as to *which happened first or did they happen simultaneously*. And Smith would have no more been able to understand such an assertion – that is, it would not have been an intelligible assertion, before Einstein told his story and showed how to apply it – than we would have been able to understand "space is finite but unbounded" before Riemann and Einstein told their stories and showed us how to apply them.

I remind you that for Wittgenstein a rule (*Regel*) is a subspecies of regularity (*Regelmässigkeit*). Now it is certainly a *regularity*, a *Regelmässigkeit* in the behavior of physicists that, under our twentieth century conditions (where the rele-

vant "conditions" include both the data that were collected and the space of available theories to interpret the data), physicists accepted Special and General Relativity. And it is a regularity that has normative significance; a physicist who deviates from it is regarded as irrational, as at best an unreasonable reactionary. But is it a *rule*?

If Stephen Mulhall is prepared to say that it is, then the disagreement between him and Steven Affeldt may well be in large part a verbal one. I myself think there is a natural understanding of the notion of a "rule" on which it would be decidedly odd to say that physicists who accepted the Einstein theories and who persuaded other physicists to accept them were "following a rule". The word "rule" suggests something one could state (perhaps after reflection). I recall Paul Ziff protesting¹⁴ against the tendency to postulate "rules" whenever there is a question of right and wrong. "There are right and wrong ways to use a screwdriver," he said, "but there isn't a *rule* for using a screwdriver." But perhaps this is just a bit of "ordinary language philosophy" of the kind we should set aside?

I am inclined to think we should not set it aside. First of all, what happened in this case was that scientists – eventually an overwhelming majority, though at first only a few – discovered that they were in what Cavell calls "attunement". Discovering an attunement is phenomenologically quite unlike being reminded of a rule to be followed. Indeed, Mulhall himself stresses that "rules" in his sense are *independent* of what they justify. But if the regularity: "In *such* conditions good scientists will eventually prefer the Special and General Theories of Relativity" is a rule, it is so very particular! We can, of course, give it a pseudo-generality by saying this is an instance of the rule "choose the simpler theory", or something of that kind, but by what *prior* standard of "simplicity" was it "simpler" to abandon the maxim (which had always been regarded as a priori) that there is a fact of the matter as to whether events precede one another in time or are simultaneous (setting aside borderline cases, such as the "close finish" in a race)? By what *prior* standard of "simplicity" was it "simpler" to abandon *Euclidean-geometry*? By what *prior* standard of simplicity was it "simpler" to think of space as "finite but unbounded"?

Indeed, it is not even quite right to speak of a regularity (*Regelmässigkeit*) here, let alone a rule. To be sure, once large numbers of physicists were won over, there was a "regularity" in their scientific judgments and practice for philosophers and historians of science to observe. But we now regard the first physicists to accept the theory (that is, to accept it as at least a strong candidate for acceptance) as *rational*, indeed as displaying a high order of scientific insight, and *their* decisions were not yet even instances of a regularity. In this case mas-

¹³ *The Claim of Reason*, p.121.

¹⁴ In a wonderful seminar on his book *Semantic Analysis* at Princeton in 1959!

ters of a science "accept[ed] a revolutionary change as a natural extension of that science", in Cavell's phrase; but not on the basis of anything it seems right to call a *rule*, or even a regularity.

I have chosen these cases because they are exemplary for the difference between Cavellian and "orthodox" readings of Wittgenstein. Cases like these illustrate the difference between "going on" in Wittgenstein's sense (or "applying words to the world", in Mulhall's phrase) on the basis of a prior and independent rule and going on without any such basis, but in a way that is fully rational (if revolutionary), a way that would not be comprehensible without our – often unforeseeable – attunement with each other. Note that I do not speak of going on *on the basis* of an attunement. For reasons made clear below, I do not think our attunements are a *foundation*, or a *basis* or a *justification*. They are rather the *preconditions of intelligibility* of our utterances. Recall PI §242:

"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.*

One possible reaction, of course (I hope it would not be Mulhall's, or Baker and Hacker's), would be to say that what we have here is simply a string of cases in which the *words* (i.e. the phonetic shapes) "triangle", "right angle", "straight line", "plane", "finite", "unbounded" (and perhaps "space"?) are committed to new and different concepts. When we are told that straight lines can behave in these "non-Euclidean" ways, the old grammar is not being contradicted but simply abandoned; in fact, the concept of a straight line has been altered. Perhaps it has been; but not *arbitrarily* altered. For to assimilate these cases to cases in which there is a *mere* change of meaning, would be quite wrong. As I pointed out in "It Ain't Necessarily So", what one should ask anyone who took *this* line is: "Pray, then, which are the straight lines *in the old sense*?" What was literally inconceivable in Jones's and Smith's day was not only that straight lines, properly so-called, should not exhibit "Euclidean" behavior; it was equally inconceivable that *there should be no straight lines in that sense*, in space.

Moreover, if we were to insist on regarding scientific revolutions as disguised redefinitions of words, or on saying that whenever we "go on" in a way that forces us to modify or abandon previous criteria we are really "changing the meaning of words", we would, in fact, have gone back to exactly the Carnapian view that I and others spent our efforts attacking in the 1960s. In that case I would have to say that, despite Mulhall's insistence that the "orthodox" view is not a version of logical positivism, it seems to have exactly the same disastrous consequences.

Attunement and ordinary language

Another possibility is that someone might say that scientific revolutions are a "special case", that none of this shows anything much about ordinary language. Besides misunderstanding Wittgenstein's notion of ordinary language (in which "ordinary" contrasts with "philosophical", not with "scientific", or "technical", or the like), such a reply would simply be dead wrong. This sort of projection of old concepts into new situations – projection which reveals attunements that have not previously been made manifest – is fundamental to all use of language. Let me begin with an everyday case: the case of *jokes*.

Here is a (presumably true) story I heard last year. There is, I was told a professor of philosophy at a Catholic university in the United States who has lost his faith. In these liberal post-Vatican II days, he has, however, kept his position at that university. This professor was about to give a paper at a Catholic philosophy conference, where all the participants knew of this philosopher's unbelief. When he stood up to read his paper he smiled, and said, "I guess I am the lion being thrown to the Christians."

The amazing thing is that this witticism is instantly intelligible to us (given the background of course, which includes knowing about gladiatorial games in ancient Rome! – this is an instance of what Cavell calls the *systematicity* of our attunements). Yet this particular metaphor had never been employed by anyone before as far as we know! The regularity that people understand this metaphor and that they regard it as amusing is extremely strong (I have tested it on a number of occasions). And there are *appropriate* and *inappropriate* ways to understand this joke (which is surely normative). But *rules*? Come on!

I once was talking to Adolf Gruenbaum about his well-known attacks on psychoanalysis, and I said, "I grant you that Freud was mistaken in thinking that psychoanalysis is a *science*. But does that show that it is all just *suggestion*, or *hypnosis*, or something like that, as you maintain? Look, is *philosophy* a science?" Gruenbaum looked a little crestfallen (to my surprise – this was not at all the reaction I expected), and finally answered slowly, "Yes, it is a shame that we have not yet succeeded in writing down *the canons of rationality*."

I confess that the idea that we distinguish appropriate from inappropriate metaphors, interpretations of jokes, and the like on the basis of *rules* seems to me much the same fantasy as Gruenbaum's fantasy of a set of "canons of rationality" waiting for us to write them down.

Yet another possibility is that someone will say that jokes and metaphors *too* are a "special case". (But was not the argument that normativity presupposes the possibility of justification which in turn presupposes the existence of rules "independent" of what is to be justified a perfectly *general* argument?) However, as

Charles Travis has brilliantly argued over many years¹⁵, if anything is central to Wittgenstein's vision of language it is that the meaning of our words does not determine the precise truth-evaluable content they have in particular contexts. If I say, "that apple is green," even if you know what apple I am talking about, and that it is the color green that I am ascribing, you need also to understand what it would be for that apple to be green in this context (e.g., am I saying that you shouldn't eat the apple because it is "still green", i.e. not ripe? Or that the peel is green? Or that it belongs to a *kind* whose peel is normally green? – Each of these in turn permits of different "understandings" in different contexts, and each of those understandings permits of different possible further interpretations, etc.¹⁶.) Our ability to – often instantaneously – arrive at the proper understanding of what is said in a context is, again, a manifestation of our attunement with one another, not of "rules" (unless it be rules in Chomsky's peculiar sense, a sense that is certainly not Wittgenstein's, and one that I believe to be ultimately incoherent¹⁷).

Do our attunements have normative significance?

We have already quoted Mulhall arguing that "it must be possible for us to justify how we go on" and saying that Wittgenstein tells us 'justification consists in appealing to something independent of what is being justified' (PI, 265. I am not claiming that our attunements with one another, the attunements we manifest in speaking in both familiar and novel ways, are a *justification* for what we say or how we say it. The very idea of a *general* problem here, a general question as to how *any* of the things we say is justified (or as to how we are justified in saying them), whether we be chatting at the dinner table, arguing about the next elections, advising a client, performing an experiment, reproofing someone for their behavior... seems to me one that Wittgenstein would certainly reject as senseless. Just as the things we say make sense (when they do) in particular contexts, so the demand for justification, when *it* makes sense (and very often it does not arise, and it would not make sense if someone were to say "justify that claim") is met in

15 Cf. Charles Travis, "Annals of Analysis," *Mind*, vol. 100.398 (April 1991), pp. 237-263; "Pragmatics". Travis' chapter in C. Wright and R. Hale, *Companion to the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), and *The Uses of Sense*.

16 See Travis' work cited in the preceding note. See also the works listed in the appendix to Kent Bach, "Semantic Slack: What is Said and More," in S. Tsohatzis, *Foundations of Speech-Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1994).

17 See my criticism of Chomsky's idea of a "semantic component" of "UG" ("Universal Grammar") in *The Threefold Cord*, pp. 123-125.

particular ways, depending on the particular claim that is called into question. Our attunements enable us to understand "what is going on"; they are not facts that we appeal to in going on.

Missing this is, I think, responsible for much of the oscillation between apriorist and extreme relativist positions in philosophy. In ethics, for example, students often ask "By what criteria can one tell when an ethical claim is justified?", and are startled when I reply, "By just the considerations that we advance in a good ethical argument". It is as if, over and above the things we say when we argue for or against an ethical judgement, there had to be a *more fundamental* consideration, a *philosophical* consideration, which we ordinarily neglect to give, but which has to be given lest our ordinary arguments lack... what? A foundation? [But Wittgenstein beautifully quips (*On Certainty*, 248), "I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation walls are carried by the whole house."] Similarly, in the philosophy of mathematics, the different positions often seem to be seeking so many different *foundations* for mathematical judgements, for reasons that particular mathematical judgements are true that the mathematician neglects to give, but which have to be given lest mathematics lack... foundation. As the aphorism I just quoted illustrates, Wittgenstein is no foundationalist. Affeldt is right that we do not need a "framework of rules" to serve as a foundation for the ways we go on. (But I am troubled by his concluding remark (23) that "If there is a ground of intelligibility, then I am that ground. But picturing ground as given, I may not be." Perhaps Cavell too sounds at times as if he were saying that we, or each of us individually, were a "ground"; but the metaphor is too easily taken as accepting (and providing an answer) to the question "What is the foundation?").

The significance for philosophy

If the view I have been defending is right, then we cannot be convicted of speaking nonsense just by showing that we have used a word in a case where the "criteria" of its ordinary use are not fulfilled. Here is a nice example from *The Claim of Reason* (181):

"We learn the use of 'feed the kitty', 'feed the lion', 'feed the swan', and one day one of us says, 'feed the machine', or 'feed his pride', or 'feed wire', and we understand, we are not troubled. Of course we could, in most of these cases, use a different word, not attempt to project, or transfer, 'feed' from contexts like 'feed the monkey' into contexts like 'feed the machine'. But what should be gained if we did? And what should be lost?"

“What are our choices? We could use a more general verb like ‘put’, and say merely, ‘Put the money in the meter’, ‘Put new material into the machine’, ‘Put film into the camera’, etc. But first, that merely deprives us of a way of speaking which can discriminate differences which, in some instances, will be of importance; e.g., it does not discriminate between putting a flow of material into a machine and putting a part made of some new material into the construction of the machine. And it would begin to deprive us of the concept we have of the emotions. Is the idea of feeding pride or hope or anxiety, any more metaphorical, any less essential to the concept of an emotion, than the idea that pride and hope, etc., grow and moreover grow in certain circumstances? Knowing what sorts of circumstances these are and what the consequences and marks of overfeeding are, is part of knowing what pride is. And what other way is there of knowing? Experiment? But those are the very concepts an experiment would be constructed from.

“Secondly, to use a more general verb does not reduce the range of transfer or projection but increases it. For in order that ‘put’ be a relevant candidate for this function, it must be the same verb we use in contexts like ‘Put the cup on the saucer’, ‘Put your hands over your head’, ‘Put out the cat’, ‘Put on your best armor’, ‘Put on your best manner’, ‘Put out the cat and then put out the light’” [I have rectified two typos. The passage continues and all of it should be read over more than once.]

What one can add, however, is that if someone uses a word in a case where the criteria for its previously familiar uses are not fulfilled, then if we do *not* automatically project the new use (as Cavell imagines us naturally understanding “feed the machine” without any explicit explanation), we need to be told a “story” about how the word *is* to be understood. I have claimed that Lobachevski, Riemann, and Einstein told a story that enabled us to understand how and why they said things about straight lines that defied the accepted criteria, that enabled us to see what they were saying as “a natural extension” of the geometrical concepts, in Cavell’s phrase. What kind of story will enable us to see a use of a word or concept as a “natural extension” and in what circumstances is something for which there are no general rules.

It may seem as if this interpretation deprives Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation of all its philosophical power, of its critical bite. If I cannot show the skeptic is talking nonsense by suggesting that our words may not apply to the world although the criteria for applying them are manifestly fulfilled, or that concepts like “dream” or “illusion” may apply even though the criteria for applying them aren’t fulfilled, if I cannot show the traditional philosopher that (s)he

“violates rules of language” (a locution Wittgenstein never uses, by the way¹⁸), then *what good is Wittgenstein’s philosophy?*

The answer, I suggest, is that the philosopher’s claim to be *justified* in using the words in question outside or apart from their (Wittgensteinian) criteria *cannot* be rejected *a priori*. In each case, one has to listen to the story the philosopher tells, and show why and how it is incoherent. (I have tried to do just that in a Wittgensteinian spirit in some recent writing on skepticism, and on the philosophy of mind.¹⁹) What is true, perhaps, is that, once we strip “Wittgensteinianism” of the appearance of being a machine for refuting traditional philosophy, then it may turn out to be much more continuous with philosophy as Socrates practiced it than it is customary to think.

- 18 Jim Conant has told me that, as far as he can determine, Wittgenstein speaks of violating rules of language only in “Some Remarks on Logical Form” – the one piece of writing he explicitly later disowned! “Some Remarks on Logical Form” was published in the *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 9* (1929); it was reprinted in I. M. Copi and R. W. Beard’s (eds.) anthology *Essays on Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). Elizabeth Anscombe added a note there saying “Wittgenstein disowned the following essay... I have consented to the reprint of the essay because I suppose that it will certainly be reprinted some time, and if that is to happen there had better be a statement indicating how little value can be set upon it as information about W’s ideas.” Juliet Floyd informs me that the current most accessible place to find the essay is in K. Kluge and A. Nordmann (eds.) *Philosophical Occasions* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993) (and see further citations of relevant correspondence there).
- 19 Cf. my “Skepticism” in M. Stamm (ed.) *Philosophie in synthetischer Absicht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998), and “Strawson and Skepticism” in *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court/The Library of Living Philosophers, 1998).

Linda M. G. Zerilli

Wittgenstein

Between pragmatism and deconstruction

In his enjoyable little book on Wittgenstein, O.K. Bouwsma recounts a conversation he had with the philosopher during his 1949 visit to the United States. On one of their many walks together, writes Bouwsma in his rather compressed style,

he [Wittgenstein] asked me: Had I ever read any Kierkegaard? I had. He had read some. Kierkegaard is very serious. But he could not read him much. He got hints. He did not want another man's thought all chewed. A word or two was sometimes enough. But Kierkegaard struck him almost like a snob, too high, for him, not touching the details of common life. ... On the way home he asked me whether I had ever read the letter of François Fénelon to the French Academy, against purist rules. Admit other words, if only they are sweet. Sweet! How is sweetness judged? Later he spoke of a friend of his who was an Esperanto enthusiast. He couldn't stand it. A language without any feeling, without richness. Strange, he said. Like a man's being offended, repelled by another man's spittle. ... This is a fine illustration of the richness of his [Wittgenstein's] mind. For all this came about through what? Through seeing a sign advertising "cheeseburgers." That offended him! He loathed it. That was no way to derive words. And what happens? Fénelon.¹

Bouwsma has a point. The exchange he describes is classic Wittgenstein – but not only because it shows the undeniable richness of the philosopher's mind. The exchange is classic because, among other things, it combines statements that, far from cohering into an argument to which every rational member of the community would have to agree, lead in contradictory directions and sustain debate: Wittgenstein disdains the project to purify language *and* he judges "cheeseburgers" to be a vile word. What interests me here is the way in which Wittgenstein sustains dialogue. I shall argue that his practice of thinking exemplifies a conception both of plurality, which is not reducible to the (deconstructive) notion of undecidability, and of judgment, which is not reducible to the (pragmatist) understanding of "form of life." What links Wittgenstein's distinctive conception of plurality to that of judgment and makes his work unassimilable to both deconstruction and pragmatism is his novel and, I think, easily misunderstood concep-

1 O. K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein. Conversations 1949-1951*, ed. J.L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 46-47.

tion of the ordinary, the common. My claim will be that both deconstructivist and pragmatist appropriations of Wittgenstein misread this notion of the common, attributing to it either too much solidity or too little stability, and consequently missing what is distinctive in his ongoing interrogation of the philosopher that sits in each and every one of us.

Allow me to begin my argument with a few remarks on Esperanto, the language Wittgenstein found lifeless and sterile, lacking the mark of another person's particularity, his "spittle," as it were. Esperanto is an artificial universal language of considerable success, which was devised in the late nineteenth century by Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof, a Lithuanian Jew who grew up in Bialystok, a multilingual and multiethnic area of the Russian Empire, which is now in Poland. Publishing under the pseudonym Dr. Esperanto, Zamenhof explains that what motivated him to develop a universal language was the desire to overcome the linguistic barrier to mutual understanding that, in his view, was the source of the intense social conflict among the native speakers of Russian, Polish, Yiddish, and German in his home town. "The diversity of language," writes Dr. Esperanto, "is the only, or at least the main cause, that separates the human family and divides it into conflicting groups. I was brought up as an idealist; I was taught that all men were brothers, and meanwhile, in the street, in the square, everything at every step made me feel that men did not exist, only Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews and so on. This was always a great torment to my infant mind ... [and] I kept telling myself, that when I was grown up, I would certainly destroy this evil."²

Zamenhof's ideal, the reconciliation of all mankind, identifies the plurality of languages, indeed natural languages themselves, as the source of most if not all social misunderstanding and political conflict. Since each natural language carries the mark of a particular form of life, no one language can serve as the vehicle for expressing what he calls the universal truth of "brotherhood and justice among all peoples." That is why Zamenhof not only rejects reviving Latin, the language of the educated classes, but also simplifying French and English. Only an artificial language that can easily be learned by the masses and that does not privilege any national or ethnic group can realize the "sacred, grand, and important idea" of universal brotherhood that animates Zamenhof's project.³

2 Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof quoted in Pierre Janton, *Esperanto: Language, Literature, and Community*, ed. Humphrey Tonkin, trans. H. Tonkin, J. Edwards, and K. Johnson-Weiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 24.

3 For Zamenhof the creation and practice of Esperanto was intended to create a universal brotherhood. In a famous letter to Alfred Michaux he wrote of his plan called "Hillelism" (named after the rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus) which "involves the creation of a moral bridge by which to unify in brotherhood all peoples and religions, without creating any newly formulated dogmas and without the need for any

"[T]o imagine a language means to imagine a form of life", writes Wittgenstein.⁴ Attempting to fuse a form of life with the structure of a language leads Zamenhof not only to insist on Esperanto's neutrality and universality, but also to resist its pure instrumentalization: "no one has the right to insist that we see Esperanto only as a practical affair," he declares.⁵ Indeed, a purely instrumental language would never get off the ground: no one would speak it. Lacking the life born of the particular – or, to stay with Wittgenstein's characterization, spittle – such a language would be doomed from the start.

As it turns out, those who did come to speak Esperanto, as Pierre Janton explains, not only satisfied their "practical need to communicate, but also became aware of their own uniqueness and advantage compared with their fellows who do not speak Esperanto. This awareness led to the development of what might be described as a specifically Esperantist consciousness, and it is common to hear people refer to Esperanto as "their" language."⁶ Esperantists meet and talk with other Esperantists, marry Esperantists, and have Esperanto children. This is only a slight exaggeration. Based on the ideal of humanism, the society of Esperantists is in principle open to anyone who wishes to learn and communicate in Esperanto. But we begin to suspect that what differentiates this neutral and artificial universal language from the plurality of partial and natural national languages is rather less clear, and that the linguistic vehicle for eradicating the difference between those who share the Esperantist form of life and those who don't, between "us" and "them," is rather less effective than its creator Zamenhof supposed.

Esperanto, then, presents us with a paradox. On the one hand, it is based on the idea that the universal truth of man's humanity is hidden by the particularity

people to throw out their traditional religions. My plan involves creating the kind of religious union that would gather together all existing religions in peace and into peace – in much the same way as a kingdom might gather together various separate principalities, obliging none to surrender its own separate traditions." Indeed "Hillelism," as Zamenhof wrote in an anonymous 1906 article, "Beliefs of Hillelism," "is a doctrine that, without separating a person from his native country, or language, or religion, gives him the possibility of avoiding all untruths and antagonisms in the principles of his natural religion and of communicating with people of all languages and religions on a basis that is neutrally human, on principles of common brotherhood, equality and justice." See Janton, 30-31. What is striking about Hillelism, I argue below, is its attempt to articulate, in Wittgenstein's formulation, what stands fast for us.

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, German-English edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (London: Blackwell, 1977), par. 19. Hereafter cited in the text as P. I. . .

5 Zamenhof quoted in Janton, *Esperanto*, 35.

6 *Ibid.*, 18.

of his natural language and must be articulated in an artificial, universal one; on the other hand, it shows in practice that to speak this artificial, universal language is to discover one's particularity. On the one hand, Esperanto holds that what will emerge once we remove the constraints and distortions to communication that flow from the plurality of natural languages is the universal fact that we are all human. Thus Zamenhof's doctrine, called Hillelism, begins with the assertion: "I am a human being, and for me there exist only purely human ideas." On the other hand, to articulate this general fact as part of a specific doctrine is to set oneself apart as a member of a community (Esperantists) that recognizes this same fact. If we now consider that the articulation of such a general fact – "I am a human being" – belongs to the category of propositions that Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty*, refers to as what "stands fast" for us, we can begin to appreciate the complexity of every claim to the common – and that includes Esperantist-like claims made in the name of a universal community of human beings.⁷

The question of community has been at the center of many debates in the reception of Wittgenstein's work, at least since the publication of Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* and Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Although I shall not review these debates here, they form the background to my discussion of Wittgenstein's legacy for both deconstruction and pragmatism. Indeed I would suggest that community is the question raised either explicitly or implicitly in the related secondary literature on Wittgenstein. I began my essay with Esperanto because it links community to language and is premised on the assumption that all kinds of difference are just linguistic differences. More to the point, Esperanto reduces strong – perhaps incommensurable – differences between individuals and groups to failed communication. Not unlike the early work of Jürgen Habermas, Zamenhof aspires to undistorted communication and the creation of common criteria, which would promote inclusion, facilitate critical judgment, and permit rational agreement. Whatever their differences, both thinkers assume that the removal of systematic constraints and distortions to communication will result in the emergence of the common interest. The question of course is whether such communication is in fact possible or desirable.

On the face of it, Wittgenstein's disdain for Esperanto can be read as extending his criticism of a long history of philosophical attempts to construct an ideal language. Zamenhof's image of language as neutral and complete, a citadel of perfect reason and reasonableness, is at odds with Wittgenstein's image of it as messy and evolving, as "an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of

old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and houses" (P. I. 18).

We might read Wittgenstein's disdain in yet another register, namely as a judgment about the failure to make judgments, a failure that Zamenhof's ideal language seems both to encourage and permit. Wittgenstein is repelled by the idea that a "truly" common language, encoding a "truly" universal agreement in judgments, would allow us to subsume particulars under universals and thereby eliminate the problem of the particular for reaching judgments with universal validity. That is why Wittgenstein is led, I think, from the American word "cheeseburgers," to Kierkegaard's disdain for the common, to the French Academy's purist rules, to the Esperantist's offense at another man's spittle. Whereas the word "cheeseburgers" offends Ludwig Wittgenstein – that is, it provokes his judgment, a judgment based on particulars and situated in the common, a judgment which can appeal to, but not compel, his interlocutor's (Bouwsma's) assent – both the purist rules of the French Academy and the universal pretensions of Esperanto would compel our agreement by establishing rules that eradicate the particularity of every judgment and every judging subject. Wittgenstein pushes us to ask what we are doing when we insist on stabilizing our criteria in order to judge. He suggests not only that such a project is finally impossible – ideal languages fail – but also that, from an ethical (and I would add political) point of view, it is not desirable. It amounts to a failure to judge.

The reduction of critical judgment to ideal communication is part of a more general problem of thinking about ethical and political questions as if they were reducible to the question of communication and intersubjective agreement. This way of thinking leads some interpreters of Wittgenstein to imagine criteria that would provide not only the *conditions* of (shared) speech, with which to debate what counts as community, but also the *limits* of (shared) speech, with which to delimit what could possibly count. It is what leads some readers to understand the phrase "form of life" or "agreement in judgments" as a conversation stopper. Indeed speakers of a truly common language could in principle be mute. What could they possibly say to each other that would not already be contained in their criteria? The notion that undistorted communication will yield or rather reveal a cognitively based agreement with the force of truth is part of the rationalist attempt to reduce if not eliminate what Hannah Arendt, citing Lessing, once called the "incessant discourse" born of human plurality.

The tendency to interpret political and ethical questions of community as if they were questions of (better or worse) communication is not limited to rationalists. Readers looking to align Wittgenstein with either pragmatism or deconstruction often assume that his account of how language works is also an account

⁷ A similar attempt to articulate the obvious can be found in Zamenhof's Russian-language brochure entitled "Hillelism", which was published in Warsaw in 1901 under the Latin pseudonym *Homo Sum* (I am a human). See *Ibid.*, 31.

of how community works: if language is (relatively) stable, community is (relatively) closed; if language is (relatively) unstable, community is (relatively) open. Thus Wittgenstein's account of language is often discussed in terms of whether it is "conservative" or "radical." It is as if political and ethical questions of community hung on the structure of the sign. More specifically, it is as if these questions could be answered by showing that communication either generally succeeds among speakers who share a form of life, as pragmatist readings of Wittgenstein hold, or that it generally fails, as deconstructive readings hold. I would now like to turn to a few examples of such readings of Wittgenstein and, in the process, try to recover a conception of the common in his work that is not reducible to the twin notions of successful or failed communication.

Deconstruction

In a 1985 interview with James Conant, Stanley Cavell observed that "Wittgenstein is ... potentially Derrida's ... major opposition, or alternative, and exactly because of the strong affinities between them."⁸ I think this is right. Let me also say that I do not take Cavell to be calling for a competition between the two philosophers and their adherents, as if one should choose *either* Wittgenstein or Derrida. Unfortunately that is precisely what writers like Charles Alteiri, Michael Fischer, and Jay Cantor, among others, seem to think when they diagnose Derrida as a sceptic and Wittgenstein as the antidote. To read Wittgenstein against Derrida in this way is to misread, first, Wittgenstein as offering a definitive rebuttal to skepticism and, second, Derrida as caught in "a crippling version of linguistic immanence, which leaves the speaking subject without any relationship to the external world."⁹ I don't find this a productive way to approach the question of Wittgenstein's legacy as it bears on deconstruction. And I don't think that Cavell did either – not only because he argued against the reception of Wittgenstein as the definitive answer to skepticism, but also because he recognized that the problem of skepticism goes way beyond its negative thesis about knowledge of the external world.

As Ewa Plonowska Ziarek has argued in *The Rhetoric of Failure*, the central issue that deconstruction raises in its critique of classical epistemology, of refer-

8 James Conant, "An Interview with Stanley Cavell," *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 21-72, 67.

9 Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 75. Hereafter cited in the text as Ziarek.

ence and correspondence, is not skepticism about the world but the problem of alterity. Derrida himself says as much in an interview when he remarks: "I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact saying the opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language'."¹⁰ It is on just this point that I am sympathetic to the interpretative project of Ziarek, as well as of Henry Staten, both of whom have tried to map lines of affiliation between Wittgenstein and Derrida.¹¹ If we think about these lines in terms of the question of alterity, we can appreciate their readings as useful correctives to communitarian appropriations of Wittgenstein, which seem to find reassurance for "what we do" in his writings, at the cost of eliminating the probing, critical quality of his prose, and its continual attempt to imagine, and let oneself be questioned by, the other, including the other in oneself.

The central problem I wish to address in the deconstructive approach to Wittgenstein, then, is the question of alterity and its relationship to community and the common. The point that recurs in discussions that relate Wittgenstein to Derrida is that both writers undercut the classical notion of communication, according to which meaning, conceived as a "unitary, ideal object," has its origin, or source, in the subject, and the successful transport of meaning from one consciousness to another is secured by the symmetrical relationship of speakers in a dialogue.¹² As Ziarek sees the problem: "If the paradigm of intersubjectivity and community is limited to mutual reciprocity and understanding between subjects, then this paradigm, and the ideal of communication underlying it, is incapable of articulating and sustaining the relation to alterity as an irreducible dimension of being in common" (*Ziarek* 95).

Inasmuch as Wittgenstein questions the possibility of a private language and the ideality of words, says Ziarek, his texts evince elements of Derrida's attack on logocentrism. More specifically, Ziarek sees what Cavell calls Wittgenstein's account of the projection of a word as consistent with Derrida's account of iteration, that is, the sign's repeatability. This projection, she writes, introduces, "on one hand, the impossibility of totalizing meaning and, on the other, the perpetual threat of deviation – of stepping outside the bounds of linguistic norms" (*Ziarek* 35). As Staten puts the same point: "[I]n 'Signature, Event, Context' Derrida

10 Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other," Interview with Richard Kearney, in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester UP), 123-124.

11 Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 1984).

12 *Ibid.*, 139.

argues [against John Austin] that the possibility of infelicity, since it is always possible, ought to be treated as an essential predicate or law of the nature of speech acts. We could call this an instance of the "general" law of accidents, the principle that something can always go wrong with the normal course of things because of the illimitability of its relations with its 'outside.'" Likewise Wittgenstein wants us to think of the operation of rule "in terms of something that is subject to contingency, to which *accidents may happen*." ¹³

Both Ziarek and Staten, then, find affinities between (what they read as) Wittgenstein's notion of deviance as an intrinsic part of rule-following and Derrida's generalization of the possibility of accidents or failure of communication. This "generalization of failure in communication," writes Ziarek, "undercuts both the notion of a homogenized community without difference and the idea of language as based on such a community." It undercuts the notion of intersubjectivity as it is classically understood. According to Ziarek, the perpetual threat of deviation "which is as essential to language as the conditions of its stability" and which "links any linguistic exchange to an encounter with the other," also generates a *fear* of deviation, which generates in turn "the appeal to community as a way to fix the boundaries of these linguistic norms" (Ziarek 98, 199, 36). Ziarek finds this fear and this appeal in the work of Stanley Cavell, whose own "recognition of the irreducible alterity of the other," she argues, is sacrificed, finally, to his insistence on the agreement in judgments or mutual attunement among speakers in a discursive community, an attunement that is deaf to the other, deaf to difference. ¹⁴

At this point several questions arise. The first question is whether we can in fact characterize Wittgenstein's argument in terms of the *possibility of deviance* in rule-following and as akin to Derrida's *generalization of failure* in communication. ¹⁵ The second question concerns the ethical and political claim that, in Ziarek's words, this failure "undercuts both the notion of a homogenized community without difference and the idea of language based on such community." ¹⁶

Beginning with the first question, my sense is that reading for the deconstructive moment in Wittgenstein, as Ziarek and Staten both do, transforms deviation

13 *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, 16, 18.

14 For Ziarek's critique of Cavell see *The Rhetoric of Failure*, ch. 2.

15 As Staten puts it: "[I]n 'Signature, Event, Context' Derrida argues that the possibility of infelicity, since it is always possible, ought to be treated as an essential predicate or law of the nature of speech acts. We could call this an instance of the 'general' law of accidents, the principle that something can always go wrong with the normal course of things because of the illimitability of its relations with its 'outside.'" (Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* 16).

16 *The Rhetoric of Failure*, 98.

into an intrinsic condition or principle of rule-following and, then, tends to overstate the threat that is posed by the lack of fixity in our concepts. Perhaps I am missing something here, but I do not detect this atmosphere of threat when I read Wittgenstein. I do not detect it despite the fact that he gives numerous examples of failed instructions, machines that break down, conversations that go awry; despite the fact that these examples attest to the general indeterminacy of rule-following, our inability to fix meaning to specific contexts or to determine the totality of possible contexts for the use of a word; and despite the fact that, in contrast to his communitarian interpreters, Wittgenstein does not invoke "what we do" as the conversation stopper, the definitive answer to the skeptic or the outsider. To conclude that these examples attest to failure or deviance as intrinsic to rule-following seems to assume, paradoxical though it may sound, that there is a rule that one could in principle properly follow in the first place. And I think the point of Wittgenstein's many examples of how things go otherwise was meant to show not the permanent threat of deviance from the rule but the problem with thinking about rules in terms of either obedience or deviance. What characterizes rule-following, according to Wittgenstein, is not the threat of deviance or of generalized failure. It is rather the plurality of practices in a plurality of contexts that we might count as following a rule. Whereas this notion of plurality suggests the multiple ways that one might follow a rule, the notion of deviance suggests one way. Indeed to think of a rule as something we *either obey or fail to obey* misunderstands Wittgenstein's notion of rule-following: namely, the idea that a wide variety of people in a wide array of circumstances will vary from each other in their practice of following a rule – and yet in each of these cases we may say that they followed the rule. ¹⁷

I agree with Henry Staten when he criticizes the reception of the *Investigations* as an account of language as a rule-governed activity. On the contrary, says Staten, "the concept of 'following a rule,' far from being an answer to the question of how we know how to use a word, is the central problem of the *Investigations*." ¹⁸ But the question remains as to whether the more Derridean language of deviance, failure, or accidents is the most productive way of appreciating the problem of rule-following as Wittgenstein defined it.

My sense is that the aforementioned way of describing the deconstructive moment in Wittgenstein is often accompanied by the implicit assumption that if meaning is not unitary, it is terribly ambiguous. Allow me to elaborate by turning,

17 By the plurality of ways to follow a rule I do not mean rule skepticism, as it has been discussed by Saul Kripke. One does not have to agree with Kripke that every practice can be made to count as following a rule in order to argue that *what does count* – that is, what we say counts – is multiple and context dependent.

18 *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, 79.

first, to paragraph 67 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein introduces the notion of “family resemblances” as an alternative to the ideality of concepts, and second, to Ziarek’s reading of the same passage. Wittgenstein writes: “Why do we call something a ‘number’? Well, perhaps because it has a – direct – relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.” Citing this passage, Ziarek concludes: “when overlapping similarities do not articulate the unity of meaning, ‘one thing in common’, then concepts of everyday language seem to lose their identity and precision. ‘Uncircumscribed,’ unbounded, and ‘blurred,’ the concepts and words of ordinary language are marked by ambiguity.” “Incomplete and ambiguous,” meaning is open to “the perpetual threat of deviation” (Ziarek 35, 36).¹⁹ That is the (Derridean) lesson learned from Wittgenstein, she concludes.

This interpretation does not seem right to me. For one thing, it ascribes to Wittgenstein the position articulated by his metaphysical interlocutor, who wonders whether a “blurred concept is a concept at all.”²⁰ Whereas Ziarek reads Wittgenstein to be saying that our ordinary language is indeterminate and thus our concepts lose their clarity and precision, I read him to be saying that our ordinary concepts are clear enough, precise enough, despite being indeterminate. Indeed that insight, as I understand it, is at the heart of Wittgenstein’s critical account of rule-following. Isn’t it our sense that there *must* be something in common if our concepts are to be clear enough, precise enough, that leads us, as it led Zamenhof, to dream of an ideal, common language? Don’t we become entangled in the same dream when we read that indeterminacy in terms of a permanent threat of deviance or failure of communication? Isn’t that what Ziarek’s reduction of Wittgenstein’s account to the worries of his metaphysical interlocutor suggests? It matters little, I think, whether one celebrates that threat, as Ziarek does, or condemns it, as this interlocutor does. Both are caught in the same conception of language, and thus in an inescapable conflict.

That words are marked by ambiguity tells me little. At most it is a philosophical point about how language works – or fails to. The important question would be: marked by ambiguity *for whom and under what conditions*? Isn’t *this* the

¹⁹ *The Rhetoric of Failure*, 35, 36.

²⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, par. 71. The words “blurred”, “uncircumscribed,” and “indistinct” are used by Wittgenstein’s imaginary metaphysical interlocutor to object to the idea that a word could lack a common core. See P.I., par. 71.

contextual question that Wittgenstein pushes us to ask? “Blurred, incomplete, ambiguous”? Doesn’t this generalized characterization of our use of concepts as intrinsically disunified repeat the error of an ideal language – only in reverse? Doesn’t it amount to the substitution of one notion of commonality for another? When in paragraph 66 of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes, “Don’t say: ‘There *must* be something in common, ... but *look and see* whether there is anything common,” does that mean: Say they have nothing in common? I think not, for that would amount to saying precisely what Wittgenstein rules out: “there *must* be something in common” – what they have in common is their lack of commonality. Indeed the next few lines from paragraph 67 (which Ziarek does not cite) suggest this very problem: “But if someone wished to say: ‘There is something common to all these constructions – namely the disjuncture of all their common properties’ – I should reply: Now you are only playing with words.”

If I find little evidence in Wittgenstein to suggest that the lack of fixity in our concepts amount to a permanent threat to our life with language and with each other; if I cannot quite conclude that the generalized failure of communication or threat of deviation opens the space for the appreciation of alterity, it is not because I understand his teaching to be that infelicities in communication are mere accidents of no consequence, as John Austin held. Nor do I think that the actions that ground our language games make them impermeable to the other’s questions, as the “form-of-life theorists” would have it. That too would be to make a general claim. There are conditions under which I may experience this lack of fixity as a threat – say, when I am doing a certain form of philosophy, or when I am trying to rally my fellow citizens to common cause, and so on – but that is a contextual matter, quite different from saying that the threat of deviance inheres in our ordinary language. Indeed deviance only makes sense as a threat if you are already caught up in the picture of language as unitary, determined by rules. Whether you celebrate that threat as the “condition of possibility for a different structure of communication, text, signification” (Ziarek 100), like Ziarek, or deplore it as the cause of social and political conflict, like Zamenhof, you remain captive to a metaphysical picture. Wittgenstein does not deny the appeal of that picture – which is why he does not try to silence the metaphysician – but his way of working through it is different. Simply put – and I’ll expand on this point a bit later – it is to emphasize the plurality of our lives with language rather than the accidents, deviance, or failure that inheres in the practice of following a rule.

To reduce plurality to deviance is to miss the ethical import of Wittgenstein’s writings. There are times when I may discover that what I took to be the most common concept is not used by another person in the same way. And, as Cavell reminds us, “one of Wittgenstein’s questions is: What would it be like to find this

out?"²¹ The point here is that whether I do in fact find out that you and I do not use a word in the same way, not to mention what I then do with that discovery, is a matter not of the generalized failure of communication or the intrinsic deviance of rule-following but of a certain attitude that I take with respect to you. This, it seems to me, is how Wittgenstein helps us to think the question of other-regard or what Cavell calls acknowledgement and Ziarek calls alterity.

I mentioned earlier that the deconstructive reading, first, overemphasizes the threat that the lack of fixity in our concepts poses to meaning and, then, criticizes the appeal to community as a way to fix the boundaries of linguistic norms. If Cavell does not appeal to community to control meaning, as Ziarek accuses, it is because he, like Wittgenstein, is trying to diagnose, not affirm or deny, our sense of threat in the absence of such control, be it communal or metaphysical. That is why Cavell, like Wittgenstein, sees the temptation to refute our criteria – skepticism – not as the cause of this sense of threat but as its symptom. Cavell, like Wittgenstein, recognizes that meaning works well enough without such control and, where it doesn't – that is, where we no longer agree in our judgments – the problem is not one that can be resolved by compelling that agreement. Rather, the situation calls for imagination and a new judgment, for now we are faced with the other. With this in mind, let me turn to how pragmatist readings of Wittgenstein account for this situation.

Pragmatism

"What would it be like to find out that another person does not use the most common concept in the same way that I do?" This question, which runs through all of Wittgenstein's writings, is what certain pragmatist and quasi-pragmatist appropriations of his work tend to suppress. According to Richard Rorty, for example, when Wittgenstein writes, "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life" (*P. I.* 226), he teaches that "ethnocentrism," understood as an epistemological position, is "an inescapable condition – roughly synonymous with 'human finitude'."²² Liberal projects that seek to justify our

21 Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 67.

22 Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, Philosophical Papers, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15. Rorty distinguishes between two uses of the term "ethnocentrism." In response to the hostility that his use of the terms aroused in leftists, he seeks to clarify that ethnocentrism is an epistemological position, not simply a political statement of loyalty to bourgeois democracy. Most of

moral standards to people who do not share our form of life, says Rorty, are doomed from the start. The liberal's justifications will inevitably run out and, reaching bedrock, he will be forced to conclude with Wittgenstein: "This is what I do" (*P. I.* 217).

The problem, according to Rorty, is that liberals who do not accept the inescapable fact of epistemological ethnocentrism – he calls them "wet liberals" – will agonize over making moral and political judgments across cultural divides and be haunted by guilt.²³ Acting "as if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime," as Wittgenstein puts the problem of endless justification in *On Certainty*,²⁴ "wet liberals" persist in the metaphysical dream of a reason that would persuade the other who does not share our form of life because that reason satisfies a neutral set of standards and is thus free from cultural particularity. Marshalling Wittgenstein's critique of objectivity, Rorty would free wet liberals from their false problem, reminding them that all accounts are perspectival and that different positions are incommensurable.²⁵ Once we have disabused ourselves of the absurd idea that there is a true account beyond perspective, he argues, perspectivism ceases to pose the same kind of problem. Freed from the hopeless task of justifying our way of life, we can get on with the real problems of community that confront those who do not use philosophy to bypass all contingencies of the specific case at hand. The question is whether one can in fact find support for this position in the work of Wittgenstein.

It strikes me that to derive epistemological ethnocentrism from Wittgenstein is to treat his stance towards the philosophical tradition as, among other things, a form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Hilary Putnam has argued that far from trying to silence his metaphysical interlocutor, Wittgenstein engages him and

Rorty's discussions of ethnocentrism stem from the mid eighties, although he continues to define his position in these terms.

- 23 Wet liberals hold the following three positions simultaneously: they insist upon the "distinction between rational judgment and cultural bias," they have a deep commitment to liberal Enlightenment moral ideals and to human equality, and they know "that most of the globe's inhabitants simply do not believe in human equality." Richard Rorty, "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 25, 523-34, 531.
- 24 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), par. 110. Cited hereafter in the text as O. C.
- 25 Rorty develops this epistemological critique in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where he invites us to agree with the later Wittgenstein "that questions which we should have to climb out of our minds to answer should not be asked" (p. 7). Once we abandon the old distinction "between permanent truths of reason and temporary truths of fact," and with it the Kantian distinction between necessary morality and contingent custom, we will see that the problem of relativism dissolves.

takes his objections seriously. Putnam has also taken Rorty to task for assuming that, once our practices of justification and the quest for objectivity are exposed as metaphysical pipe-dreams, we can stop worrying about whether "some value judgments are reasonable and some are unreasonable, or some views are true and some are false, or some words refer and some do not."²⁶ In other words, we can stop worrying about how our claims are received by the other.

Putnam is concerned with "bringing us back precisely to these claims, which we do after all make in our daily lives,"²⁷ and I think Wittgenstein was too. The way Wittgenstein did that, I suggest, was to resist the central tenet of classical philosophy as it was first articulated by Socrates: namely, the principle of agreement with oneself.²⁸ This principle underwrites accounts of community like Rorty's that find in Wittgenstein a more or less unitary conception of our agreement in judgments and form of life. Despite Rorty's claim to attend to the particular, it is this principle, the striving for agreement with oneself, which defines epistemological ethnocentrism and distinguishes him from Wittgenstein. As exemplified by Rorty's appropriation of Wittgenstein, this principle is realized at bedrock where, having arrived at the obvious, there is nothing left to say. This is what I do. Reaching that place of our agreement in judgments, the place where my spade is turned, is, on Rorty's account of epistemological ethnocentrism, where I coincide with myself and with my community. Justification is not only impossible but unnecessary.

To read Wittgenstein in this way is to assume that, once we can no longer justify what we do, we would be justified in ending the conversation. But a glance at the many interlocutors that populate Wittgenstein's pages shows something quite different. Here we find not only the metaphysician but the man who doubts he has a body (*O.C.* 257); someone who claims that the earth did not exist

26 Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 102.

27 *Ibid.*, 102.

28 "Since I am one, it is better for me to disagree with the whole world than to be in disagreement with myself." Quoted in Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 220. "From this sentence," Arendt writes, "both Occidental ethics, with its stress upon being in agreement with one's own conscience, and Occidental logic, with its emphasis upon the axiom of contradiction, took their starting point." *Ibid.*, 220. Though this principle can divide the individual from the community, as it did in the case of Socrates, the series of analogy arguments that constitute ethical discourse in the Western tradition, arguments that both Arendt and Wittgenstein in their different ways criticized, are crucially bound up with the principle of agreement with oneself. Their respective accounts of judgment were likewise attempts to unsettle that principle and to thereby open a different space of other-regard.

150 years ago (*O.C.* 185); the pupil who *insists* that he is following the rule "add two" when he counts 1000, 1004, 1008 (*P. I.* 185); someone who claims to have been on the moon (*O.C.* 238), and so on. It is true that Wittgenstein takes some of these characters for "dim wits," and he does not know how to convince them otherwise, and he resigns himself to putting up with them (*O.C.* 238). But that does not mean that the conversation is over, or that it should have never even started, which is what Rorty's ascription of epistemological ethnocentrism to Wittgenstein suggests. To assume that a conversation stops when we can no longer justify our practices to another human being is to assume that human dialogue reduces to the practice of justification, and that the sole aim of dialogue, like that of justification, is to convince the other and thus achieve intersubjective agreement, which is to say agreement with oneself.

"Recognizing that there are certain places where one's spade is turned; recognizing, with Wittgenstein, that there are places where our explanations run out, isn't saying that any particular place is permanently fated to be one of these places, or that a particular belief is forever immune from criticism."²⁹ To appreciate Hilary Putnam's point here and set it in contrast to Rorty's reading of Wittgenstein I want to turn to paragraph 84 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. "What does a [language-] game look like that is everywhere bounded by rules? Whose rules never let a doubt creep in, but stop up all the cracks, where it might? – Can't we imagine a rule determining the application of a rule [die die Anwendung der Regel regelt], and a doubt which *it* removes [Und einen Zweifel, den jene Regel behebt] – and so on? But that is not to say that we are in doubt because it is possible for us to imagine a doubt. I can easily imagine someone always doubting before he opened his front door whether an abyss did not yawn behind it, and making sure about it before he went through the door (*and he might on some occasion prove to be right*) – but that does not make me doubt in the same case" (*P.I.* 84; my emphasis). From Rorty's perspective, this passage would merely confirm that I am not moved by doubts at bedrock: another person's doubts are not my doubts, and I need not appeal to a metaphysical conception of a rule to say as much. From the perspective I am trying to argue here, however, the passage suggests not only that I do not doubt *just* because I can imagine someone else's doubt, as Rorty would have it, but that I *can* imagine someone else's doubt, despite the fact that I myself do not share it.

Just because someone else's doubt is not my doubt does not mean that the capacity and willingness to imagine it is of no ethical consequence. For one thing, Wittgenstein explicitly leaves open here, as he does throughout his writings, the possibility that the doubter "might on some occasion turn out to be right." He

29 Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1987), 85.

thus leaves open the possibility that a certain context *could* arise in which what stands fast for me is open to question. The abyss image is appropriate for it powerfully suggests that even a doubt about nothing less than the very ground we stand on cannot be ruled out forever. More importantly, the image suggests that the one who has such a doubt, no matter how insane his doubt may seem to me, should not forever be ruled out as a potential interlocutor. Rorty's ethnocentric formulation of an agreement in judgments leaves me with a zero-sum game – either the doubter is crazy or I am, and to doubt like he does is to become crazy like him. Wittgenstein's magnanimous understanding of that agreement, in contrast, leaves open the ethical space in which a response to the other would not reduce to either rejecting him or becoming him (i.e., crazy). I do not have to shut him out just because I do not doubt that my front door does not open onto an abyss. I do not have to permanently occupy his point of view just because I attempt on occasion to see from it and, consequently, allow the possibility, however remote, that he may someday prove right.

Our "agreement in judgments," then, far from being that which we need not and cannot speak about, as Rorty assumes, is the space where I am called upon to see from someone else's point of view: to *imagine* how things look to him, for example, when he opens *his* front door. In Wittgenstein's account it is here, where the practice of justification as we have classically understood it comes to an end; here, where arguments fail and the rational striving for agreement with myself no longer obtains; here, where I cannot convince you and must simply face up to your point of view, that I may actually be able to see something new.

This place where I am called upon to imagine how *you* see things is akin to what Hannah Arendt, in a brilliantly idiosyncratic reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, describes as the place of "a different way of thinking, for which it would not be enough to be [like Socrates] in agreement with one's own self, but which consisted of being able to 'think in the place of everybody else' and which he [Kant] therefore called an 'enlarged mentality.'" This is the power of judgment as Arendt understood it and as I think Wittgenstein, in his own way, did too. It is a practice of judgment, says Arendt, "endowed with a specific validity which can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging subject has put himself for consideration. ... It is not valid for those who do not judge or who are not members of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear."³⁰ Qualifying the validity of judgment in this way, Arendt's account of judging particulars without subsuming them under a given rule is not like Rorty's ethnocentrism, according to which we should not even bother to voice, let alone explain our criteria to someone who is outside the community. What we cannot do

to those who are outside the judging community or, for that matter, to those who are inside, is compel their agreement. And that is why for Arendt, in contrast to Rorty, we do not escape the ongoing exchange of opinions or Lessing's "incessant talk."

One does not have to make Wittgenstein into a theorist of political judgment to see that his work, far from finding a permanent resting place in our form of life, sought out continual encounters with others. The purpose of these encounters was not to demand justification or compel agreement; it was simply to hear the other's point of view. It amounts to "incessant talk." Blinded by a metaphysical notion of objectivity as the only kind there is, Rorty cannot begin to see that Wittgenstein's achievement was to articulate not a mute ethnocentrism but what, following Arendt, we could call a talkative Homeric impartiality. This Homeric impartiality, she writes, "came into the world when Homer decided to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than those of the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector no less than the greatness of Achilles. ... [It] is still the highest type of objectivity we know. Not only does it leave behind the common interest in one's own side and one's own people which, up to our own days, characterizes almost all national historiography [e.g., Rorty's *Achieving Our Country*], but it also discards the alternative of victory or defeat, which moderns have felt expresses the 'objective judgment of history itself, and does not permit it to interfere with what is judged to be worthy of immortalizing praise."³¹

Inasmuch as Wittgenstein, in contrast to Rorty, does not settle for substituting the false comfort of a particular point of view for the metaphysician's false comfort of an objective one, his legacy, I would conclude, can be understood in terms, not of epistemological ethnocentrism, but of Homeric impartiality. The plurality that characterizes his thought is not merely a device to achieve understanding and consensus; it is not driven by a desire to convince the other, including the other in the self, but simply to hear his views. "I write one sentence and then I write another, just the opposite. And which shall stand?," he told Bouwsma.³² Wittgenstein's legacy suggests that any decision about which perspective shall stand will not be based on annihilating the other point of view. We can hear competing perspectives, and we can still make choices. Our lives with others do not have to amount to a zero-sum game; our choices do not have to reduce the other to unintelligibility. We can live by values other than the principle of agreement with oneself.

Thanks to Binnie Honig, Gregor Gnädig, and George Shulman for their help with this essay.

31 Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History," in *Between Past and Future*, 51

32 *Conversations*, 73.

30 "The Crisis in Culture," 220.

Henry Staten

Wittgenstein's deconstructive legacy

The topic of our debate at this conference, if it is to be managed at all, invites desperately oversimplified definitions of each of its three terms. Which Wittgenstein is to be evoked? Which pragmatism? Which deconstruction?

Moreover, in the question, "Is Wittgenstein a pragmatist or deconstructionist?", where is philosophy located? My original, unreflecting take on this question presumed that the issue, "pragmatism or deconstruction?" was a form of the issue, "philosophy or deconstruction?"; pragmatism being one of the accredited (if perhaps, not greatly accredited) ways in which philosophy can be taught and written about in philosophy departments, at least in American universities. But in Richard Rorty's influential hard line on pragmatism, philosophy – in its hoariest sense at least, as metaphysics or pure speculation, the concern with essences and universals and transcendentals – philosophy in this sense turns out to be on the side of deconstruction. Whereas most philosophers dismiss deconstruction as not philosophy, Rorty dismisses it as just more philosophy.

But it is easy enough to reconfigure our terms so that philosophy turns out after all to be on the side of pragmatism. Rorty's brand of pragmatism runs counter to the main stream of Anglo-American philosophy as what can roughly be called pragmatist or pragmatic reason, as represented for example by Hilary Putnam. If they criticize philosophy in its traditional or pre-pragmatist form, neo-pragmatists like Putnam do so in a way that promises to be a better way of obeying the fundamental imperative of philosophy – the imperative of reason. Not pure reason, or even pure practical reason, but just plain old reason, which, we now realize, is pragmatic in character. Whatever it might have meant in the hands of the philosophers who originally developed what is called pragmatism (and it seems to have meant substantially different things to each of them), there is today a broad current of neo-pragmatist philosophizing that draws its inspiration not only from James and Dewey but from Aristotle, Wittgenstein, Habermas, and Cavell, among others; there are also feminist forms of neo-pragmatism, exemplified for example by Seyla Benhabib, that supplement more traditional pragmatist considerations with the ethics of "care." Putnam, Habermas, Benhabib, and others seem to me to share a fundamental commitment to what I am calling "pragmatic reason" as what is always already there for human beings, given in our language, our practices, our sociality in general. We couldn't reason if we weren't already reasoning creatures, and we are already reasoning creatures

because our forms of life shape us that way. Human beings within a socius necessarily act, as Aristotle says, in accord with the Logos, *kata logon*, or at any rate not without the Logos, *me aneu logou* (*Nichomachean Ethics* I, vii). That interesting phrase, "not without the logos," indicates to my eye the space of what I am calling "pragmatic reason": the space in which the logos unobtrusively or implicitly, offstage or from behind the curtains, continues to function as guardrail of sociality.

My own position with respect to the discourse of pragmatic reason is not simple. My mentor in philosophy, Oets Bouwsma, was perhaps unequaled among Wittgenstein's followers for the purity of his devotion to the task of bringing words back from their metaphysical use to the everyday language game that is their "original home" (*PI* 116).¹ Under Bouwsma's tutelage, I spent several years mastering this art (this was some time before I had even heard of deconstruction), and I can attest to the extraordinary feeling of lucidity, amounting to a sort of intellectual liberation, that such mastery brings; there really is something to this business of "bringing words home." And as long as one remains resolutely within this new language game invented by Wittgenstein, which, *nota bene*, is not itself an "everyday" language game but one specific to philosophers, everything works fine. But, as any reading of Bouwsma's work will quickly show, there is no way to get from this practice, when it is really faithful to the everyday, to any of the philosophically-significant generalizations that Putnam and others want to make.² There is a double bind built into this method of "bringing words home": if you *really* bring them home, what you achieve is philosophical silence. So, unlike Bouwsma, the pragmatic Wittgensteinians must merely feint at this, bringing words only partway home or keeping them there only briefly, so they can send them forth again in philosophical claims and refutations, for instance against deconstruction.

I believe, however, that, as opposed to Bouwsma, Wittgenstein himself did not stop with the return home; and, as opposed to his contemporary exponents, neither did he sally forth once again in support of pragmatic reason. Rather, the celebrated return home makes possible a new beginning for philosophy that is too radical to be grasped within the enclosure of pragmatic reason.

Nevertheless, up to a point the *Investigations* and the later work in general do powerfully corroborate the pragmatist bottom-line claim: that our practices form the unsurpassable and indeed unspeakable ground that cannot be grounded and

which we must take for granted in order to proceed with the business of life. In this essay I will try to show the limits of this claim and the way in which Wittgenstein's later work can be read as going beyond them.

II

It is of the very essence of pragmatic reason to recognize that things, real things, the business of life, do not correspond to the demands of *pure* reason, because heterogeneity, discontinuity, conflict, and the possibility of change are built into the course of everyday pragmata. In a famous remark, Wittgenstein says that "when I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule blindly" (*PI* 219). This remark and others like it have led some commentators to think that Wittgenstein's forms of life are static and self-enclosed, essentially immune to criticism and change. But this is a very limited reading of Wittgenstein, as Alan Janik has shown.³ Following up some hints dropped by William E. Connolly, Janik has argued that the possibility of political conflict is, on Wittgenstein's account, intrinsic to our language games because of the "family resemblance" character of concepts. Since any given use of a concept depends on the context within which it is applied, and since concepts must be "supple," capable of being applied in different contexts, there is always a tension or potential for conflicting interpretation of any given concept, arising from the difference between the varying contexts of its application. Hence, whereas Connolly had argued that political concepts are "essentially contestable," Janik concludes that the political is built into the nature of our language games from the outset – that it is because of the "political" nature of language games in general that politics in the narrow sense is possible and indeed inevitable. Not only political concepts but concepts in general are "essentially contestable," and they could not function as concepts if they were not.

Wittgenstein tells us that things are in order as they are, without need of philosophical rectification. They are not in order in the sense that everything all the time functions without conflict or disagreement but in the sense that they have the kind of order appropriate to the sorts of phenomena that these are, which involves "essential contestability." As, for instance, in a courtroom everything is in order when the defense lawyer attacks a witness's testimony and makes him break down in tears, or in a boxing ring one man beats another into a bloody pulp. This is normal: in the context. I want to say that such practices as the court-

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. 3rd edition.

2 See O. K. Bouwsma, *Philosophical Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

3 Alan Janik, *Style, Politics, and the Future of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

room and the ring emblemize the essential contestation at the heart of culture; hence their endless fascination as spectacles. Connolly and Janik show how deeply this contestation is woven into the fabric of social practices and the language in which these practices are conducted. Essentially contested concepts embody an endless disquietude, a social or political disquietude to which philosophy-as-pure-reason cannot put an end because this disquietude is "in order" as it is. The disquietude of philosophy, which Wittgenstein sought to put to rest, is its dismay at the disorder of this order-of-things-as-they-are – to what philosophy perceives as their disorder. To put the disquietude of philosophy to rest would be to learn to rest in the disquietude that philosophy yearns to put to rest, but which in fact it can never do. The pragmatic Wittgensteinian can rest in the disquietude of things as they are, because he recognizes another kind of order, not an ideal order but a real, essentially contested order, in which we manage more or less successfully to live together, speak, understand each other – not ideally, but, pragmatically speaking, well enough.

I think Janik has made an important contribution to the debate over the political bearing of Wittgenstein's philosophy; the notion of essential contestability defines in a very lucid and concise way a crucial aspect of instability in language games that has been insufficiently foregrounded by others of Wittgenstein's interpreters. But Janik's contribution is especially important in the context of the present discussion, because it comes so close to a deconstructive reading of Wittgenstein – and yet does not cross the line. Only a hair divides Janik's pragmatic-Wittgensteinian account of the social world from that presented by deconstruction. We go so far toward thematizing the dimension of disagreement and conflict that is constitutive of the social world – and not one hair further. On this side of the line, agreement is still possible, agreement is the point; even if only the agreement to disagree. On the other side of this line there is – what? Chaos and anarchy? Nonsense? Mere play? Given that disagreement and conflict are internal to the constitution of the social, isn't it our job as reasonable beings, if not to do away with disagreement, at least to bring out the aspects of this disorderly order that are most hopeful for harmonious co-existence? Why lay so much stress, as the deconstructionists do, on the explosive potential, the intractability of paradox, the ultimate inscrutability of all attempts at rational adjudication of differences? Granted, philosophers' earlier attempts to articulate the mode of indwelling of reason in society were premature; the project of reason as European thinkers conceived it in the period of their darkest ethnocentrism and phallogocentrism ignored the diversity and heterogeneity of the social world. But we've learned a lot since then, and all we can do is keep learning more and readjusting our concepts to deal with the complexity of the problem. Whereas deconstruction seems to say that the whole project of reason, no matter how complex or prag-

matic, is flawed, doomed to failure by some contradiction intrinsic to human life, to reason, to language itself – an "agony of language," Derrida calls it.⁴

The pragmatist and the deconstructionist agree that the classical foundationalist project has irremediably foundered, but they take opposite paths from this conclusion. The pragmatist says, reason cannot found itself, so reflexivity must stop short of the project of foundation and rest content with language games and forms of life (while keeping in mind, as Janik reasonably reminds us, that these are shot through with essential contestability). Reason can dig down so far, and no farther; at a certain point, Wittgenstein says in one of his most powerful aphorisms, "I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned" (PI 217). But the deconstructionist says, reason cannot found itself, hence reason, and with reason our language games and forms of life, fall into a bottomless abyss of reflexivity. Reflexive critique does not come to an end with the "linguistic turn;" in deconstruction it acquires a perplexing new form, the reflexion or folding back of language onto itself. Reflexivity becomes "textual."

III

The philosopher qua philosopher knows nothing or nearly nothing of textuality in the sense to which I am referring, and which, while it is not a strictly literary notion, has a great deal to do with the sort of text we call literary and with a certain way, to which Derrida has contributed a great deal, of reading this sort of text. I do not blame the philosopher for knowing little or nothing of this notion of textuality; it isn't, or at least has not heretofore been, the philosopher's business. But philosophers are by and large – in my experience, almost universally – unwilling to grant that there is *anything to know* here that they do not know, at least anything that they are debarred from knowing by lacking the training appropriate to this knowledge. If Hilary Putnam were to say, you can't understand important areas of what analytic philosophers do if you don't know how to do mathematical logic, I would take his word for it and acknowledge a certain important area in which I am incompetent to judge. But because philosophers read novels and poems, they have of late acquired a certain vanity of knowing better how to read novels and poems than do those whose profession, vocation, and devotion it is to develop the technical discipline of such reading; and this vanity of the philosopher is in large part derived from the fact that literary critics have gone off chasing after deconstruction, which the philosopher, without having to do any

4 Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 324.

serious study of the matter, intuitively knows to be a foolish error. This is a powerful intuition, and we all know how much stock analytic philosophers place in their intuitions (which are their pipeline to the common sense of ungroundable pragmatic reason); so I don't expect to command immediate credence for the claim that there is a significant methodology associated with the notion of "textuality," and thus a highly sophisticated expertise, comparable to that required to become a professor of mathematical logic, which is required before one can competently judge of it. I do not expect this claim even to be taken seriously by anyone who identifies him or herself univocally with the discipline of philosophy. Rather, I make this claim in order to evoke a political fact, concerning the relations or non-relations between the discursive communities of philosophy and deconstruction. In the Anglo-American world it is primarily in literature departments that deconstruction has been received; and this fact by itself seems enough to discredit Derrida's claim to have anything to say to the philosopher. Yet the philosopher reserves the right to say something about Derrida and also about those in literature departments who have been influenced by him. There is a profound question here concerning the nature and limits of discursive communities within the academic profession, the question, indeed, the paradox of the self-validating character of these communities, each validating itself against the other with no court of last resort that could adjudicate the matter.

Can we adequately understand this situation in terms of the notion of essential contestability? No, because this notion presupposes and in return helps secure the authority of pragmatic reason as the not-without-which that from the periphery of our vision continues to mark the boundary or horizon of conflict; and it is the nature and authority of reason itself that are in dispute. We are at the boundary line or point of radical discontinuity between two perhaps incommensurable language games, and not two language games among others but two that are divided from each other precisely over the question of how the relations among language games are most fundamentally to be understood.

The presumed contestation that is the subject of this conference, pragmatism or deconstruction, occurs within the context of a standoff between two discourse communities which are for the most part talking past each other, and thus this conference itself exemplifies a disquietude of language games that cannot be contained by the line, be it thin as a hair, that holds essential contestability short of deconstruction – a disquietude involving a rupture or discontinuity of which the philosopher would rather not speak but which is, so to speak, *of the essence* for deconstruction. I call what I am doing in this reflexive move, by which I call into evidence the present context as a reflection en abyme of the question being contested – I call this a textual operation, and everything else that I will say will follow the contours of such an operation. And I ask you to notice that far from

there being any "loss of the world," as Putnam has claimed,⁵ in the textual action of deconstruction, it is precisely the present reality in its fullest concreteness that I am invoking, the reality of this group of people here, you and I, who are not merely discussing but also manifesting, exemplifying, or performing the conflict that we are discussing. Nothing, of course, could be more pragmatist than thus to evoke the social reality that is the matrix of our inquiry or debate; but whereas the pragmatist confidently presumes the telos of reason in light of which all conflicts are in principle, in the final instance, only an as yet inadequate implementation of the rule of reason – for example in the form of the rules of discourse ethics – for deconstruction, by contrast, what social reality reveals is an illimitable crosscutting and abyssal embedding of contexts, not no world but an excess of world beyond what the benevolence of the pragmatist lawgiver can contain, in fact or in principle.

The reflexive operation of deconstruction, when it is performed responsibly and not merely as a demonstration of a critical pyrotechnics – which I freely admit has happened all too often, but not, despite what philosophical rumor and superficial reading might suggest, from the pen or mouth of Jacques Derrida – when it is performed responsibly, I say, this reflexive operation reveals that both language games and the language in which we speak of language games have a more complex topography or topology than that supposed by orthodox Wittgenstein commentary. Along one major axis of the discourse of pragmatic Wittgensteinianism, the metaphor, implicit or explicit, of the boundedness or self-enclosure of the language game dominates the way in which language games are conceptualized. This way of thinking about language games is very strongly manifested, for example, by Paul Johnston in his fine book *Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*.⁶ Johnston speaks of moral language as constituted by language games that are internally coherent and hermetically sealed off from one another, such that no radical critique of the terms of any of these games can be mounted, either from inside or outside. Janik, by contrast, suggests a sort of openendedness or unboundedness to language games, which are, as he stresses, constituted as families of overlapping uses. Yet, despite the fundamental difference in these two ways of reading Wittgenstein, Janik's more expansive position shows its relation to Johnston's when Janik in his own way evokes the impermeability to radical reflexion of language games. I am completely in sympathy with Janik's basic point, that we cannot make fully explicit what it is that we know when we know how to follow a rule; the demand for a full theoretical account of

5. Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Quoted phrase from p. 20.

6. Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1989.

knowledge is as alien to deconstruction as it is to pragmatism. But Janik, unlike the deconstructionist, stresses "how constraints are built into those rules," producing a "regularity in our behavior which limits the ways in which we can expect to alter our practices" (107). "Grasping, let alone altering, the rules we follow is radically limited by our very rule following activity" (108). We are, in other words, always already inside the language game, and whether we conceive the nature of language games narrowly with Johnston or broadly with Janik, as discretely bounded or as continuously shading off into other language games, a crucial bounding function is played by the notion that we cannot get outside in such a way as to achieve a reflexive penetration of the game that goes beyond a certain unascertainable point. Not *very* long after we start digging we will hit the bedrock that provides the language game with a certain minimal boundary of form.

Hence, even though for the theorist of pragmatic reason the bounding function is in one sense unformulatable, in another sense it is quite clear and explicit. What cannot be formulated is the guiding, regularizing form of the how-to-go-on-in-the-same-way that would dictate *in any specific case* the leap from A to B. Yet it is not only possible but necessary to formulate *the most general constraints* to which any possible empirical instance of a rule must in the final instance conform, the boundaries against which it must ultimately bump. These most general constraints would be the rules of what I am calling pragmatic reason, ungroundable immanent ground of the sense of any possible language game. Pragmatic reason is the solidity of the bedrock, the universal form of the bounding function that one would transgress only on pain of disqualifying oneself from speaking. Anyone who transgresses the boundary will be guilty of contradicting herself, trapped, for example, in what Habermas has taught us to call a "performative contradiction." Inevitably, this ultimate boundary of pragmatic reason turns out to be the classical boundary that has always grounded the logos in its strictest explicit formalization as logic: the law of identity or non-contradiction, now in a new pragmatist or "transcendental-pragmatic" incarnation. (The orthodox Wittgensteinian will be on her guard against Habermas' attempt to formalize the unformalizable, and will reject my too-close assimilation of her stance to his. Habermas as daring to state what the Wittgensteinian must dissimulate on principle: this is an "aspect" that only "dawns" from a deconstructive perspective. And the Wittgensteinian intuitively rejects this perspective.)

IV

One need not obey the rules of this game or that game; there might always be some other game one is playing. The outside of any given language game might well be the inside of some other language game. But whatever language game one plays, in order for it to be a language game at all it must be subject in the final instance to the rule of pragmatic reason. The outside of the great language game constituted by all the little language games would be unreason and perhaps violence. But what if a language game had no inside or outside?

This business of the inside and the outside is a very powerful metaphoric, one that implicitly predetermines the philosophical inquiry into the meaning of Wittgenstein's late work. The inside-outside binary is also, I will just tentatively remind you, the metaphor or structure that Derrida has identified as the matrix of all metaphysical oppositions. But it is not my purpose here to argue that metaphysics is lurking behind the pragmatic concept of the language game. Rather, I want to inquire further into the concept of a language game as an artifact of the text called the *Philosophical Investigations*, where, as we shall see, this concept is already twisted into a shape that undoes the distinction between inside and outside that it simultaneously sets in play. This happens by means of a textual operation, *the textual operation*: the concept of a game is repeated en abyme, but with a twist, in the notion of what Wittgenstein calls "the language-game with the word 'game.'" (PI 71)

Before I delve into this intriguing move, this evident wordplay with which Wittgenstein sets his game in motion, "das Sprachspiel mit dem Wort 'Spiel,'" with the second "Spiel" in quotes, I note that Wittgenstein reserves the right to use the term "language-game" not only for the simplest subsets of natural language, such as the game with the four words "slab," "beam," "block," and "pillar," but also for what he calls "the whole," "das Ganze," "consisting of language and the actions into which <language> is woven" (PI 7). Does Wittgenstein mean by "das Ganze" merely a delimitable individual language game plus the actions associated with it, or does he mean the whole human thing, language plus action? Probably the former, I think; but it doesn't matter, because since all language games would in this usage include the actions with which they are intertwined, hence also the objects associated with those actions, the whole human thing is entrained in Wittgenstein's generalization of the notion of a language game as *das Ganze*, and the totality of actions and things called "world" would no longer be conceivable as the "outside" of the totality of language games. There is in this sense no outside-the-language-game, and Wittgenstein is in perfect accord with Derrida's remark that philosophers have resolutely refused to understand, that "there is no outside-the-text." But all this is by the way; the question of inside

and outside with which I am primarily concerned in the following remarks is not that of the boundary between language and world but of that between one language game and another.

The concept of a game in the *Investigations* plays from the outset a double role: it is on the one hand one concept among others, like "reading" or "thinking," one word among others naming a set of uses of a word whose grammar Wittgenstein elucidates; but unlike any of these other concepts "game" will leap from the level of what is being elucidated to the meta-language in terms of which the elucidation is done. I speak here of Wittgenstein's "meta-language" as a deliberate provocation, to underline the oddity of the fold in language by which the concept of a game grants us an overview of the functioning of language in general. "Game" becomes, in the metaphor or catachresis of a "language-game," the concept that names the most general character of the operation of all the other concepts.

The concept "game" is, however, exploited in quite distinct ways at these two levels. At the first level, Wittgenstein points to actual games as instances of a *multiplicity* of practices called by the same name not because of anything they all share in common but because they are related to each other in the fashion Wittgenstein in his metalanguage dubs family resemblance. When the concept game jumps to the metalanguage, as the concept "language-game," it incorporates the concept of family resemblance which had been elucidated by the multiplicity of actual and possible games, but which now falls into the background. What the metalinguistic concept of the language game foregrounds from the example of actual games is their character as orderly, rule-guided activities; the image of the chess game which is so salient early in the *Investigations* plays a crucial role in this foregrounding. The multiplicity of games, their radical difference from each other, is partially effaced by this highlighting in the notion of the language game of the fact of internal coherence in any given member of that multiplicity, any *single* game or kind of game. The sense of multiplicity is not entirely effaced, because insofar as the notion of the language game takes up into itself the notion of family resemblances, it still signals the relation to each other of *different* games, the fact that games are very different and yet they are all called games. Yet when Wittgenstein says, "*this* is how we play the game. I mean the language game with the word 'game,'" he mixes together these two ways of exploiting the analogy of games in a way that is quite tangled and which he never explicitly untangles. The fact that each game has its rules and we do what they tell us gives a sense of *boundedness* to this tacit knowledge, the sense that we are "inside" the language-game; yet, since the language-game with the word game addresses the relation-to-each-other-of-different-games, in shifting from one use of a word to another it is actually as though we were shifting from one game to

another, and therefore, if it's a matter of rules, *from one set of rules to another*. If we fail to keep distinct the two levels at which the concept of a game is invoked, we assimilate too closely the first, internal coherence analogy to the second, the relation-in-radical-difference analogy, and this assimilation makes the game of changing games (the language game with the word game) seem like a less mysterious business than it is. That is, it makes it sound too much like just another game, an instance of following-a-rule within a given, bounded game, rather than the previously unheard-of game of changing games and therefore changing not only a rule but the whole set of rules that within any given game provides the context for the understanding of any given rule. Even under this understanding there remains the sense of mystery evoked by Janik, that knowing any individual game is itself a mysterious business because we can't beyond a certain point articulate what we know. But in passing from "game" to "language game" the mystery of what we know in knowing how to play is exponentially heightened, becomes abyssal. If one use of a word is related to another by a family resemblance, and if a family resemblance is to be understood as the sort of relation that holds between different, and potentially radically different, games, games that might have *nothing in common* (save the fact that they are all called games), then the language game with a word, any word, (and here I remind you that for Wittgenstein the use or uses of one word shade off, overlap, or intersect with the uses of indefinitely many other words) is the game of changing games, and the "rule" for the use of a word would be the rule for changing the rules of its use. Hence what would have to be in question if there was going in any meaningful sense to be a rule for the use of a word would have to be a meta-rule or super-rule. But it is of the essence of Wittgenstein's teaching that there can be no such super-rule. That, and not because there's some "experience" to which we no longer have access, is why the use of a concept can only be illustrated by examples.

The notion of "the rule for the use of a word" has been picked up from Wittgenstein for the purposes of pragmatic reason in a way that does not clearly distinguish the two levels of the game analogy and thus gives a false pacifying impression of a continuity or coherence of pragmatic reason derived from the image of an individual game internally organized by its possibly unspeakable set of rules. This impression of internal coherence or organization, of structure of a sort, is what provides the limit to the notion of essential contestability that allows essential contestability to remain this side of deconstruction. If to use a word is not to dwell within a language game but to be constantly in transit between language games, how can we even impute enough stability to language games for them to be nameable as the termini of the transit? Into how many segments, how many uses or games, can we subdivide the thread of "the use of a word" before we succumb to a version of Zeno's paradox and fall into the abyss of infinite

subdivision? There is no formulatable rule that can tell us when to stop, only the voice of pragmatic reason warning that "your spade is turned." The super-rule of pragmatic reason is the guardrail of our passage from game to game, and if we want to know how we know that this way is how it's done, this way and not some other way which strikes us as quite deviant but which some deviant person is insisting on (and don't forget how essential it is to Wittgenstein's method to keep positing such deviant people and their weird interpretations), pragmatic reason says "don't ask." This is precisely where our spade is supposed to be turned, where the boundary of reflexion is reached and we are held within this boundary.

V

To be held within this boundary is to remain within sociality, to remain a creature that is both *politikon* and *logos ekhon*. Wittgenstein cannot appeal to anything so definite as a *polis* for the containing context of his multiplicity of language games; he introduces instead the far more fluid notion of "forms of life." The notion of language games interlocks with and is secured by that of "forms of life," which quietly slips the most fundamental philosophical notion, that of *form*, back into the picture. This is *of course* "form" not in a metaphysical but a pragmatic sense; and yet from a deconstructive standpoint one begins to wonder: can the concept of form ever be evoked, in however muted or covert a fashion, without providing the philosopher with an opening by which to salvage the remnants of metaphysical form? The notion of forms of life is fluid, but it cannot be limitlessly fluid. Philosophy, no matter how pragmatic or pragmatist, demands a limit. And the limit of fluidity of forms of life will be simultaneously the limit of fluidity of language games.

Analytic philosophers have at their disposal two knockdown objections to Derridean deconstruction, and it might be felt that I am at this point up against one of them, the objection that deconstruction is hung up on the criterion of absoluteness or preciseness in the definition of concepts. Analytic philosophers know, in no small part as a consequence of reading Wittgenstein, that there are inexact or "fuzzy" concepts. In asking for the limit of fluidity am I not repeating Derrida's mistake of demanding that an inexact concept be made precise? The other knockdown objection is that Derrida claims there is no such thing as correct understanding yet asks us to correctly understand this claim; a very elementary "performative contradiction" on his part if he had ever said anything so simplistic, which of course he has not. Derrida has, however, indeed said that a concept must be precise or it is not a concept.

Three interlocking methodological reflections precede my attempt to answer this question.

1. I don't believe there is any general conceptual question concerning "fuzzy" and "precise," or for that matter concerning any other philosophical or philosophically-appropriated concept; only definite questions arising in a specific context of debate. The neo-pragmatist Wittgensteinian claims that in a given context a concept might remain permanently fuzzy without bothering anyone, or indeed without anyone's even thinking that there is anything fuzzy about it, as long as it is doing the job for which it is intended. But in such a case, what sense does it make for the philosopher to characterize such a concept as *fuzzy*? Only as transplanted into a philosophical debate would it occur to anyone to characterize it as such. One could as easily say that it is *precise*, inasmuch as it is adequate to the need in context – which, as we have also learned from Wittgenstein, is all that the concept of precision ever means, there being no such thing as absolute, contextless precision. What I read in Wittgenstein is thus not that there exist fuzzy concepts, but rather that "fuzzy" and "precise" are entirely context-dependent concepts and that there is no point in applying an acontextual standard of precision to something that works fine in its context. Yet there is nothing sacred about "stand roughly there;" this instruction might, as Wittgenstein suggests, "work perfectly" (PI 88) yet it also might not. I might ask, "roughly *where*, exactly?"; or I might stand within what I take to be the indicated space and you might get annoyed and say, "no, no, I meant over there." In these cases, it would make sense, within the context, to say that the original instruction had been vague or fuzzy. "Inexact" is really a reproach, and "exact" is praise" (ibid.). But then its vagueness provides no support for the philosopher's contention that inexact concepts can be just fine, since the point of calling a concept inexact is to indicate its inadequacy *within the context*. When Wittgenstein says, early in this remark, that we could call "stand roughly there" *inexact* he does not mean that it would make any sense to do so within the context of use; he is talking to his philosophical interlocutor "outside the language-game." In order to validate "fuzzy concepts," philosophers introduce an extra-contextual measure of inexactness into the debate – precisely the sort of measure they claim to be denouncing. (This sort of thing happens all the time in contemporary philosophy that appeals to the authority of Wittgenstein – the failure of vigilance concerning the sea-change that occurs to ordinary language when it is appropriated to make a philosophical point.)

Thus the question of precision as between Derrida and analytic philosophy is a philosophical question that cannot be settled on general considerations concerning how language works as long as one is not engaged in philosophical argumentation; rather, we must understand what is philosophically at stake for both

sides and what consequences follow from going one way or the other in this debate.

2. It is sometimes said that Wittgenstein underwent a *Kehre* between the early and the late work, with perhaps a transitional period in between; others assert against this view that there is a fundamental unity between early and late. As against both of these views, I want to suggest that there is no unity in the later work itself, or even in the *Investigations*. By this I don't mean that Wittgenstein keeps changing his mind or that he contradicts himself. Rather, I mean that he never arrives at any comprehensive final position but keeps probing at the same fundamental questions and bringing out new aspects of them. On this reading, the invocation of language games and forms of life in the early sections of the *Investigations* does not provide an immovable foundation for everything else; it makes possible his entry into the type of investigation characteristic of his later period, but it leaves all sorts of loose ends hanging, loose ends that are not mere details calling for mopping-up work but rather the horizon towards which further investigation should orient itself. Thus when Wittgenstein says, for example, that we hit bedrock when we run out of reasons, he is not necessarily hitting bedrock in his overall process of inquiry. This moment could be just as tentative as any other, not an ultimate observation about the limit of all our inquiring but a remark about one aspect of the *phenomenology* of the search for reasons. It happens, sometimes, that we have this experience. But other times it doesn't happen; the point at which bedrock is struck is evidently different for different people, or for the same person at different times. There are even people for whom bedrock is never struck (I believe Wittgenstein himself was such a person – but his perplexities were not those of others). Wittgenstein is in part trying to goad such people to change their sense of what the search for reasons is – his language is playing a hortatory or normative role in an attempt to end their endless perplexity. But (and here I recur to my first methodological reflection) this exhortation must be understood in the context of the philosophical ambience within which it was written. Wittgenstein saw philosophy being done in certain ways in his time and place, ways to which he objected, and he was trying to counter those ways. We cannot assume without looking deeply into the matter that there is some general, acontextual force to Wittgenstein's strictures that can be transferred wholesale into the context of the present debate. Thus, it might be that while the notion of forms of life played an important corrective function to the tendencies of philosophy as it was done in the first half of the last century, this notion itself might need to be corrected today because it has been pressed into the service of tendencies akin to those it was originally designed to counter.

3. Wittgenstein chose the specific set of confusions that he addressed because he was combatting a certain urge to do philosophy that he perceived in the phi-

losophers of his time. Analytic philosophers today naively assume that because they have studied "Wittgenstein" – the received, institutionally sanitized Wittgenstein of contemporary analytic philosophy – they stand on the other side of Wittgenstein's critique, that they are not subject to the confusions he clarified and are therefore free of the misguided urge or urges that Wittgenstein sought to exorcise. This assumption is most often expressed in the form of disdain for "metaphysics." But metaphysics has a way of worming its way back into the philosopher's discourse while her back is turned, perhaps never more than when the philosopher is certain that, having attained to a properly pragmatic or pragmatist standpoint, she is *beyond* metaphysics, that she knows just what it is and can cite the appropriate passage of Wittgenstein to disarm it. Thanks to Derrida's further elaboration of Heidegger's reading of the history of philosophy, we now possess a beautifully articulated analysis of the urge from which Wittgenstein tried to free himself and others – the urge we can now call *nostalgia for presence*. It is easy enough to recognize Plato's Ideas as an expression of this nostalgia, but what Wittgenstein saw that made his thought so radical and so inimical to the conventional practices of philosophy, then as now, was that there were endlessly subtle ways in which the same *function* that in its most extreme form manifested itself as the eternity and unchangeability of the Ideas could operate, as he says, "everywhere in our lives," in conceptual operations apparently quite alien to Platonism, for instance in the intrusion of the word "must" in certain contexts.

We say: "If you really follow the rule in multiplying, it *must* come out the same." Now, when this is only the slightly hysterical style of university talk, we have no need to be particularly interested. It is however the expression of an attitude towards the technique of multiplying, which comes out everywhere in our lives. The emphasis of the 'must' corresponds only to the inexorability of this attitude, not merely towards the technique of calculating, but also towards innumerable related practices. (*Zettel* 299)⁷

Wittgenstein had an almost infallible nose for the "nostalgia for presence", and so didn't need the concept; but such noses are extremely rare. I need the concept, and I think others do too.

VI

I am now ready to adduce a passage written by Wittgenstein himself as the best rejoinder to the claim that notions of fuzziness, vagueness, and the like render

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*. Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Trans. Anscombe. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

pragmatic concepts immune to deconstructive challenge. I quote once again from *Zettel*, recognizing that the status of these notes is unclear, since Wittgenstein did not authorize their publication. Here is the note:

Consider ... the following proposition: "The rules of a game may well allow a certain freedom, but all the same they must be quite definite rules." That is as if one were to say: "You may indeed leave a person enclosed by four walls a certain liberty of movement, but the walls must be perfectly rigid" – and that is not true. "Well, the walls may be elastic all right, but in that case they have a perfectly determinate degree of elasticity" – but what does this say? It seems to say that it must be possible to state the elasticity, but that again is not true. "The wall always has *some determinate* degree of elasticity – whether I know it or not": that is really the avowal of adherence to a form of expression. The one that makes use of the *form* of an ideal of accuracy. (441)

The question at the outset concerns the freedom or play allowed by "the rules of a game," hence, by implication, also the rules of *language* games. On my reading, this remark brings out the radicality of Wittgenstein's analysis of language games by rejecting "pragmatist" approximations to his view of rule-following that remain anchored to *presence*; the stages of Wittgenstein's exposition in this remark constitute an allegory of the philosopher's retreat from explicit metaphysics to covert metaphysics by progressive obfuscation of the *limit-* or *boundary-function* (major neo-pragmatist form of *presence*) that the retreat is intended to preserve.

In the first proposition, the philosopher has already begun the retreat from "Platonist" rigidity toward "pragmatist" flexibility: "the rules ... may well allow a certain freedom." But the rules themselves are intrinsically rigid; they must be "quite definite." The rules allow a space of play, but there is no play, no Spielraum, in the rules themselves. Wittgenstein denies this, and the interlocutor's next line of defense is the claim that although there might be indefiniteness in the rules, it must be a bounded or definite degree of indefiniteness. Now, it is not clear what this kind of boundedness would be; but what is clear is that it would be such that one would be able to specify or declare it (*angeben*); and Wittgenstein denies that this is necessary either. At this point Wittgenstein could still just be plumping for an irreducible vagueness. The rules are indefinite or vague, and we can't transform this vagueness into a precise statement of what the limits of the vagueness are. But now we come to the deepest and most difficult moment. The interlocutor grants that this explicitness may not be in the cards. Nevertheless, the vagueness or flexibility of the rules must nevertheless be determinate – "whether we know it or not."

The difference between the pragmatist and the deconstructionist readings of Wittgenstein hinges on the interpretation of this final moment. The remark is

easily recuperated by the pragmatist as continuous with the first two moments as part of the "vague concept" notion. Wittgenstein is simply saying that it's silly to insist vagueness itself must be a quality with sharp boundaries. Vague is vague; end of story. But who is this person to whom Wittgenstein is replying and what is this person after? She has renounced knowledge; what she wants is merely the reassurance in principle that there must be boundary, in the form of an unknowable, indeterminably elastic determinacy. What philosopher would be satisfied with that? Only the pragmatist: the philosopher who believes that there is no definite boundary but remains confident that nevertheless we will soon hit bedrock. One can have one's determinacy and eat it, too. There is a *form* to a "form of life," and this form cannot be definitely defined, it is irreducibly vague, but this very vagueness makes it the dwelling-place of the super-rule of pragmatic reason which ensures that *this* form and *that* form remain distinct, that they do not collapse into a continuous flux.

Of course no one can do anything with a genuinely continuous flux. The question is *how much* recognition one is going to accord to flux and what consequences this recognition is going to have for the shape of the resulting discourse. Is the problematic of language and sociality going to be driven by the sense that the limit of fluidity is continually being washed away, and that we must be continually responsive to this continual erosion or fraying, attempting to grasp its regularities or laws (however paradoxical, however alien to what pragmatic reason would wish these laws to be – for example, in the form of what Derrida has called "the condition of possibility and impossibility") or is it going to dwell in the enclosure of flexible walls that are by their nature guaranteed to be *me aneu logou*, which I translate freely as "good enough for pragmatic purposes?"

The integrity of the inside of a language game could only be a function of a sociopolitical boundary. Where there is a bounded community that excludes outsiders, there is a language game with an inside. Only within the shelter of a sociopolitical boundary (real or imagined) can we do blindly, without choosing, what a rule tells us. What the philosopher is asserting with her assertions of the primacy of pragmatic reason is her sense of belonging to a community that validates the moves to which her "intuitions" guide her; and the person who does not share these intuitions does not belong to the same community. A "form of life" is either this, or it is an impossibly fluid limit-concept necessary to getting Wittgenstein's project off the ground but that becomes problematic in the extreme once that project is fully launched – part, to use Wittgenstein's familiar analogy, of the ladder that needs to be kicked away at a certain point.

In the absence of such a socio-ethico-political boundary the illusion of the (indeterminate, unspeakable, dissimulated) super-rule disappears, and the language game has no boundary and therefore no inside. In the space of indeter-

minate and indeterminable sociality that we, as participants in an international conference crossing disciplinary boundaries, here inhabit, and which is increasingly the space inhabited by large numbers of people across the globe (a condition that will inevitably transform philosophy, despite the contemporary holding actions of pragmatic reason), the language game, as the game of changing games, at every moment "others" or "outs" itself, and this continual outing or othering of what we can scarcely still call the language game is the object of the endless reflexivity of deconstruction. We can't get outside the language game, or outside the text, but we can't get inside it either; we can only, as Derrida says, re-mark it, repeat it in a different register, and in this way produce a deconstructive or (which comes to the same thing) self-deconstructing "textual" reflexion, as Wittgenstein does when he re-marks "game" as "language game." A procedure this radical is necessary to disrupt the cultural narcissism of pragmatic reason, with its reassuring belief in the possibility of return to the interior of the intuition-sharing community.

Here is the deconstructive question once more, in its sharpest form: Where is the ordinary language-game, the everyday form of life, within which the concept of a "language-game" is at home? This is the founding, authorizing concept of Wittgenstein's own "language-game," but it cannot itself be restored to the interior of a pre-existing language-game and thus cannot be authorized by the protocol of authorization that it sets up. It is, however, logically impermissible to reject the concept of a language-game as "outside the language-game," because such a judgment would base itself on the authority of the concept it rejected. To the deconstructive eye the textual shape of the concept is aporetic and abyssal: neither grounded nor ungrounded; a productive re-marking of language that has, like all other such re-markings, its uses and its limits. For the pragmatist Wittgensteinian who dwells within the "language-game" language-game, the concept seems to be auto-authorized, as though the very heart of sense could be heard to pulse within it, and hence its (indefinite, unstateable) limiting power were unlimited – so that the last word against deconstruction would always be that it moves *outside the language game* – that it is really just another form of "words gone astray" and therefore "the other side of the same philosophical coin as platonism."⁸

8 I cite a very up-to-date version (most indebted to "the influence of Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond and John McDowell" [p. 112]) of the pacifying account of Wittgenstein, Martin Stone's "Wittgenstein on Deconstruction" (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 108. Stone's account of Derrida is the most nuanced and sensitive that I have seen from an analytic philosopher and his essay on the whole is a significant step toward a real debate with deconstruction. Yet his final verdict is the orthodox one: Wittgenstein does not practice deconstruction because his final aim is to return us to the

And now it seems to me that I have caught the ear of pragmatic reason, and that I hear it saying to me in a calm but slightly annoyed tone, "It is not we who exclude you, my friend, but you who exclude yourself. We include *everyone* in the language game of democratic pragmatic reason, not only nominally but as fully participating, equal members. All you have to do is stand roughly *there*, in the space that is *me aneu logou*, recognizing that the rules of this space, the bedrock rules, are as we say they are. Yet if you have any criticism of our formulation of them we will listen to you because that's how this game works; with the proviso that your criticism itself must follow the rules that are as we say they are, because at the bedrock level the rules are rock-solid, and even if we have trouble formulating them we know that you cannot speak without obeying them on pain of contradicting yourself, of denying the condition of possibility of your right and ability to participate in the discussion. We exclude only the excluders, and, provisionally, those who have not yet fully acquired the capabilities necessary to become full and equal participants in the discussion; these we place under tutelage until such time as they have learned the unspeakable and indeterminately elastic rules and are thus ready to assume their rightful place in the conversation of reason. No need for fear here; no one is giving orders; we are merely reminding you to exercise your own autonomy by listening to the voice of sweet reason, of the 'must'-that-does-not-coerce."

And yet what I hear when I hear this sweetly reasoned discourse is not the voice of sweet reason but that of the philosopher playing the role of benevolent administrator – the role of one who knows the best way things should be organized and whose job it is to implement this state of organization or at least persuade others to implement it, for my own good and that of everybody else. And I respond to this benevolent administrator the same way I have always responded to all other benevolent administrators: I see them as having designs on me,

"agreeable, everyday use" of words (108). Inevitably, this conclusion, which is endorsed in words taken from the *Tractatus* as "the only strictly correct one (109)," is conceived on the basis of the inside/outside split: according to Stone, the deconstructivist's intention is "to speak outside of 'language games'" (108), and the correct rectification of this move is to replace her words within the boundaries beyond which they have strayed. Undoubtedly Wittgenstein along one entire axis of his thought asserts precisely this simple dichotomy, so agreeable to pragmatic reason, of full and empty language, of the inside and outside of the language game; this axis of his thought, in my view, manifests the fact that Wittgenstein was still fully enclosed by the cultural ambit of Europe. The question is whether this assertion is his last word. I believe Derrida's position as a partial outsider to Europe is irreducible as a factor in his difference from Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy in general.

designs I mean to resist. The more skillfully the benevolent philosophical administrator argues that there is no escaping the rules of pragmatic reason, the more coerced I feel and the more suspicious and resistant I become. What is pragmatic reason to do with me? I refuse to be placed under tutelage; indeed, I seem to know well enough how the language game of pragmatic reason works and yet strangely, unreasonably, perversely, like the tortoise in Lewis Carroll's fable of Achilles and the tortoise, I refuse to go along.

Yet in this refusal I also refuse to grant that I am taking the side of unreason, nonsense, mere play, or nonseriousness. For I am not saying no to pragmatic reason *itself*; there is no pragmatic reason *itself*. It's the philosopher's rhetorical trick to pretend that when we say no to his account, his verbal formulation, of reason, sociality, or democracy, what we are denying is reason *itself*, sociality *itself*, democracy *itself*. A picture holds him captive, and he cannot see why any reasonable being would not be in thrall to the same picture, because the voice of pragmatic reason seems to repeat it to him inexorably. But for me there is too much that this picture excludes: for instance, the "language game" of deconstruction. And in excluding this language game, pragmatic reason excludes, in Wittgenstein's name, Wittgenstein's most consequential legacy, the one most pregnant with future.

Allan Janik

Wittgenstein's critical hermeneutics: from physics to aesthetics

I. "The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language." *PU*, I 206.

"...the meaning of a word is its use in the language." *PU*, I 43.

II. "All that philosophy can do is to destroy idols." *Big Typescript* (=MS 213), 413.

III. "Our clear and simple language games are not preparatory studies for a future regularization of language – as it were first approximations, ignoring friction and air-resistance. The language-games are rather set up as objects of comparison which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities. *PU*, I, 130.

Although there are certainly pragmatist and deconstructive moments in Wittgenstein's mature philosophy, as the first three texts cited clearly indicate, that philosophy is neither pragmatist nor deconstructive, but a peculiar sort of entirely unorthodox hermeneutics as the third implies. With that in mind we should remind ourselves 1) of the points of contact between Wittgenstein and these approaches to philosophy, 2) of the differences between them and 3) explore his concept of philosophy with a view to laying bare what we have termed his "critical hermeneutics".

It is frequently overlooked that we find pragmatist moments already in the *Tractatus*. The pragmatic aspect of what it means for pseudo-propositions to "show" that they are tautologies or contradictions, namely, the fact that one can do anything one likes with a tautology and absolutely nothing with a contradiction, has frequently been overlooked.¹ Try as hard as you will, in framing a theory you cannot do anything with a contradiction but you can do anything you like with a tautology. Truth tables do not merely establish that fact but make it absolutely clear why this should be the case.

A second case in point concerns Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea of a meta-language in the *Tractatus*. This follows from the fact that we construct propositions and a fortiori the world.² What seems to be a hierarchy of languages in fact is not. Actually, the meta-language in the alleged hierarchy is a construct of a construct – a picture of a picture, rather than an analysis of pictorial structure – and as such more distorting than revealing of the nature of proposition and

1 Wittgenstein *Tractatus*, 4.46ff.

2 *Ibid.*, 5.556

language because it further obscures the fact that *we picture facts for ourselves*.³ The perspective is clearly pragmatist.

In the *Investigations* the pragmatic moment seems to jump out at us as soon as we encounter the notion that "meaning is use". And, indeed, there is scarcely a more central notion in Wittgenstein's thinking than the idea that it is first in understanding how we are to use a picture (sign, symbol, sentence or text) that we know what it means. However, the notion of a pragmatic contradiction such as a private language – or private money – is no less central. To suggest that either is possible is simply to fail to understand the relevant *concept*. Moreover, there is much to be said for the thesis that the limits of language in the *Tractatus* involve such a pragmatic contradiction: it is not that you cannot believe that you have put absolute value into words, but that you cannot *succeed* in doing so.

However, unlike pragmatists from Peirce to Rorty, Wittgenstein was not in the least interested in developing an "edifying" philosophy. In his philosophizing he was neither interested in constructing a better society nor was he concerned with disclosing the meaning of life. Although he was personally profoundly influenced by Christianity, he was in no sense a secularized post-Christian *philosopher* like the classical pragmatists.

With respect to deconstruction, one can find any number of deconstructive moments in Wittgenstein's philosophizing as well. Thus in his early period the truth table technique provided him with a crystal-clear decision procedure for demarcating the propositions of logic from empirical propositions. At the same time it showed that, if all propositions were truth functions that no propositions had a privileged status. Thus there was no justification for terming certain propositions "axioms" in logic because all of the propositions of logic had the same status. On the basis of an alternative mode of representing propositions, the only strict way, "from within"⁴ as he put it, he was thus able to "deconstruct" a project that had occupied Russell and Frege intensely for some time.

Later in the *Philosophical Investigations* the task of disabusing philosophers' of their "one-sided diet" of metaphysical and epistemological examples would be vastly more complicated. It offered no chance of producing the sort of *tour de force* that the invention of the truth table did in the *Tractatus*. Instead, his efforts had to resemble a set of therapeutic techniques, which could be alternatively applied until he found one that succeeded in dispelling the original problem. Further examples of his deconstructive tendencies include his steadfast rejection of theory in philosophy, his view that logical form/depth grammar can only be shown and not said, his idea that the goal of philosophy is to destroy idols, which

³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.1.

⁴ Wittgenstein to Ficker, p. 35.

are in fact but houses of cards, and the notion that what was most important in the *Tractatus* was what he had *not* written.⁵

Yet, for all that, he was not a deconstructionist. He may have said in the spirit of deconstructionism that all that philosophy could do was destroy idols but he immediately added, "and that means not making any new ones – say out of 'the absence of idols'".⁶ Unlike deconstructionists, Wittgenstein most definitely believed that there is such a thing as meaning. Although he shared their antipathy to the idea that meaning is based upon cognitive structures, be they logical, as Russell believed, neurological, as Chomsky believed or sociological, as Whorf and Sapir believed, he steadfastly eschewed the idea that "anything goes" as far as meaning is concerned. Wittgenstein was not a nominalist; meaning is by no means arbitrary for him. For Wittgenstein there is meaning but it is not univocal in nature. In Wittgenstein's view we are not confronted with a choice between a fixed notion of meaning and pure ambiguity. There is a place for both fixity of meaning and ambiguity in a conception of knowledge and mind rooted in the sorts of *metaphorical* thought processes that belong to the natural history of an animal that speaks. There is, indeed, in Wittgenstein's mature view a logic of language but it is a metaphorical rather than a subsumptive logic.⁷

So, from the start we do well to question the very title of our symposium. It seems to suggest, like many efforts to treat the theme "Wittgenstein and..." that we finally know what Wittgenstein was really up to. In fact this is just another chapter in a book that might be called "How To Do Things With Wittgenstein".⁸ From the point that it finally became clear that Wittgenstein was not a "logical positivist" people have had the equally problematic idea that he was, nevertheless, really trying to do something other than he actually did and failing in his efforts either to become Carnap⁹ or to become Heidegger. For these people Wittgenstein is a sort of Douanier Rousseau of philosophy: a brilliant primitive, only able to express himself idiosyncratically, a victim of his own talent as it were. This view is simply false.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁶ MS 213 [The Big Typescript], 413.

⁷ This point has largely gone unobserved in the literature. It is too complex to discuss here. I am grateful to Kjell S. Johannessen for discussions on this topic.

⁸ This title was originally that of a paper given by Kevin Mulligan in connection with the London discussion of J.C. Nyiri's thesis that Wittgenstein was a conservative ideologue in the fall of 1981.

⁹ Alois Pichler informs me that, if Wittgenstein ever aspired to do what Carnap did he gave up on the idea in 1936 when it became clear to him that he could only express his thoughts in aphoristic form.

Nevertheless, many of his own statements superficially support that view. Consider the following from the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*:

"After several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I would never succeed... I should like to produce a good book. This has not come about, but the time is past in which I could improve it".¹⁰

Statements such as this are easily compounded from Wittgenstein's notebooks and correspondence. In fact, Wittgenstein complains in a Socratic vein of his inability to express himself as he would. Those laments are hardly strange in a perfectionist, whose philosophical conversation partners for the most part spoke a language that was not his mother tongue¹¹. However, he insists at the same time that this inability to express himself as he would is connected with the very nature of his philosophical investigation¹². In fact, we have paid too little attention to the peculiarities of his philosophical endeavor.

His way of writing had to be odd indeed if Wittgenstein would probe what R.G. Collingwood terms the "absolute presuppositions" in everyday life, i.e., what is so self-evident as to be beyond question. Such questions into what everyone takes for granted must seem absurd, hilarious or uncanny but in no sense "normal".¹³ So, given his philosophical task, the oddness of his way of writing and Wittgenstein's difficulties of expression are hardly as strange as they might seem from the outside. Their strangeness is all part of the task of showing us aspects of language and experience that are so close to us that we cannot perceive them. In fact, now that his whole corpus is accessible,¹⁴ it is clear that his philosophy looks more or less as it would have, had he been able to express himself adequately in his own eyes.

The central idea in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is a notion that has been all too little understood. It is the idea that in the last analysis the logic of human thinking cannot be described.¹⁵ This is for three reasons. First, rule-following involves learning to use examples and they can always be employed in new and

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Vorwort.

11 The fact that Wittgenstein wrote almost nothing in English is evidence that this point was important to him.

12 See n.2.

13 On Collingwood and Wittgenstein see my *Kunskapsbegreppet i praktisk filosofi* [The Concept of Knowledge in Practical Philosophy] trans. Birgit Häggkvist (Stockholm: Symposium, 1996), 96-100.

14 The philosophical Nachlaß is available at the Wittgenstein Archives in Bergen Norway and will soon be available from Oxford University Press as a CD rom, his letters at the Brenner Archives in Innsbruck.

15 Wittgenstein, *UG*, 501.

innovative ways. Radical innovation, completely unexpected conceptual change, does occur. Second, there is always the possibility that there are exceptions that are compatible with our rules. As a result we are often uncertain whether we are confronted with a case that corresponds to the rule or forms an exception. In this sense everything is compatible with the rule. Third, the very multiplicity of our ways of interweaving words and actions into "language games" defies systematization. Yet, even if rule-following cannot be reduced to a system, it is for all that comprehensible. We must simply learn to look at what we do: "don't think, look!"¹⁶ Thus in order to help us to get a glimpse of our "language games" or practices the philosophers must *gesture* at something that cannot be described in ordinary prose. Indeed, there is a reciprocal relationship between word and gesture in Wittgenstein's thinking, "...we really shall be explaining words by a gesture, and a gesture by words".¹⁷ Wittgenstein's peculiar version of hermeneutics thus follows from the notion that meaning is use but that use cannot be described; it must be shown on the basis of examples. However, the examples appealed to here are paradigmatic actions to be gestured at not propositions as Socrates erroneously thought.

No small part of our problem with understanding Wittgenstein has arisen precisely because he departs so radically from traditional philosophy both with respect to the substance and the form of his philosophizing in all its phases. Moreover, since we have had only the foggiest idea of how he got to that view, of who his philosophical precursors really are, it has been extremely difficult for many philosophers with a solid, but conventional, education to make anything but incompetence or obscurantism out of his seemingly oracular pronouncements. Thus arises the temptation to search for a "key" to understanding him.

If there is such an historical key to understanding what Wittgenstein really wanted to do in his philosophizing in all its phases and why his writings are in principle complete in their curiously fragmentary character, it is to be found in the philosophical Introduction to Heinrich Hertz's *Principles of Mechanics*.¹⁸ The odd thing is that Wittgenstein, a Berlin-trained engineer with a solid grounding in theoretical physics, always said this. He hardly ever spoke of anyone else in connection with the question of what philosophy is all about.¹⁹

16 Wittgenstein, *PU*, I, 66.

17 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 227.

18 Heinrich Hertz, *Die Prinzipien der Mechanik in neuem Zusammenhange dargestellt* (Leipzig: J.A. Barth; 1894), 1-49.

19 "[T]hroughout his life, Wittgenstein regarded Hertz's solution to the problem [of force in Newtonian physics] as a perfect model of how philosophical confusion should be dispelled", Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), 446.

Moreover, we find intertextual evidence of Hertz's influence in the crucial discussion of the nature of philosophy in the *Investigations* (I, 89-133).²⁰ So it should not be surprising that we should have to look to Hertz to find the most rudimentary level of Wittgenstein's philosophizing, his distinction between saying and showing, which runs throughout his philosophizing, and determines his peculiar way of understanding "clarity". The problem here is that Hertz has been conflated with the more orthodox positivist, Mach, in the literature on Wittgenstein and generally.

Apart from being a brilliant experimentalist and a bold theoretician, Hertz was an extra-ordinarily innovative philosopher of science, whose contributions to that subject are only beginning to be recognized for what they are.²¹ Like all of his contemporaries, he had his qualms about the metaphysical components in Newtonian physics. Like Ernst Mach, for example, he objected to the Newtonian employment of the notion of "force" in the exposition of mechanics. For Mach, who was the precursor of the Vienna Circle in this respect, words such as "force", which do not refer to anything directly perceptible (but to an equation expressing a relationship between mass and acceleration), should be banned from scientific discourse. Indeed, the sort of almost fanatical anti-metaphysical, "scientific" philosophy that Mach inspired tended to preoccupy itself all too much with the policing of intellectual life and posing a demand for the reform of language.

Hertz's response was considerably less repressive and considerably more creative. He reasoned that if problems like that of force arose from the way we formulated our concepts, a re-formulation of those concepts, 1) equally rigorous with respect to formal relations and 2) equally rich with respect to empirical content, ought to be able to eliminate them. Thus Hertz's response to the classical metaphysical objections that his contemporaries raised to Newton was not to develop a philosophical theory about the sort of language that was acceptable for the development of an acceptable theory but to restate the principles of mechanics in such a way that Newton's problems would not arise in the first place. This response was based upon a sensitivity to the role of rhetoric in the development of scientific theory: theories must be not only empirically rich and logically coherent; they must also be *appropriately presented*. However, what is appropriate for professional colleagues is hardly appropriate for, say, beginning students

20 Wittgenstein *PU*, I, 133; cf. Hertz, *Prinzipien*, 9 and *PU*, I, 132; cf. Hertz *Prinzipien*, 14. The English translation obscures the point.

21 On Hertz see my "How Did Hertz Influence Wittgenstein's Philosophical Development?", *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, Vol. 49 (1994/95), 19-47, which treats the themes discussed here in depth. Cf. Davis Baird, R.I.G. Hughes and Alfred Nordmann (eds.), *Heinrich Hertz: Classical Physicist, Modern Philosopher* ("Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science" 198; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

without being any the less "scientific" for all that – and vice versa. Thus posing the question "appropriate for whom?" introduces *eo ipso* a rhetorical and ultimately aesthetic dimension to the evaluation of theoretical representations that classical rationalism and empiricism systematically ignores. Hertz's particular way of clarifying the "language" of classical mechanics involved re-formulating mechanics as an axiomatic system.

Dazzled by formalization as it was, the Vienna Circle could see nothing other than the formal ingenuity and rigor that was demanded by Hertz's program for representing mechanics. So Carnap and Co. failed to see the forest for the trees, when they considered Hertz's contribution to physics exclusively as a contribution to axiomatics. Unlike Wittgenstein, they did not see the actual philosophical point of the exercise, which in fact was only indirectly related to the success or failure of Hertz's axiomatization project; for Wilhelm Ostwald and the so-called Energeticists had already produced one such re-formulation of the principles of mechanics, one that Hertz approved of in principle, but found too cumbersome in practice, to fit the bill as far as radical clarification goes. Emphasizing the axiomatic character of Hertz's alternative to Newtonian mechanics, i.e., the substantive character of his presentation of physical theory, obscures a philosophical point, namely, that it is possible to clarify what has been confused entirely *immanently*, i.e., on the basis of an alternative way of representing the same object. In this way physical theory takes care of itself without recourse to an epistemology such as Mach's – or any other. In fact it has been Hertz's boldness and cleverness as a physicist that has obscured his brilliance as a philosopher of science until today.²²

The fact that Hertz's peculiar hermeneutical approach to the dissolution of metaphysical problems in natural science has been neglected by philosophers of science goes a long way to explaining why many philosophers today find Wittgenstein so strange. Be that as it may, it is precisely that technique of alternative representation that the mature Wittgenstein recommends and in fact delivers.²³ Thus what began as a brilliant strategy for tackling metaphysical problems in mechanics in Hertz was developed by Wittgenstein into an equally brilliant technique for dealing with both the problems of logic and those of life.²⁴ It is signifi-

22 Apart from Wittgenstein Ernst Cassirer alone among philosophers seems to have appreciated Hertz. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge*, trans. W. Woglom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 103-114.

23 Cf. "Your concept is wrong. – However, I cannot illuminate the matter by fighting against your words, but only by trying to turn your attention away from certain expressions, illustrations, images, and towards the use of the words", *LW Zettel*, 463.

24 Cf. Wittgenstein *Geheime Tagebücher*, ed. Wilhelm Baum (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1992), 6-7.VII.16.

cant that Wittgenstein frequently uses the same expression to describe what is needed in both situations: "das erlösende Wort" – nor is it accidental that it occurs in an early version of the *Philosophical Investigations* in connection with the nature of philosophy: "the philosopher endeavors to find the saving word, that is that word that allows us finally to grasp what has been until now a continually intractable burden to our consciousness".²⁵ This "erlösende Wort" turns out, not unsurprisingly for a Hertzian, to be "a composition of the right examples".²⁶

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein insists that it is "deep disquietudes", deep as the forms of our language, that move us to philosophize. The "depth" of the problem hangs closely together with the fact that human beings cannot learn language without it being drilled into them to the point that it becomes second nature. Thus successful routinization of complex behavior patterns makes it extraordinarily difficult to get an overview of how language, and a fortiori human thinking, works. The problem is, indeed, so deep that the very posing of it tempts us to misunderstand the workings of language by looking for its defining characteristics, whereas what we really should be doing, once we have taken a look at what we do in a particular situation, is *rearranging* what we in practice know about how we do things with words such that those problems dissolve.²⁷ This rearrangement is an activity as demanding as it is creative. It is one that Wittgenstein clearly considers akin to that of writing fiction.²⁸ It involves:

1) finding and inventing intermediate cases to wean us away from our previous "one-sided diet" of examples,²⁹

2) experimenting with various ways of formulating expressions to see how seemingly minute differences in language can lead to significant differences of meaning,³⁰ which,

3) show us how much of our expectations in philosophy are connected with a superficial aesthetic sensibility, which confuses clarity with a property of propo-

sitions rather than an understanding of the "absolute presuppositions" of thinking³¹

and thus why

4) the "dissolution" of those problems must take place slowly, i.e., because the therapy must be complete and the urge to produce a philosophical theory must disappear completely.³²

This is the "complete clarity" that philosophy strives for in Wittgenstein's view.

In all phases of his philosophizing Wittgenstein was convinced that philosophical problems arise because we misunderstand the logic of our language. In his later philosophy this is a matter of failing to grasp that language is not a unified phenomenon but a variety of interweavings of words and actions. We are dazzled by the word and seek a single object that corresponds to it, when in fact there are many kinds of, say, "games" that cannot be reduced to one definition. Furthermore, we use words that resemble each other closely to do the most different things:

It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro.³³

Thus the task of philosophy was always an "analytic" one in the sense that the philosopher has to break down the intractably complex set of interrelated phenomena that constitute language into their constituents, i.e., "language games", with a view to showing that there are in fact a multiplicity of ways that words, signs, sentences, symbols and texts fit into the human form of life:

"Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language. – Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression with one another; this process may be called an 'analysis' of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart".³⁴

25 Wittgenstein, *PU: Frühversion 1937-1938*, eds. G.H. von Wright & H. Nyman: Helsinki: privately printed, 1979), I, 106.

26 Wittgenstein, MS 147, 19 (1.02.1934)

27 Wittgenstein, GT, 26.XI.14; cf. PU, I, 133.

28 Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, 58.

29 Wittgenstein, *PU*, I, 593.

30 See Alois Pichler's penetrating "Wittgenstein's spätere Manuskripte: einige Bemerkungen zu Stil und Schreiben", *Mitteilungen aus dem Brenner Archiv* 12 (1993), 8-26.

31 Wittgenstein, *PU*, I, 217. On clarity and "absolute presuppositions" see my *Style, Politics and the Future of Philosophy* ("Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science" 114; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), xiii *et passim*.

32 Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 382.

33 Wittgenstein, *PU*, I, 12.

34 Wittgenstein, *PU*, I, 90.

Only when this sort of analysis is complete does philosophy cease to call itself into question. Such an Hertzian hermeneutic version of analytic philosophy has very little to do with the sort of philosophizing normally associated with the term and exemplified by such figures as Russell, Carnap, Ayer and Quine. At best it is a sort of distant cousin.

The differences between the Hertzian-Wittgensteinian concept and the positivist notion of clarity should serve as a solid point of departure in developing an account of his peculiar concept of hermeneutics with its roots in Hertz. Wittgenstein considered that philosophy, unlike science, did not solve problems, rather it "dissolved" them. Getting clear about a philosophical matter for him was a question of coming to understand paradoxically 1) why we have the sense that a philosophical question has been "forced upon us" and 2) how practice shows us why that should not be so. Clarity for him has nothing whatsoever to do with the logical analysis of the propositions which express our claims to knowledge but is a matter of getting an overview (*eine übersichtliche Darstellung*)³⁵ of the field in which a problem arises such that the problem disappears.

Thus what starts with Hertz as a campaign to eliminate metaphysical problems in mechanics on the basis of an alternative representation of the subject physics becomes in Wittgenstein ultimately a kind of sensitivity training with respect to the differences that linguistic and behavioral nuances make with respect to meaning. Little wonder that the most insightful commentators on Wittgenstein have come to recognize the centrality of an *aesthetic moment* in his philosophizing. Philosophers have long noted that there are strong implications for aesthetics in Wittgenstein's mature philosophy. His emphasis upon the indeterminacy of aesthetic concepts, the logical plurality of critical discourses and the contextual character of knowledge are three examples of notions that have been profitably incorporated into contemporary discussions in aesthetics.³⁶ What has been less often noticed is that aesthetic understanding is in fact Wittgenstein's paradigm for philosophy.³⁷ This corresponds both to Wittgenstein's explicit assertions such as the idea that the *Tractatus* was at once strictly literary and at the same time philosophical and the philosophy could only be written as fiction. Thus in the Preface to the *Investigations* he compares himself to a draughtsman drawing a landscape from various points of view, which are to be compared to one another. It runs through his efforts to introduce new ways of seeing things like, say, intentions differently from our routinized, conventional way of per-

35 Wittgenstein, PU, I, 122.

36 Cf. Richard Shusterman, "Wittgenstein and Critical Reasoning", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 46, (1986), 93-99.

37 Cf. Cyril Barrett's contribution to the symposium "Wittgenstein and the Problems of Objectivity in Aesthetics". *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 7 (1967).

ceiving them. This often involves guiding us with a view to bringing us to a more appropriate response to, say, our ascriptions of color. His technique is almost entirely Hertzian inasmuch as he introduces new points of comparison to induce a sense of wonder at the everyday. Moreover, to induce wonder in minds that had long lost the ability to see things anew, he had to find new ways to confront us with the everyday.

All of that is in the end little more than leading us to a new aesthetic appreciation. Little wonder, then, that the Hertzian Wittgenstein could have considered Kent's assertion from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, "I'll teach you differences" an apt motto for his major work. The critical moment in Wittgenstein's later thought is precisely the point at which the act of continually seeking differences *relativizes* what the external forms of language themselves tempt us to absolutize language in the form of, say, a philosophical *theory* of meaning. This moment in Wittgenstein's philosophizing can be constructively compared with the practice of skepticism as understood by, say, Sextus Empiricus.³⁸ Moreover, the continuous search for new points of comparison deals with a problem endemic to Popper's "critical rationalism", which leaves the rational person in a schizophrenic state of tension between avidly producing conjectures only to refute them vigorously, inasmuch as the act of comparing does not require that we be of two minds in the same matter. The act of mulling over differences relativizes what philosophical theory has absolutized in confusing surface grammar with depth grammar. Problems get "dissolved" as we come to realize the essentially metaphorical and therefore pluralistic character of meaning. "Dissolving" problems has frequently been perceived as nothing less than perverse by traditional philosophers committed to an 'heroic' view of philosophy's role in propagating Enlightenment. Yet, this is a mistake. Society's would-be "enlighteners" have all too often forgotten Diderot's ironical warning in *Rameau's Nephew* that we ignore the *limits* that nature itself places upon Enlightenment at our peril.³⁹

As far as Wittgenstein goes, we also forget that there is a certain kind of human wisdom here that has often been intuited but seldom articulated. Paul Engelmann has termed it "creative separation" between what can be said and what can only be shown, i.e., between thought and action. Wittgenstein finds philosophy completely unrelated to efforts to change the world or – and this is often overlooked – to resist such efforts. He might well have said with Freud, whose disciple he claimed to be, that the ego is master in its own house in a very

38 See Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Skepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

39 Cf. My "Rameau's Nephew: Dialogue as Gesamtkunstwerk for Enlightenment", in *Skill, Technology and Education: On Practical Philosophy*, ed. B. Göranson (London: Springer, 1995), 57-74.

restricted sense. To many, if not most philosophers, this is simply unthinkable. Yet, for Wittgenstein the idea that philosophy is *completely* different from ethics/politics is absolutely central to philosophy. It is a corollary of a thought that runs throughout all of Wittgenstein's thinking that human beings must take care of themselves just as in his earliest notes "logic must take care of itself", whereas later "language must take care of itself" and finally "practice must take care of itself". Philosophy, i.e. ideas, cannot help us if we are not ready to change ourselves. We can only accomplish this with the greatest of difficulty. There are no theories or formulas that make the world better. Only human action can accomplish that. Anyone who promises a theoretical solution to human problems in fact only compounds the problem by seducing us into thinking that there can be a solution without effort. The skeptical tone of Wittgenstein's assertion that the real revolutionary would be the one that would revolutionize himself⁴⁰ should not obscure from us the fact that Wittgenstein also recognized a deep-seated tendency in us to *want* to change the world radically. For him it is something that we must combat if we are to do philosophy. This is not to be reactionary but simply to leave things as they are – which is in fact the exact equivalent of Nietzsche's notion of Eternal Recurrence and the early Heidegger's notion of truth as the "letting-be of what is". Leaving things as they are, too, is more difficult than we are inclined to think.

40 Wittgenstein, VB, 92. Cf. Herbert Josephs, *Le neveu de Rameau: Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture* (n.p.: Ohio University Press, 1969).

Stephen Mulhall

Deconstruction and the ordinary

Why has Jacques Derrida never, in the course of his long, prolific and wide-ranging intellectual career, engaged in a detailed reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*? Even if we acknowledge that that not even a writer of Derrida's legendary productivity can hope to address every text in the history of philosophy in which he might have an interest, my question remains pressing, because the highly distinctive prose of the *Investigations* appears to pose in an unusually powerful way at once an invitation and a challenge to what one might call deconstructive reading. I would hardly be inviting controversy to describe Wittgenstein's writing in this book as 'patient, open, aporetical, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the acknowledgement of its impasses than its positions'; but in so describing it, I would be reciting words Derrida himself uses to characterize those aspects of the work of J.L. Austin which attracted him sufficiently to devote an essay to certain parts of it.¹ Hence, one way of thinking of my question is as an invitation to imagine a deconstructive reading of the *Investigations* as a way of continuing the exploration of what is often called ordinary language philosophy that Derrida began in the three essays collected in *Limited Inc.*

Of course, Derrida himself might initially be inclined to find this way of casting my invitation the very reverse of appealing; the Afterword to *Limited Inc* makes it abundantly clear just how disturbing he found the polemical tone, and the attendant lapses of scholarly integrity, of the exchanges with Searle that followed upon the publication of 'Signature Event Context' (just as the absence from the volume of Searle's reply to that essay makes it clear that he feels no less disturbed, and no doubt for what he takes to be similar reasons). Indeed, any philosopher with an interest in either or both of these traditions (whose failure to encounter one another in these exchanges is perhaps the only point upon which its principal participants agree) is likely to find the idea of revisiting this particular debate profoundly disheartening.

What we need to recall is that it is both possible and necessary to distinguish between Derrida's interest in Austin's work and his interest in Searle's, and to

1 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc.* (NorthWestern University Press: Evanston IL, 1988), p 14; all references to the three essays contained in this collection – hereafter LI – will be keyed to its pagination.

acknowledge not only that the species of ordinary language philosophy represented by Austin can be inherited in ways other than that of Searle, but also that there is another species of ordinary language philosophy than that represented by Austin, and hence another way of attempting to make the idea of the ordinary (with respect to language and to life) philosophically fruitful. Stanley Cavell's recent essay 'Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice'², represents the former possibility; it describes itself as pretending that Derrida's controversy with Searle did not happen, as speaking to Derrida's words on Austin as if for the first time - thereby enacting a speech-act of the very kind under discussion in Austin and Derrida in order to free both from a certain kind of misappropriation, and to free himself to respond to Derrida's words in ways that he ought to find rather more congenial, even if no less resistant. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* represents the latter possibility. In this essay, I shall attempt to show that, and how, realizing either possibility might make the encounter between deconstruction and philosophical appropriations of the idea of ordinary language less heated and more illuminating.

1) Austin's contexts

Cavell's attempt to respond in Austin's name to Derrida's critique is protracted, complex and multiply qualified; here, I can only draw out some of its more central claims and questions. One might think of them as implying that Derrida has in various ways failed to attend to Austin's contexts:

Take, for example, Derrida's most fundamental, would-be complimentary, comment on the general form of Austin's theory of speech-acts; he tells us that 'Austin was obliged to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the truth *value*... and to substitute for it at times the value of force, of difference of force (*illocutionary* or *perlocutionary* force)... which is nothing less than Nietzschean' (LI, 13). For Cavell, this shows that Derrida is insufficiently sensitive to the fact that Austin's account of performatives aims to counter a defining assumption of the then-dominant analytical school of logical positivism - the assumption that all utterances other than those in the business of describing states of affairs (for example, judgements of aesthetics, of ethics and of religion) were held to have merely emotive meaning, and hence to lack any cognitive or rational relation to reality. Austin's account of performatives controverts that assumption by representing those utterances as retaining a certain kind of adequation to

2 In *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1994) - hereafter CPV.

reality or to factual conditions despite not being characterizable as descriptions of reality, and hence as true or false.

What Austin "substitutes" for the logically defined concept of truth is *not force but "felicity"*. Statements, if adequate to reality, are true, if not, false. (This defines the concept of a statement.) Performatives, if adequate to reality, are felicitous, if not, then, in specific ways, infelicitous. (CPV, 81)

The concept of 'force' does come up in Austin's work, but in a very different context - although one still implicitly keyed to the broader context of logical positivism. For he distinguishes between utterances that do something in saying something and those that do something by saying something (that is, between illocutionary and perlocutionary utterances); and this distinction between kinds of force allows him to locate a type of utterance that answers to logical positivism's idea of emotive meaning - perlocutionary speech-acts such as persuading, annoying, thrilling, bullying, frightening, wounding - but to reveal thereby their difference from the illocutionary utterances to which the logical positivists wished indiscriminatingly to apply that idea. It follows that, by misplacing Austin's concept of force, Derrida's would-be compliment eclipses any adequate conception of the way in which Austin's theory of speech-acts registers his sense of the limited truth and the general falsity of logical positivism's conception of what one might call the non-constative.

By substituting the idea of felicity for that of truth, one might think that Austin necessarily makes central to his account of speech-acts the possibility that utterances might in various ways be infelicitous - suffering inadequation to reality. Derrida's critique of Austin suggests, on the contrary, that his general theory fails to appreciate the necessity of that possibility, fails to interrogate exposure to infelicity as an essential predicate or law of human utterances (LI, p 15). His basis for this claim lies in the significance he attributes to two occasions on which Austin appears to exclude, reject or defer any such interrogation. The first concerns the kinds of infelicity or unhappiness to which speech-acts are vulnerable in the way that all actions are vulnerable:

Features of this sort would normally come under the heading of "extenuating circumstances" or of "factors reducing or abrogating the agent's responsibility", and so on. (HDTW³, 21)

3 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1962) - hereafter HDTW.

The second concerns the kind of ill to which performatives are vulnerable in the way that all utterances are vulnerable:

I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy... - a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways - intelligibly - used not seriously, but in many ways *parasitic* upon its normal use - ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (HDTW, 22)

Derrida excludes (more precisely, 'leaves aside') the first of these exclusions - perhaps because he thinks of them as two cases of the same general gesture; but he quotes enough of that first deferral to show how implausible it is to claim that Austin passes over the significance of this kind of infelicity. For Austin there asserts that 'features of this [first] sort can and do constantly obtrude into any case we are discussing' (HDTW, 21); and what he there refers to as 'extenuating circumstances' he famously subjects to a thorough and painstaking analysis elsewhere; in a paper entitled 'A Plea for Excuses'. Cavell's purpose in pointing this out is not to accuse Derrida of poor scholarship; it is to suggest that Austin's lectures on speech-acts have a broader context in his (short) lifetime's work, that deferring the performance of a theoretical task to another (con)text is not equivalent to excluding or rejecting it, and - most importantly - to remind us that in that other context Austin makes it clear that 'excuses are as essentially implicated in [his] view of human actions as slips and over-determinations are in Freud's' (CPV, 87). More specifically, for Cavell, this is where a truly Nietzschean turn is really evident in Austin's work:

What does it betoken about human actions that the reticulated constellation of predicates of excuse is made for them...? It betokens, we might say, the all but unending vulnerability of human action, its openness to the independence of the world and the preoccupation of the mind. I would like to say that the theme of excuses turns philosophy's attention patiently and thoroughly to something philosophy would love to ignore - the fact that human life is constrained to the life of the human body, to what Emerson calls the giant I always take with me. The law of the body is the law. (CPV, 87)

Austin's second exclusion is a different matter. Cavell emphasizes that it too implicitly refers the reader to another of Austin's texts, a paper entitled 'Pretending', in which he begins the theoretical work of distinguishing pretending from (and thus linking it with) feigning or posing as, affecting or shamming, imitating, rehearsing and acting. Cavell does not, however, take this reminder of the broader context of Austin's second exclusion simply or directly to controvert

Derrida's claim that '[Austin] insists on the fact that this possibility [that utterances may be 'quoted'] remains *abnormal, parasitic*, that it constitutes a kind of extension or agonized succumbing of language that we should strenuously distance ourselves from and ignore. And the concept of the "ordinary", thus of "ordinary language", to which he has recourse is clearly marked by this exclusion' (LI, 16). For the highly provisional and undeveloped work laid out in 'Pretending' neither underwrites nor overwrites the concluding gesture of Austin's second exclusion to which Derrida adverts, with its unavoidable implication that what one might call literary iterations of language are necessarily to be distinguished from 'ordinary circumstances'.

Nevertheless, Cavell dissents from Derrida's diagnosis of the root cause of this exclusion, and from his sense of the depth to which any Austinian concept of the ordinary must be marked by it. Derrida lays out his diagnosis as follows:

If one maintains that... ordinary language... excludes a general citationality or iterability, does that not mean that the 'ordinariness' in question - the thing and the notion - shelter a lure, the teleological lure of consciousness...? Above all, this essential absence of intending the actuality of the utterance, this structural unconscious... prohibits any saturation of the context. In order for a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense required by Austin, conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining centre of context. (LI, 18)

What lures Derrida into thinking that Austin seeks exhaustively determinable contexts, each centring around a totally self-present and self-transparent intention? He claims earlier in his essay that Austin includes consciousness or intention as one element (and not just one amongst others) in determining the context of a speech-act (LI, 14); and some of Derrida's most sophisticated commentators follow him in this. Henry Staten⁴, for example, refers in more detail to Austin's early identification of three types of necessary condition for the happy execution of a speech-act: the first two types specify that the relevant procedural form must exist, and that it must be correctly and completely executed; the third specifies that we must be sincere where sincerity is called for (have the thoughts, feelings and intentions for which the procedure is designed) and fulfil the commitments we take on in our subsequent conduct. Staten notes that the third type of condition has a peculiar status:

Austin labels them with Greek letter[s]... to indicate that they are of a different type than the first two, and says that they involve the 'implementing' or 'consummating' of the act. The status of [these] conditions... seems to me peculiar; the act has in fact been com-

4 In *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1985) - hereafter WD.

pleted, but not 'consummated'. Yet, however peculiar their status, Austin does not consider them marginal or accessory conditions; on the contrary... When conditions A and B are satisfied, we have only the dead shell of a ritual; [type 3] conditions are its *energeia* or *entelecheia* (as we should translate into formal Aristotelian terms Austin's 'consummation'). (WD, 115)

In subjecting Austin's admittedly peculiar choice of imagery to the further stress of translation into Aristotelian terminology, Staten does not exactly heed Austin's quickly delivered warning that they 'will not bear very much stressing' (HDTW, 16-17). And he passes over (as does Derrida) Austin's initial or primary explanation of the difference (what he calls 'the first big distinction') between the first two and the third types of condition.

If we offend any against any of the former rules (A's or B's) - that is, if we, say, utter the formula incorrectly, or if, say, we are not in a position to do the act... then the act in question... is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved. Whereas in the two [type 3] cases the act *is* achieved, although to achieve it in such circumstances, as when we are, say, insincere, is an abuse of the procedure. (HDTW, pp 15-16)

As Cavell emphasizes, this seems the very reverse of making the category of intention or consciousness the organizing centre of the analysis of performatives. The distinction as Austin marks it is rather intended to register the fact that (at least in certain major categories of performative) intention is inessential in determining whether a performative is in effect.

Setting aside Derrida's diagnosis of Austin's second exclusion, what are we to say about his sense of the depth to which Austinian accounts of speech-acts are and must be marked by that rejection? Here, Cavell is rather inclined to think of the paper on 'Pretending' to which Austin is implicitly referring as at least representing the standing possibility that an Austinian approach to language might very naturally explore such literary iterations as part of its broader investigation into what it is to say, or not quite to say, something. If such an analysis can be done for 'pretending', why not for the concepts from which Austin there distinguishes it, and to which he links it? Hence for Cavell, Derrida goes awry here in assuming too quickly that this second exclusion is a necessary law of Austinian ordinary language philosophy as such - in, as it were, conflating Austin and his method. The key question is thus not whether Austin's understanding of this feature of language has gone awry, but why - given that it need not have done so - it nevertheless does.

Cavell's answer importantly turns on his view of the significance of the feature of language that Austin's second gesture excludes. For the fact that human utterances can suffer iteration or imitation betokens their essential vulnerability to

insincerity, and so reminds us that we may never know whether they have so succumbed - thus pointing us in the direction of scepticism; and Cavell has argued extensively elsewhere that Austin's treatment of scepticism is fundamentally inadequate - that he is unwilling or unable to regard philosophical scepticism as a serious intellectual stance (perhaps because, so often in modern philosophy after Kant, it is not serious). Without broaching the details of that material here, it means for Cavell that Austin will have been prone to take such familiar philosophical cautions as 'But how do you know you weren't hallucinating, or that the person wasn't feigning or acting?', perhaps issued in response to his own analyses, not as the expression of a serious human anxiety about the accessibility of reality or the genuineness of action, but as flippant attempts to ward off the truly serious implications and commitments of ordinary speech and action.

Austin adverts to, and diagnoses, such unserious understandings of serious speech at the outset of his book, towards the end of the first lecture; it provides what one might think of as the immediate context within which he lays out his general theory with its exclusionary gestures.

Surely the words [of performatives] must be spoken 'seriously' and so as to be taken 'seriously'? This is, though vague, true enough in general - it is an important commonplace in discussing the import of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem. But we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe... that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance. (HDTW, 9)

Austin takes delight in showing the moral as well as the intellectual cost of this unserious interpretation of seriousness; for he presents it as preparing the ground for an attempt to downgrade public deeds in favour of private spiritual motions, which can then provide 'the bigamist with an excuse for his "I do", and the welsher with a defence for his "I bet"'. Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*' (HDTW, 10).

However, in so doing, Austin is led to cite Hippolytus' famous declaration 'My tongue swore to, but my heart did not' as an example of such immorality - thereby forgetting that Hippolytus does not use his words to excuse breaking his word, but is rather incapable of so doing, and thereby brings doom to himself and those he loves most. 'So that, in drawing, on the basis of the *Hippolytus*, the moral that *our word is our bond*, Austin rather fails to appreciate the case in which that motto is more a curse than a sensible maxim' (CPV, 101). It then becomes a question of much moment, and of no little difficulty, for Cavell to determine the causes and the consequences of this failure.

Has not Cavell's recontextualisation of Austin, then, simply returned us to Derrida's original criticism, revealing once again Austin's insensibility to language in its literary iterations? The difference is that, where Derrida implies that any Austinian conception of ordinary language will be marked by its exclusion of literary iteration as abnormal or parasitic, Cavell distinguishes between Austinian conceptions of ordinary language and Austin's own, and (within the latter) between deafness to the literary as such, an overly-general resistance to certain localised citations of literariness and the repression of a specific feature of a specific literary text. Which approach suggests the closer attentiveness to Austin's text? Towards the end of his remarks on Austin's exclusions, Derrida asserts that '[a] reading of the connotations, this time, of Austin's text, would confirm the reading of the descriptions; I have just indicated its principle' (LI, 18). Cavell's work on its connotations suggests rather that the principle Derrida imputes to Austin's text is a product of his inattentiveness to its contexts.

2) *Philosophy's rigour*

We can begin to turn our attention from Austinian to Wittgensteinian inflections of the concept of the ordinary by picking out one final strand of Cavell's response to Derrida on Austin. It concerns Derrida's general characterization of the identity of any signifying form:

Why is this identity paradoxically the division or dissociation of itself, which will make of this phonic sign a grapheme? Because this unity of the signifying form only constitutes itself by virtue of its iterability. (LI, 10)

What puzzles Cavell is the way the first of these sentences takes the not-unfamiliar paradox of identity (that two things can be the same thing), in its application to language, as a question of animism and pathos (of something's being dissociated from itself). Cavell would himself be inclined to express the idea in Derrida's second sentence as follows: 'If the signifying form weren't recognized to recur, it wouldn't be a signifying form. It follows that "before" the recurrence (in writing the occurrence (in sound, in the mouth), whatever particular it was, was not a signifying form. Where is the paradox?' (CPV, 71). Everything turns here on the quotation marks Cavell finds himself placing around 'before' - signifying his suspicion of the (chrono)logical turn implicit in Derrida's animism. Recurrence or iterability cannot amount to a signifying form's self-division or self-dissociation, as if introduced into something undivided or integral - what one

might call the signifying form in its original purity; for if that 'something' was not always already iterable in the relevant way, it would not be a signifying form.

One might say that Derrida's idea of self-dissociation makes sense only insofar as we think of recurrence or iterability as something belated or secondary, as if signifying forms (say, universals) are what material marks or sounds (say, particulars) become - as if all that (really or originally) exists are particular, perhaps material, things. Only then can iterability appear as a paradoxical fissioning of unity into multiplicity, rather than as internal to the kind of unity or identity a signifying form necessarily possesses. As Cavell puts it:

Derrida's sense of the 'paradoxicality' in this 'unity' [of the signifying form] seems to insist on the pathos of the philosophical view of language that he combats... [H]ow otherwise does the sense of paradox arise?- as if the orthodox thought of a 'signifying form' is, again, what Locke expresses by assuming that 'all things that exist are particulars'. (CPV, 72-3)

We might think of this as one example of a more general Austinian and Wittgensteinian suspicion of Derrida's relation to the philosophical traditions he engages with - an expression of the sense that his sense of the paradoxicality of his own discoveries is essentially parasitic upon the discoveries announced or assumed in the philosophical texts he undertakes to read with and against the grain. This is, of course, a hugely delicate matter, not easily handled in a small compass, and one to which Derrida's most acute commentators are not insensitive. Turning once again to Henry Staten, we find an explicit acknowledgement of deconstruction's ineliminable indebtedness to the traditions it interrogates. Discussing Derrida's general deployment of the notion of a constitutive outside (exemplified in his suggestion that iterability, excluded by Austin as an accident exterior to felicitous speech acts, is in fact an interior and positive condition of their possibility), Staten in effect poses Cavell's query:

The question still remains as to whether such a paradoxical-sounding formulation as this makes sense, or whether the sense that it makes is worth making in such a peculiar fashion. Can it not be stated in more commonsense and less jarring terms? I believe it cannot. To do so would be to lose the connection with the philosophical tradition and with what has been positively established by that tradition. Derrida does not want to deny the self-identity of concepts or of entities-as-given-to-knowledge; he only denies what we could call the impermeability of the as-such, the transcendental or logical superhardness of the barrier that marks off the conceptual purity of X from everything that is not-X. It is not that identity is drowned in otherness, but that it is *necessarily* open to it, contaminated by it. Yet the necessity or essential character of this contamination cannot be named unless we first grasp the concept of essence or form as purity, as pure positive self-identity. Otherwise there is nothing to contaminate, or the force of the contamination is not felt. Furthermore, the claims of positive self-identity are undeniable. The Now cannot

be reduced to the not-now. Its essential linkage with the not-now compromises the purity of its positive identity without destroying it. (WD, 18-19)

In the context of a debate in which deconstructive readings of Austin and Searle make much of their talk of parasitism, anomaly and impurity, it is striking to see how far the movement of this deconstructive reading is governed by ideas of contamination and impurity. Perhaps its author would say that deconstruction shows these ideas to be inseparable from the philosophical tradition's positively established conception of conceptual self-identity, and hence as no more to be denied than that conception itself. But can one deny, as Staten claims that we must (following Derrida) deny, the impermeability, transcendental and superhardness of a concept's identity with itself, and still think of that self-identity as contaminated or rendered impure by that from which it is non-transcendentally distinguished? Staten tells us that we cannot even name this contamination 'unless we first grasp the concept of essence or form as purity, as pure positive self-identity', but does not the deconstructive denial of the superhardness of a concept's boundaries amount to a subversion of the ideal of a *purely* positive self-identity, 'without which there is nothing to contaminate (or the force of the contamination is not felt)? When Staten asserts that 'the claims of positive self-identity are undeniable', does he mean to distinguish the claim of positive self-identity from that of pure positive self-identity (perhaps according to whether or not the claim implies a transcendental or superhard barrier between X and not-X), or is he conflating them? Which idea of self-identity 'has been positively established by [the philosophical] tradition' (and has it been [merely] positively established, or purely positively established)? To move without warning or apparent consistency between talk of purely positive concepts and of (merely) positive ones effaces in advance any possibility of distinguishing between what Austin and Wittgenstein would call ordinary or everyday (say, non-transcendental or permeable) concepts and their philosophical appropriations or sublimations.

In an important sense, however, Staten's remarks about rejecting superhard conceptual boundaries without rejecting conceptual boundaries as such are more responsive to the real complexity of this philosophical moment than are some of the remarks to which Derrida finds himself driven in the aftermath of his debate with Searle, when - in the Afterword to *Limited Inc* - he replies to a number of questions posed by his translator. To the first such question, which asks whether concepts like intention are made to seem vulnerable by being identified with metaphysical claims that they need not entail, Derrida offers the following response:

Every concept that lays claim to any rigour whatsoever implies the alternative of 'all or nothing'. Even if in 'reality' or in 'experience' everyone believes he knows that there is never 'all or nothing', a concept determines itself only according to 'all or nothing'. Even the concept of 'difference of degree', the concept of relativity, is, qua concept, determined according to the logic of all or nothing, of yes or no: differences of degree or nondifferences of degree. It is impossible or illegitimate to form a *philosophical concept* outside this logic of all or nothing. But one can... think or deconstruct the concept of concept otherwise, think a *différance* which would be neither of nature nor of degree, and of which I say... that they are not entirely words or concepts. But it is true, when a concept is to be treated as a concept I believe that one has to accept the logic of all or nothing. (LI, 116-7)

Although in the middle of this passage Derrida suddenly restricts his claim about the subjection of concepts to an 'all or nothing' logic to the concepts of philosophy, the context provided by the rest of the passage - with its talk of 'every concept that lays claim to any rigour whatsoever', and of 'concepts treated as concepts' - determines that his claim about philosophical concepts (like his earlier claim about concepts as employed in [ordinary?] reality or [everyday?] experience) is a specific application of what he takes to be a more general principle or law. One might say: the passage as a whole propounds as a principle or law that the only alternative to conceptual rigour understood as 'all or nothing' is not, say, a desublimated or detranscendentalized notion of rigour, but no rigour whatsoever.

Derrida's annunciation of this law contextualizes, and gives a very particular inflection to, one of his most outraged complaints (later in the same essay) about Searle. Citing Searle's claim that Derrida assumes (like a good logical positivist) 'that unless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise, it isn't really a distinction at all', Derrida describes it as 'the most stupefying, the most unbelievable' of all Searle's shocking accusations.

How can one make the demand for 'rigorous and precise' distinction the property of any one school of thought or of any one philosophical style? What philosopher ever since there were philosophers, what logician ever since there were logicians, what theoretician ever renounced this axiom: in the order of concepts..., when a distinction cannot be rigorous or precise, it is not a distinction at all. (LI, 123)

If the sole alternative Searle could envisage to rigorous and precise distinctions were vague and imprecise ones, then Derrida's outrage might be well-directed. But we know from the previous passage that, on Derrida's own account, distinctions can be rigorous and precise only if they obey the logic of 'all or nothing'; and it is at least plausible to think that Searle, as familiar with Wittgenstein's 'school of thought' as he is with Austin's, is here claiming that Derrida is

prone to overlook the possibility that conceptual rigour can be attained and maintained outside the sway of this logic.

Here is a sequence of passages from Wittgenstein⁵ that might have helped Derrida to contextualize Searle's claim otherwise:

Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything with it. But is it senseless to say: 'Stand roughly there'?

I say 'There is a chair'. What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight? - 'So it wasn't a chair, but some kind of illusion'. - But in a few moments we see it again and are able to touch it and so on. - 'So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion'. - But suppose that after a time it disappears again - or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases - rules saying whether one may use the word 'chair' to include this kind of thing? But do we miss them when we use the word 'chair'; and are we to say that we do not really attach any meaning to this word, because we are not equipped with rules for every possible application of it?

...[And] what does a game look like that is everywhere bounded by rules? Whose rules never let a doubt creep in, but stop up all the cracks where it might? - Can't we imagine a rule determining the application of a rule, and a doubt which it removes - and so on?

But isn't ['Stand roughly here'] inexact? - Yes; why shouldn't we call it 'inexact'? Only let us understand what 'inexact' means. For it does not mean 'unusable'. And let us consider what we call an 'exact' explanation in contrast with this one. Perhaps something like drawing a chalk line round an area? Here it strikes us at once that the line has breadth. So a colour-edge would be more exact. But has this exactness still got a function here: isn't the engine idling? and remember too that we have not yet defined what is to count as overstepping this exact boundary; how, with what instruments, it is to be established...

'Inexact' is really a reproach, and 'exact' is praise. And that is to say that what is inexact attains its goal less perfectly than what is more exact. Thus the point here is what we call 'the goal'. Am I inexact when I do not give our distance from the sun to the nearest foot, or tell a joiner the width of a table to the nearest thousandth of an inch?

No *single* ideal of exactness has been laid down; we do not know what we should be supposed to imagine under this head - unless you yourself lay down what is to be so called. But you will find it difficult to hit upon such a convention; at least any that satisfies you. (PI, 71, 80, 84, 88)

If what is said here captures the logic of 'exactness', it will also characterize that of precision and of rigour; but the exactness, precision and rigour of that logic is very much not 'all or nothing'. (Is Wittgenstein's chair without doubt a chair, or nothing like a chair? Is the degree of its difference, or nondifference, from ordinary chairs determinately calibrated in advance? Does his capacity to

5 *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell: Oxford, 1953) - hereafter PI.

imagine such differences render our ordinary talk of chairs imprecise?) The Fregean (and Derridean?) idea of conceptual determinacy misrepresents the ordinary or everyday rigor and precision of concepts, proposing an ideal or law which is at once inaccurate (in repressing or annihilating the plurality of standards of conceptual precision and rigour), idle (being unnecessary for such concepts to fulfil their various purposes), pernicious (in its denial of the world's unruliness and of the unforeseeability of a word's possible futures within it) and incoherent (imagining it possible to mean something by the phrase 'all possible contexts of a word's application'). To take this stretch of Wittgenstein's thought seriously would mean acknowledging that to attribute the logic of 'all or nothing' to all concepts *qua* concepts is not to characterize their essence but to sublime it.

3) Wittgenstein's child

The attractiveness of Wittgenstein as a further or alternative participant in the discussion begun by Derrida's and Cavell's essays on Austin and Searle can be made more salient in a number of ways - even if we restrict ourselves to the perhaps over-familiar words of the opening section of the *Investigations*. To begin with, it is worth remarking that the first words of that section, and hence of the book, are a citation of another's words - another in whom Derrida has shown an interest elsewhere⁶; and that citational gesture embodies a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, detached from their textual and cultural context, Augustine's words can appear utterly unremarkable to readers accustomed to contextualize Wittgenstein's text as inheriting the philosophical tradition of Frege and Russell, and hence can make Wittgenstein's citation of them appear utterly remarkable. Why, one might say, choose to cite a handful of sentences relating Augustine's brief and apparently casual reminiscences of an early stage of his initiation into language, rather than sentences from other authors (perhaps even other sentences from the same author) whose interest in language is more self-evidently philosophical or philosophically relevant? So taken, Wittgenstein's gesture questions this sense of self-evidence, implying that, if these words of Augustine require a philosophical response from him, then we cannot say in advance that any uses of words - and hence any aspects of human culture and experience - are beyond (his conception of) philosophy's interest.

On the other hand, the very act of citing a passage from another's text necessarily points one's reader towards the uncited remainder of that text; encountering

6 In 'Circumfession', in: G.Bennington and J.Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993).

those words in their new context thereby invites us to reconsider the relation between them and their old context. So taken, Wittgenstein's gesture might be taken to ask whether the first nine books of the *Confessions* (from the first of which the cited sentences come) can rightly be assumed to form a self-evidently non-philosophical prologue to its concluding four self-evidently philosophical books, or whether such a dichotomous characterisation would misrepresent the structure of their original context, which might rather be taken (for example) as implying that Augustine's culminating metaphysical questions are invited or even made unavoidable by his autobiographical exercises. Their citation might then imply that Wittgenstein similarly envisages the autobiographical as tending towards the philosophical, that he has an interest in (at least one version of) the idea that the autobiographical is a means of access to, even a medium of, the philosophical. Derrida's remarks about the quasi-structure of iterability that underlies what he calls the possibility and impossibility of citation would suggest that we need not and should not choose between these possibilities. Need we, or should we, choose to think that it was beyond Wittgenstein to have wished to make use of this effect of iterability?

Re-reading Derrida's reply to Searle's reply to 'Signature Event Context' in this context, I was particularly struck by Searle's choice (and Derrida's re-examination) of the example of a shopping list (*Limited Inc*, pp 49-50). For of course, Wittgenstein's first response to the picture of language that he claims to read in the words of Augustine that he cites is to tell a tale involving a shopping list.

Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked 'five red apples'. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked 'apples'; then he looks up the word 'red' in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers - I assume that he knows them by heart - up to the word 'five' and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer. - It is in these and other ways that one operates with words. (PI, section 1)

I believe that it continues to be taken as self-evident that Wittgenstein means this tale to be an unquestionable invocation of our ordinary life with words, to be placed in opposition to Augustine's unquestionable misrepresentation of that life - that this shopping trip is an unremarkable and exemplary instance of what his philosophizing thinks of as ordinary language. It must not be denied that his counter-tale makes evident differences in the ways colour words, number words and nouns can be employed which are repressed in Augustine's tale. But it cannot simply be maintained that Wittgenstein's counter-tale is a paradigm of ordinarieness in any simple sense. For when did any of us last observe anyone attempt to

buy apples by mutely presenting a shopping list to the shopkeeper? When did we last go shopping in a store where the shopkeeper keeps his fruit in drawers, employs a sample chart when selecting amongst them by colour, and counts aloud as he deposits each apple in his customer's bag? For Wittgenstein to present such a surreal episode as an unremarkable example of the way we operate with words is surely to place any simple concept of everyday human transactions under intolerable strain. But if nothing could be more extraordinary than this scene of supposedly ordinary life, what might Wittgenstein's idea of the ordinary actually amount to?

My suggestion is that the extraordinariness of this scene of shopping is in fact designed to register that Wittgenstein conceives of the ordinary not as immune to, and hence as available as a simple counterweight to, philosophical appropriations and sublimations, but as inherently vulnerable to them. For when his interlocutor resists his brusque assertion that the shopkeeper understands the words he operates with, the cast of her questions ("how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?") implies that only answers invoking inner, mental operations corresponding to his behaviour could confer understanding and hence significance upon it. But such mental operations are typically imagined as internalized versions of the kind of processes of comparison and correlation that the shopkeeper goes through publically in Wittgenstein's counter-tale; and this has a double implication.

First, it implies that the interlocutor's doubts about the shopkeeper's understanding are groundless (for if internal versions of those operations would remove her doubts, why should the publicness or externality of the operations he actually performs raise any such doubts in the first place - unless they are motivated by attributing magical powers to the sheer fact of interiority?). Second, if the shopkeeper's surreal, oddly mechanical way with words amounts to an externalized representation of the way Wittgenstein's interlocutor imagines the inner life of all ordinary language-users, it thereby shows us how surreal and oddly mechanical our picture of the inner life of human beings actually is, and thus reveals itself as not so much a depiction of how Wittgenstein imagines ordinary life, but as a realization of what he takes to be one of our fantasies of it. And if the drawers and tables of his grocer's shop reflect the architecture and furnishings of the mental theatre we attribute to ourselves, and the robotic, chanting shopkeeper is the homunculus who occupies its stage, then if we, as readers, happily accept Wittgenstein's apparent invitation to regard this tale as an episode from ordinary life and proceed to berate his interlocutor for failing to do likewise, we are at once participating in the very confusions that we are so quick to condemn in others, and revealing the ways in which the realm of the ordinary (on Wittgen-

stein's conception of it) can prove vulnerable to philosophical depredations as well as providing a means of overcoming them.

So much for the shopkeeper; what, however, of the shopper? I have suggested that we do not typically think of shopping-lists as made for use as an alternative to speech; we rather think of them as more commonly employed in conjunction with further words, for example as an aide-memoire for conversational exchanges with shopkeepers. Are there, nevertheless, ways of imagining Wittgenstein's scene as ordinary or everyday? One way would be to imagine the shopper (and the elder who sent him) as mute, without the ability to speak. Since there is no necessity to think of their muteness as a loss (no need to imagine that they once possessed the capacity to speak and then were deprived of it), why should their way of using the shopping list be thought of as anything other than ordinary for them? After all, such perhaps untypical ways of operating with words can achieve their goal (the shopper will get the apples for his elder), and their success depends upon exploiting perfectly ordinary aspects of the powers of words; ordinary words, we might say, just are so made as to be usable in such ways. Certain paths of thought open up here, perhaps to be followed out elsewhere.

Here, I want to open up another path, another way of imagining an ordinary or everyday context for Wittgenstein's scene. For if we recall that his tale is meant to counter Augustine's tale of childhood, it might strike us that Wittgenstein's words describe a child sent on an errand. (Indeed, thinking again about the fairy-tale quality of the shopkeeper's arrangements and actions, quite as if he is inhabiting a child's fantasy of a grocer's shop, we might further ask: is the child's parent actually sending him to the local store, or rather participating in a game the child is playing with a friend, one playing at being the customer and the other the shopkeeper? Yet further paths of thought open up here, which I cannot now follow out.) In effect, then, where Augustine's elders display little interest in teaching him how to speak (his tale rather suggesting that he was left to work the matter out for himself), Wittgenstein's child has elders who are fully engaged in the task of initiating him into language, and do so by encouraging the child to play a part in their life with words.

Is such a child 'really' or 'properly' buying groceries, or is he 'really' 'only' playing at doing so? Is playing at something a matter of pretending to do it, or of making believe that one is doing it (a matter of deception, or of suspending disbelief)? Is playing at shopping not really shopping (perhaps even 'in a peculiar way hollow or void... language... used not seriously, ...parasitic... [an] etiolation' [HDTW, p 22])? Clearly, understanding Wittgenstein's child means taking a very different path across the field of concepts with which the debates between Austin, Derrida, Searle and Cavell have concerned themselves. Suppose, provisionally to

re-open these exchanges, we hypothesize⁷ that the child's willingness to play expresses his knowledge that he will be an adult and his desire to be an adult, that it signifies his wanting to do the things we do together with his knowledge that he can't as yet quite do them. Then we might say that playing at shopping is a serious business both for the child and for its elders; and we might further say that, according to Wittgenstein's counter-tale, inheriting language is a matter of inheriting a willingness to play with words, of acknowledging words as themselves playful.

The scope and ramifications of this idea of play towards and in language are in question throughout the remainder of the *Investigations*. Even staying within the first section, however, we can say that its future elaborations are inflected by its encoding of Wittgenstein's apparent response to Augustine's portrait of the relation between language and desire. Augustine's child plainly acquires the impression that language as such is an instrument for the communication and satisfaction of desire; he depicts the world of his elders as pervaded with desire - as a realm in which human beings struggle to seek and have what they want, and to reject or avoid what they do not want. Wittgenstein's counter-tale does not exactly contest this: his child is, after all, acting as a messenger for one elder's linguistic expression of desire to another, and will presumably act as a messenger for the other's attempt to satisfy it - and one of our earliest stories (a story from the book with which Augustine ends the *Confessions* by occupying himself) links apples with desire. On the other hand, what one might call the sheer ordinariness of the adult exchange this child facilitates, its quotidian sense that the elder's investment in his desire for an apple allows for the possibility of the shopkeeper's inability to satisfy it, seems to lack the background (perhaps metaphysical, perhaps spiritual) of a world of unceasing, desirous struggle conjured up so effectively by Augustine - a world of original sinfulness delivered over to its own reproduction, as children imbibe their elders' enacted conception of words as instruments of self-satisfaction.

It is as if Wittgenstein wishes to drive a wedge between the idea of a connection between language and desire, and Augustine's idea of that connection. Since Wittgenstein's tale variously implies that the inheritance of language is emblematic of human maturation, that this inheritance depends upon the child's willingness to desire it and to use it to give expression to its own desires, and that play is its primary mode of acquisition, one might say that, for him, to acquire language is to participate in the play of human desire. But by dissociating himself from Augustine's visions of language users as submitting to the need to submit the

7 Adapting related thoughts of Cavell's - cf. *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1979), p 176.

world to their will, he also implies that human desire is distinguishable from, say, need or fixation - that the play of words can allow us to see beyond an inability to accept the world's independence from our will.

Take the evident but unacknowledged surreality of the shopkeeper as designed to reveal our capacity to take what is utterly extraordinary as ordinary, and the evident but unacknowledged familiarity of the shopper as designed to reveal our capacity to take what is ordinary as utterly extraordinary. Is this an ordinary, an everyday or familiar, notion of the ordinary? Is it Austin's? It does not seem that one can simply say of it, as Derrida says of Austin's, that it has 'metaphysical origins' (*Limited Inc*, p.18) - at least, not without acknowledging Wittgenstein's own implicit acknowledgement that metaphysics originates in opposition to, and hence is always already capable of marking, the ordinary. How, then, might one proceed with a deconstructive reading of a text which persists in seeing instruction for philosophy in the concept of the ordinary despite or beyond such an acknowledgement of its treacherousness?

James Conant

A prolegomenon to the reading of later Wittgenstein

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 I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now.

Wittgenstein¹

.... Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

W. B. Yeats²

My aim in this paper will be to highlight some continuities in Wittgenstein's philosophy that I believe have not been sufficiently appreciated. My aim in doing so is not to suggest that there are no significant differences between the philosophies of the early and the later Wittgenstein, but only that we will not be in a position to appreciate what *is* genuinely new and original in Wittgenstein's later philosophy until we are first in a better position to appreciate what is not.

Most commentators approach Wittgenstein's early work with deeply rooted assumptions about the sorts of doctrines that are to be found in it: The guiding exegetical presupposition on the part of most commentators is that the central views of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are precisely the ones which Wittgenstein is most concerned to criticize in *Philosophical Investigations*.³ Commentators, accordingly, approach the early work determined to find the relevant (especially, mentalistic) doctrines espoused somewhere within its pages, for the shape of their narrative of Wittgenstein's overall intellectual development requires that such views be there somewhere.⁴ (It is noteworthy in this regard that most of the commentators who furnish such readings of Wittgenstein's early work do so in

1 *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.7.

2 *The Circus Animals' Desertion*, in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, edited by Richard J. Finneran (New York: MacMillan, 1983); pp. 347-8. I am indebted to T. P. Uschanov for this epigraph.

3 A number of people have pointed out that this exegetical procedure has led to catastrophic misreadings of the *Tractatus*. On this topic, see, for example, Warren Goldfarb's "I Want You to Bring Me a Slab", (*Synthese* 56, 1983); especially pp.265, 281 n2; and H. O. Mounce's "Philosophy, Solipsism and Thought" (*The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 186, January, 1997), especially pp. 4-5.

4 See note 46 for a brief discussion of an instance of this phenomenon.

the early chapters of book-length narratives that aspire to explain Wittgenstein's later criticisms of philosophy by furnishing illustrations of its targets purportedly drawn from the early work.) This has led to the attribution of a great many views to the *Tractatus* which come in for criticism not only within the pages of the *Tractatus* itself, but which are subject to vehement and devastating criticism already in the writings of Frege. The irony of this situation is further intensified, if one comes to appreciate that these same pages from Frege's writings constitute a decisive (perhaps the single most important) influence on the early Wittgenstein, just because of the exceptional degree to which early Wittgenstein appreciated the devastating character of these criticisms; and these same pages of Frege also form perhaps the single most important target of the *Tractatus*, just because Wittgenstein thought that even "the great works of Frege" failed to think these criticisms all the way through – failed (to borrow a phrase of Wittgenstein's) "to carry [them] out strictly".⁵ Moreover, the views in question (so often attributed to early Wittgenstein and so severely criticized by Frege) are ones which – even if they are not held by either Frege or early Wittgenstein – very widely held by a great many other philosophers, thus leaving it something of a mystery why Wittgenstein would wish the notoriously difficult pages of his *Tractatus* (a book about which he himself declared: "Nobody will understand it; although I believe it's all as clear as crystal"⁶) to be bound together in a single volume with the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*, and why he would say – as he does in the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations* – that "the latter could be seen in the right light only against the background of my old way of thinking." Why "only against the background of my old way of thinking", if the doctrines buried in the difficult pages of the *Tractatus* represent confusions easily found in the less difficult writings of a great many other philosophers?

This strategy of approaching Wittgenstein's early work with a set of assumptions about what *must* be in that work has led to drastic underestimations not only of the philosophical aspirations of that work, but equally of those of his later work. For in underestimating the philosophical achievement of the early work one underestimates the depth at which the investigations in the later work are prosecuted. If much of what is credited as the achievement of Wittgenstein's later work is anticipated, if not already transcended, in Wittgenstein's early work, and

5 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §5.64. All subsequent unspecified references to a section number are to the *Tractatus*. Quotations from the *Tractatus* will be drawn from either the Pears and McGuinness translation (Routledge: London, 1981) or the Ogden translation (also Routledge: London, 1981), or some emendation or combination thereof.

6 Letter to Russell, 13.3.19; *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p. 68.

if it is, nonetheless, true that his later work marks a significant break from his early work, then it still remains for us to inquire: Wherein does that break consist?⁷

The presence of the "only" in Wittgenstein's remark in the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations* – about how the new way of thinking is to "be seen in the right light *only* against the background of my old way of thinking" – suggests that, if we want to see his new way of thinking in the right light, we need first to see it against the background of features of his "old way of thinking" that he takes to be *peculiar* to that way of thinking. Which features of his old way of thinking are at issue here? And how do they serve to form the background against which his new way of thinking can be seen in the right light? Are they features of his old way of thinking that he takes to be mistaken in a respect peculiar to that way of thinking? Or are they ones that he takes to be essentially correct in a respect peculiar to that way of thinking? Is what is at issue here that which he is concerned to inherit or that which he is concerned to repudiate in his old way of thinking?

Both. We can only see what Wittgenstein is most concerned to repudiate in his old way of thinking – and, thereby, what is most original in, and thus peculiar to, that way of thinking – against the background of that which he is most concerned to inherit in his earlier way of thinking. Having failed to identify the latter, we are in no position to identify the former. The aim of this paper is to attempt to bring into focus an aspect of his old way of thinking which is peculiar to, and which he is concerned to inherit from, that way of thinking. It forms a part of that background which, if only we could get it into view, Wittgenstein thought might enable us to see his new way of thinking in the right light, thus enabling us to see what in his old way of thinking he seeks to overcome and thus what in his "new" way of thinking is, indeed, *new*.

The famous penultimate section of the *Tractatus* runs as follows:

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 out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)⁸

7 I do not think that any of the secondary literature on Wittgenstein currently available contains a satisfactory answer to this question.

8 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.54.

Wittgenstein says of Carnap that he failed to understand this passage and therefore failed to understand "the fundamental conception of the whole book".⁹ What did Carnap fail to understand, and how did that failure lead him to misunderstand the fundamental conception of the whole book? We are told in §6.54 that the author's propositions serve as elucidations by *our* – that is, the reader's – coming to recognize them as nonsensical. But how can the recognition that a proposition is nonsense ever elucidate – ever shed light on – anything? Evidently we need a better understanding of how this work thinks about nonsense.¹⁰ This is what the *Tractatus* has to say about what is distinctive about its own conception of nonsense:

Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts. (§5.4733)

Wittgenstein here contrasts a formulation of Frege's¹¹ with one of his own. At first blush, it is hard to see how they differ. The critical difference between Frege's formulation and the one which the *Tractatus* endorses is that the former implicitly distinguishes between those propositions that are legitimately constructed and those that are not, while the latter rejects the idea that there is such a thing as a logically illegitimately constructed proposition: "Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed."

9 "I cannot imagine that Carnap should have so completely and utterly misunderstood the last sentences of the book – and therefore the fundamental conception of the whole book" (Wittgenstein, Letter to Moritz Schlick, August 8, 1932; quoted in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*, ed. M. Nedo & M. Ranchetti (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983); p. 255). For further discussion of this remark, see my "On Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors" (in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, edited by D.Z. Phillips; St. Martins Press: NY, 1995).

10 Ogden mistranslates *unsinnig* in §6.54 as "senseless", and indeed throughout conflates the distinction between *unsinnig* and *sinnlos*. (When I refer in this paper to Wittgenstein on nonsense, my topic throughout will be – unless otherwise stated – what is treated in the *Tractatus* under the rubric of *Unsinn*.) If the propositions of the work were only *sinnlos*, then they would have the same logical status as the propositions of logic (rather than having the same logical status as the "pseudo-propositions" of the philosophers).

11 For Frege's own formulation, see *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, translated by Montgomery Furth (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1967), §32.

I have argued elsewhere¹² that Wittgenstein saw a tension in Frege's thought between two different conceptions of nonsense, which I call the *substantial conception* and the *austere conception* respectively. The substantial conception distinguishes between two different kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense and substantial nonsense. Mere nonsense is simply unintelligible – it expresses no thought. Substantial nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way – it expresses a logically incoherent thought. According to the substantial conception, these two kinds of nonsense are logically distinct: the former is mere gibberish, whereas the latter involves (what commentators on the *Tractatus* are fond of calling) a "violation of logical syntax".¹³ The austere conception, on the other hand, holds that mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is. Along with these two different conceptions of nonsense go two different conceptions of elucidation: according to the substantial conception, the task of elucidation is to "show" something which cannot be said; according to the austere conception, it is to show that we are prone to an illusion of meaning something when we mean nothing. The *Tractatus* is standardly read as championing the substantial conception. This is to mistake the bait for the hook – to mistake the target of the work for its doctrine. On the reading of the *Tractatus* I have defended elsewhere¹⁴, the *Tractatus* is to be seen as resolving the tension in Frege's thought between these two conceptions of nonsense in favor of the austere view.¹⁵

Almost all commentators on the *Tractatus*, either implicitly or explicitly, attribute to that work a commitment to the substantial conception. In seeking to emphasize their differences from one another, proponents of different interpretations of the *Tractatus* will tend to articulate the details of the substantial conception in apparently distinct ways. It may therefore help to distinguish between two (apparently distinct) variants of the substantial conception. I shall term these the

12 See my "The Method of the *Tractatus*" (in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, edited by Erich H. Reck; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [henceforth TM]) from which parts of this paper are drawn.

13 In the entry entitled "Nonsense" in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996; pp. 259-260), Hans-Johann Glock is helpfully explicit in attributing the substantial conception of nonsense to the *Tractatus*.

14 For a fuller discussion, see TM.

15 The claim that the *Tractatus* is to be seen as resolving a tension in Frege's thought (between these two different conceptions of nonsense) raises interpretative questions about how Frege is to be read that cannot be explored here. I mean here to take sides on these questions only in so far as it bears on claims about Wittgenstein and how he read Frege.

positivist variant and the ineffability variant.¹⁶ According to the former variant, violations of logical syntax are a kind of linguistic phenomenon: identifying a violation of logical syntax is a matter of isolating a certain kind of (logically ill-formed) linguistic string. According to the latter variant, a violation of logical syntax is a kind of phenomenon which can transpire only in the medium of thought and necessarily eludes the medium of language. Though proponents of the ineffability variant hold that language is powerless to express such thoughts, they nonetheless deem language an indispensable tool for "conveying" them. They hold that language can "hint" at what it cannot say.¹⁷ The positivist and ineffability variants of the substantial conception therefore appear to differ over where the violation transpires when a transgression of logic occurs – and hence apparently over what the transgression itself really consists in. These two variants of the substantial conception lean towards opposite metaphysical doctrines. The former fits comfortably with the doctrine that the limits of thought cannot outrun the limits of language. The latter presupposes the doctrine that thought not only can but (as putatively evidenced by our capacity to frame in thought such transgressions of logical syntax) demonstrably does outrun these limits.

Most commentators on the *Tractatus* do not explicitly distinguish between these two variants of the substantial conception. Proponents of the ineffability interpretation, however, do seek to distinguish, in some way or other, between what counts for the *Tractatus* as *misleading nonsense* and what counts as *illuminating nonsense*¹⁸. The tendency among commentators who do so distinguish is to characterize misleading nonsense in terms which accord more comfortably with the positivist variant of the substantial conception¹⁹, and to characterize

illuminating nonsense in terms which presuppose the ineffability variant.²⁰ Thus misleading nonsense is characterized as a strictly linguistic affair, while illuminating nonsense is characterized as a vehicle for grasping that which cannot be said. Here is Peter Hacker's description of how illuminating nonsense is supposed to illuminate:

[W]ithin the range of philosophical ... nonsense we can distinguish ... between ... illuminating nonsense and misleading nonsense. Illuminating nonsense will guide the attentive reader to *apprehend what is shown* by other propositions which do not purport to be philosophical; moreover it will intimate, to those who *grasp what is meant*, its own illegitimacy...

[T]he *Tractatus* does indeed consist largely of pseudo-propositions. Of course, what Wittgenstein *meant* by these remarks is, in his view, quite correct, only it cannot be said. Apparently what someone *means* or *intends* by a remark can be *grasped* even though the sentence uttered is strictly speaking nonsense.²¹

Hacker here attributes to the *Tractatus* the idea that there is a kind of thought (a kind of "grasping" or "apprehending" what is "meant" or "intended") which outruns the limits of language.²² This reading of the *Tractatus* invokes the idea of a kind of substantial nonsense – a violation of logical syntax – to solve the problem of how a piece of nonsense can so much as "intend" something (which it fails to say but which the reader is nonetheless "meant" to "grasp"). According to the ineffability variant of the substantial conception, these violations arise through attempts to express fundamental features of the logical structure of language in language.²³ These attempts, as Peter Hacker puts it, "unavoidably

16 I distinguish between these two variants because proponents of the substantial conception tend to present themselves as *prima facie* distinct. As we shall see, however, these variants cannot in the end be clearly distinguished from one another in the manner that I am here pretending that they can be.

17 Some commentators, in their expositions of Tractarian doctrines, simply waver between the positivist and the ineffability variants of the substantial conception of nonsense.

18 And, surely, it is right to think a viable reading of §6.54 requires such a distinction. The question is: how is it to be drawn?

19 I am allowing myself to gloss over certain complexities here. It would be more accurate to say: They waver between characterizing misleading nonsense in terms which accord more comfortably with the positivist variant of the substantial conception and characterizing it in terms which accord more comfortably with the austere conception. Such wavering is, as we shall see, an inescapable feature of the positivist variant. In some cases, however, the waver has an additional source in a commentator's wanting, on the one hand, to be able to maintain that misleading nonsense and illuminating nonsense are logically distinct kinds of nonsense; yet not wanting,

on the other hand, to have all cases of "illuminating nonsense" turn out (along with misleading nonsense) to be (only apparently illuminating) cases of mere nonsense.

20 That their account of *Unsinn* should be thus distributed over these two variants is, as we shall see, unsurprising. It is not uncommon, however, for commentators to hover between the variants even *within* their characterizations of misleading and illuminating nonsense respectively.

21 My emphases; *Insight and Illusion* (Revised Edition, Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 18 - 19, 26.

22 This will not deter Hacker and many other commentators from saying that they agree that, for the *Tractatus*, "the limits of language are the limits of thought". They may attempt to remove the apparent contradiction by explaining that what is thus *meant* or *intended* by nonsense is not, strictly speaking, a "thought" – and thus is not, strictly speaking, "meant" or "intended" either. On the use, on the part of commentators, of such devices for begging the question, see my "The Search for Logically Alien Thought" (*Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, No. 1) *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.

23 Thus Hacker: "Categorical necessities are reflected in the formation-rules of language. Any attempt to express them involves ... the violation of rules of logical syntax" (*op. cit.*, p. 106).

violate the bounds of sense, misuse language, and produce nonsense.²⁴ The rules of logic render the "it" (which such nonsense is attempting to express) unsayable. The logical structure of language keeps us from being able to say "it". When we try, we come out with bits of nonsense. But these bits of nonsense are, nonetheless, useful; they can convey the unsayable thing our words were after but could not reach.

So much, for the moment, for the ineffability variant. Let us now briefly consider the other variant of the substantial conception. One commentator who attributes to Frege a version of the positivist variant is Michael Dummett. There is never any reference in Dummett's exposition of Frege to thoughts which can only be gestured at or to that which Frege's elucidations might be attempting – but failing – to express.²⁵ Yet, in other respects, Dummett's account of substantial nonsense in Frege parallels the account offered by most commentators on the *Tractatus* of what "a violation of logical syntax" consists in. Here is Dummett on Frege's theory of how such violations arise:

[It] is a theory of what expressions can be accepted as significant: only certain functions – those of the appropriate type – can "occur significantly" as arguments of other functions; expressions which violate the theory of types are simply meaningless...

We, therefore, have to have some conception of logical valency, of different categories of expression, governed by rules determining that expressions of certain categories will fit together to form a sentence, while expressions of certain other categories will not.²⁶

Dummett employs here the chemical metaphor of valency: just as certain elements can be combined so as to form a compound while others cannot be so combined, so items of certain logical categories can be combined so as to form a proposition and others cannot be so combined. Underlying this conception of logical valency is the idea that we get a very special kind of nonsense when we abortively attempt to combine incompatible logical items – that is, when we

24 Ibid, p. 21.

25 Dummett himself never, in his discussion on Frege on nonsense, makes an explicit connection between the conception of nonsense he ascribes to Frege and the doctrine that there are things which can be "shown" but not said. But, Dummett's remarks elsewhere (in particular, his responses to related aspects of Geach's work on Frege, his vehement attribution to Frege of the thesis of the priority of thought over language, and his occasional asides about the "self-refuting" character of "the Tractarian doctrine" that there are inexpressible thoughts) leave little doubt that he would not favor the attribution of an ineffability variant of the substantial conception to Frege.

26 *Frege: Philosophy of Language* [henceforth FPL], 2nd edition (Duckworth: London, 1983); pp. 50, 62.

attempt to combine logical items from logical categories which do not fit together. Dummett is certainly right that Frege often speaks in ways which encourage the attribution to him of the view that there are instances of this sort of nonsense. The following three passages furnish some examples of Frege's willingness to talk in these ways:

For not all the parts of a thought can be complete; at least one must be 'unsaturated', or predicative; otherwise *they would not hold together*. For example, the sense of the phrase 'the number 2' *does not hold together* with that of the expression 'the concept prime number' without a link.... [T]hey hold aloof from one another ...; however we put them together, we get no sentence.²⁷

Take the proposition 'Two is a prime number'.... [T]he two parts of the proposition are ... essentially different; and it is important to realize that this difference cuts very deep and must not be blurred. The first constituent 'two', is a proper name of a certain number; it designates an object, a whole that no longer requires completion. The predicative constituent 'is a prime number', on the other hand, does require completion and does not designate an object.... An object, e.g. the number 2, *cannot logically adhere* to another object, e.g. Julius Caesar, without some means of connection. This, in turn, cannot be an object but rather must be unsaturated. A logical connection into a whole can come about only through this, that an unsaturated part is saturated or completed by one or more parts.... Now it follows from the fundamental difference of objects from concepts that *an object can never occur predicatively* or unsaturatedly; and that logically, *a concept can never stand in for an object*. One could express it metaphorically like this: There are different logical places; in some only objects can stand and not concepts, in others only concepts and not objects.²⁸

We can analyze the proposition '3 is a prime number' into '3' and 'is a prime number'. These parts are essentially different: the former complete in itself, the latter in need of completion. Likewise, we can analyze the proposition '4 is a square number' into '4' and 'is a square number'. Now it makes sense to fit together the complete part of the first proposition with that part of the second proposition which is in need of completion (that the proposition is false is a different matter); *but it makes no sense to fit together the two complete parts; they will not hold together*; and it makes just as little sense to put 'is a square number' in the place of '3' in the first proposition.²⁹

In passages of Frege's such as these there is the idea of a kind of nonsense that arises from an impermissible combination of logical categories – a kind of nonsense which results because "it makes no sense to fit together" the parts which we are attempting to combine.

27 My emphases; Frege, *Collected Papers* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1984 [henceforth CP]), p. 193.

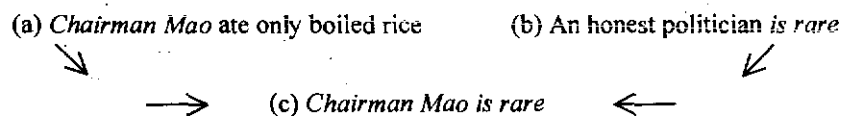
28 My emphases; CP, pp. 281-282.

29 My emphases; Frege, *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1980 [henceforth Corr]), pp. 141-2.

Frege in these passages seeks to draw attention to examples of this kind of nonsense in order to elucidate the distinction between object- and concept-expressions. Such an elucidation can only be conducted in ordinary language. In a proper *Begriffsschrift* such illegitimate combinations can not be constructed. Here is Dummett's account of the kind of nonsense which ordinary language permits but a proper *Begriffsschrift* excludes:

[P]recisely because natural language violates the principle that each expression incomplete in sense must carry with it its argument-place(s), it does become possible within natural language to form meaningless but grammatically correct sentences which violate the distinctions of type and in the symbolic language could not be constructed at all. For instance, the sentence 'Chairman Mao is rare', while perfectly grammatical, is meaningless because 'rare', though in appearance just like a first-level predicative adjective, has the sense of a second-level predicate. The diagnosis and explanation of such failures of significance in natural language can easily be accomplished by reference to the impossibility of constructing a corresponding sentence in the symbolic language.³⁰

Let us consider Dummett's example here.³¹ "Chairman Mao is rare", Dummett says, is meaningless because 'rare' ("though in appearance just like a first-level predicative adjective") here actually expresses a second-level function (a function which takes first-level functions as its arguments). Sentences which involve "such failures of significance" can be constructed in natural language, thus sometimes leading us to mistake sense for nonsense. We are able to see clearly and to explain precisely how a sentence such as the one which figures in Dummett's example involves the particular sort of "failure of significance" it does by reflecting on "the impossibility of constructing" such a sentence (i.e., one which involves the "corresponding" failure of significance) in a proper *Begriffsschrift*. Dummett's picture of why this sentence is nonsense can be illustrated through the following diagram:



The proposal is to combine the underlined portions of propositions (a) and (b) so as to form a third proposition which, if there could be such a proposition,

30 FPL, p. 51.

31 The ensuing discussion of this example is indebted to Chapter 2 of Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*.

would be expressed by (c).³² We attempt to combine the 'Chairman Mao' of (a) [the 'Chairman Mao' that denotes *that* individual] and the 'is rare' of (b) [the 'is rare' that denotes *that* second-level function] and we thus arrive at (c), which, according to Dummett's Frege, is a concrete instance of a special type of meaningless sentence – one which involves a violation of logical category: we have tried to put a proper name into an argument place into which only a first-level function fits. Moreover, what we have here is (alleged to be) a case of *fully determinate* nonsense: (i) it is *logically distinct* from other fully determinate cases of substantial nonsense; (ii) each of the "parts" of this proposition has a *fully determinate sense*; and (iii) though the sense of the resulting whole is flawed, it is flawed in a *determinately specifiable respect* – it involves a determinate kind of "failure of significance" (whereas other cases of substantial nonsense each involve some other equally determinate "violation" of logical principles). That we have here to do with a logically determinate example of nonsense can be seen from the fact that other natural languages, unlike a proper *Begriffsschrift*, permit the construction of substantially nonsensical sentences which "correspond" (in the sort of flawed sense they each possess) to this one. The determinately specifiable respect in which Dummett's case of substantial nonsense possesses a flawed sense is the following: it represents "an attempt" to put *that* proper name into *that* argument place for a first-level function. But it won't fit – (in Frege's words) "the parts cannot logically adhere", "it makes no sense to fit them together", "they will not hold together" – thus we get nonsense; but not mere nonsense, but a special variety of nonsense which arises from attempting to do something logically impossible. Wittgenstein's critique of Frege turns on his critique of this idea – an idea which is common to both the positivist and ineffability variants of the substantial conception: the idea that we can so much as try to put a logical item into an argument place in which it doesn't fit – the idea that we can have a proposition that has a fully determinate kind of sense but the kind of sense that it has is nonsense.

Is it possible to identify an expression as being of a particular logical category if it occurs in the wrong place? It is here, in its response to this question, that the *Tractatus* sees a tension in Frege's view. A number of Frege's doctrines and a great deal of his own methodological practice suggest that the answer to this question should be: No! It is reflection on these aspects of Frege's thought and practice that leads Wittgenstein to embrace the austere conception of nonsense.

32 This way of describing the proposal involves a fudge. It isn't quite correct to say that the proposal is to combine the underlined portions of propositions (a) and (b) since the underlined portion of (b) lacks an argument-place.

Frege warns in "On Concept and Object" (and elsewhere) that the same word in ordinary language can be used in some contexts as a proper name and in others as a concept word. Frege's favorite example of such a word is 'moon'.³³ It can also happen in ordinary language that an object-expression which has *never* been previously used to express a concept can suddenly be used, for the first time, as a concept-expression; and that we can understand what is meant by such an unprecedented usage.³⁴ Frege offers as an example of this sort of creative use of language the lovely sentence "Trieste is no Vienna":

We must not let ourselves be deceived because language often uses the same word now as a proper name, now as a concept word; in our example ["There is only one Vienna"], the numeral indicates that we have the latter; 'Vienna' is here a concept-word, like 'metropolis'. Using it in this sense, we may say: "Trieste is no Vienna".³⁵

In this example, Frege says, we encounter a word which usually functions as a proper name playing the role of a concept-expression. Frege's reading of this sentence is arrived at through reflection upon what possible use this combination of words might have; that is, by asking himself: in what context would one utter such words and what thought would one then be expressing? If we reflect on when we would utter such a sentence and what we might mean by it, Frege suggests, we will see that 'Vienna' here could mean something like 'metropolis' (or perhaps even beautiful or majestic metropolis) – and thus that the sign 'Vienna' used in this way should be expressed in a proper logical symbolism by a completely different kind of symbol than that which we would use to express the occurrence of the word 'Vienna' in the sentence "Vienna is the capital of Austria". Notice that Frege does not conclude that what we have here in his lovely sentence about Trieste is a piece of nonsense – one which results from trying to put a proper name where a concept-expression should go. He concludes instead that what appears in the guise of a concept-expression here *is* a concept-expression –

33 As, for example, in §51 of *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1959 [henceforth *FA*]): "With a concept the question is always whether anything, and if so what, falls under it. With a proper name such questions make no sense. We should not be deceived by the fact that language makes use of proper names, for instance Moon, as concept words, and vice versa; this does not affect the distinction between the two". (*FA*, p. 64)

34 A famous example of a proper name suddenly being used as a concept expression is Lloyd Benton (in the 1988 vice-presidential debate) saying to Dan Quayle: "You're no Jack Kennedy." Benton's point was not that two individuals (Quayle and Kennedy) are not identical, but rather that there is a concept (of, say, exemplary statesmanship) which Quayle does not fall under.

35 *CP*, p. 189.

and then makes a suggestion about what the sentence as a whole might mean (and hence about *which* concept might be meant). Thus Frege's methodology here is to begin with our *understanding* of the proposition as a whole and to use that as a basis for segmenting it into its logically discrete components.³⁶

This raises a question about how Frege's context principle – "never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition"³⁷ – is to be interpreted. Here is how Dummett explains the principle:

[T]he assignment of a sense to a word, whether a name or an expression of any other logical type, only has significance in relation to the subsequent occurrence of the word in sentences.... [A] sentence is determined as true under certain conditions, which conditions are derivable from the way in which the sentence is constructed out of its constituent words; and the senses of the words relate solely to this determination of the truth-conditions of the sentences in which the words may occur.³⁸

This is fine, as far as it goes. But what Dummett says here is consistent with a weaker and a stronger interpretation of the context principle. Dummett himself goes on to expound the principle in such a way as to attribute to Frege (what we shall see to be) the weaker version of the principle. For Dummett, Frege's principle forms part of "a general and systematic account" of the part played by each sub-sentential expression in determining the truth-conditions of each meaningful sentence in which it may appear.³⁹ The meaning of an expression specified by such "a general and systematic account" is the meaning it has even when it occurs in a construction which, as a whole, has no meaning (and hence no truth-conditions). The idea here is that there are (so-called) "general rules" of the language, and it is these rules that determine the meaning of an expression; and the meaning thus determined is the meaning that the expression has, regardless of

36 This is not to say that, in general, any proposal which yields a possible segmentation of a string is equally tenable. In real life cases of interpretation, we are obliged, on the one hand, to make sense of the way a sentence occurs within a larger stretch of discourse. ("Understanding without contextuality is blind.") To commit oneself to a segmentation of the string, on the other hand, is to commit oneself to patterns of inference (see note 126) which are a function of how these words (of which the string is composed) occur in other propositions. ("Understanding without compositionality is empty.") The attribution of the endorsement of inferences of certain patterns to a speaker is governed by those considerations of charity and relevance which govern all aspects of interpretation. These considerations generally uniquely determine a segmentation (and, where not, they at least severely constrain the range of reasonable proposals).

37 *FA*, p. x.

38 *FPL*, pp. 193-4.

39 *FPL*, p. 195.

whether or not the sense of the whole in which the expression in question occurs is nonsense. Since, on this (weaker) way of interpreting Frege's context principle, everything that fixes the meaning of an expression is external to any particular context in which it occurs, it permits the possibility of cases of substantial nonsense – that is, cases in which the general rules of the language fix the meanings of each of the expressions occurring in a nonsensical construction (so that each expression makes a "contribution" to the "meaning" of the whole) even though the resulting whole has no (proper) meaning. The stronger way of interpreting Frege's principle does not permit there to be constructions that have a sense, even though the sense that they have is nonsense. The stronger way of interpreting Frege's principle does not take it merely to be declaring that a word has meaning if it contributes to the sense of any sentence in which it occurs in accordance with certain general rules of the language. Rather it takes it to declare that it is through the sense of the whole, and only through the sense of the whole, that each of the expressions which make up that whole acquire their meaning.⁴⁰

My aim here is not to adjudicate between these two different ways of reading Frege⁴¹, but only to claim that Wittgenstein, first in the *Tractatus* and then later in the *Philosophical Investigations*, subscribes to the stronger version of the principle. That Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, means to be embracing the stronger version – and rejecting the weaker version – of the context principle is precisely what is indicated by the presence of the word "only" in the remark (quoted above) in which he contrasts his own view with that of Frege:

Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (§5.4733)

This second and more severe way of understanding the import of Frege's context principle is developed in the *Tractatus* through its deployment of the distinction between sign [*Zeichen*] and symbol [*Symbol*]. The distinction might be summarized as follows:

40 Indeed, Frege says: "It suffices if the sentence as a whole has a sense; it is through this that the parts also acquire their content." [my translation] *FA*, §60. This would seem to rule out the possibility of the parts acquiring a content despite the fact that the whole lacks a sense.

41 For a reading of Frege along these lines, see Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1991), chapter 3.

- * sign – an orthographic unit, that which the perceptible expressions for propositions have in common (a sign design, inscription, icon, graphème, etc.)⁴²
- * symbol – a logical unit, that which meaningful propositions have in common (i.e. an item belonging to a given logical category: proper name, first-level function, etc.)

Armed with the Tractarian distinction between sign and symbol, we can formulate the contrast between the two conceptions of nonsense (which Wittgenstein sees Frege as torn between) in a more precise manner. To recall, the two conceptions of nonsense were:

- * the substantial conception – which holds that there are two logically distinct kinds of nonsense: *substantial nonsense* and *mere nonsense*
- * the austere conception – which holds that there is, from a logical point of view, only one kind of nonsense: *mere nonsense*

The underlined terms in the above formulations can now be defined as follows:

- * substantial nonsense – a proposition composed of signs which symbolize, but which has a logically flawed syntax due to a clash in the logical category of its symbols
- * mere nonsense – a string composed of signs in which no symbol can be perceived, and which hence has no discernible logical syntax

I have, until now, pretended to be able to distinguish between the positivist and ineffability variants of the substantial conception. But, armed with the distinction between symbol and sign, we can start to see why the distinction

42 For purposes of simplifying the exposition, I have restricted my definition to (what the *Tractatus* calls) "written signs" – the *Tractatus* explicitly allows for "sound signs" (see §3.321) and implicitly for other sorts.

between these two variants is an inherently unstable one.⁴³ Any attempt clearly to articulate the positivist variant will lead to its collapse either into the ineffability variant or into the austere conception. Either the proponent of the positivist variant holds that a violation of logical syntax involves an impermissible combination of symbols or he holds that it involves an impermissible combination of signs. If he holds the former, then the positivist variant collapses into the ineffability variant; if the latter, then he abandons the substantial conception altogether. To take an example of the former case, Dummett's account of "Chairman Mao is rare" teeters throughout on the brink of collapse into a version of the ineffability variant. The items combined in Dummett's example – items which (in Frege's words) "cannot logically adhere", which "it makes no sense to fit together", which "will not hold together" – can not be mere *signs*. For the four signs 'Chairman', 'Mao', 'is', and 'rare' can be combined (as can any four signs). What cannot be combined, says Frege, is that which the signs *symbolize*: items belonging to incompatible logical categories. The expressions of which the example is composed are taken by Dummett to be incompatible (not because of their typographic properties, but) because of what he takes these expressions to symbolize: an object and a second-level function respectively. But if the flaw lies in what is symbolized by the resulting combination, then, it would seem, there is *something* which these words, so combined, symbolize – an "it" which logic debars but which Dummett is nonetheless able to frame in thought and identify as involving a violation of logic. If, on the other hand, the proponent of the positivist variant holds that a violation of logical syntax involves an impermissible combination of (mere) signs, then he teeters on the brink of abandoning the substantial conception altogether (in favor of the austere conception). For if his account of the impermissibility fails to turn on any logical feature(s) of the alleg-

43 My self-defeating exposition of the alleged distinction between the two variants of the substantial conception mirrors, albeit in a highly summary fashion, the first half of the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus*. Half of the central point of the *Tractatus*, on my reading, is to show that once one has bought into the substantial conception one has implicitly committed oneself to a conception on which there are ineffable thoughts – thoughts which we can gesture at (with the aid of nonsensical language) but cannot express in language. (A central part of the interest of Frege's work for Wittgenstein, as he read him, is that Frege recognized and drew this consequence.) The second half of the point of the work is to show that the way to escape this consequence is to abandon the substantial conception of nonsense altogether (not, according to Wittgenstein, an easy thing to do). My exposition of the alleged distinction between the substantial and austere conceptions of nonsense aims to mirror, in equally summary fashion, this second (and largely unnoticed) half of the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus*.

edly impermissible string, then he has deprived himself of the resources requisite for claiming that there are two logically distinct kinds of nonsense.⁴⁴

In order to begin to see why this is so, it will help to look more closely at the distinction between sign and symbol as it is drawn in the *Tractatus*. The distinction is introduced as part of the commentary on §3.3 (which is the *Tractatus's* reformulation of Frege's second principle⁴⁵). §3.3 runs as follows: "Only the

44 The *Tractatus* is not concerned to argue that there are no ways to distinguish between kinds of nonsense – or even that there is no distinction to be drawn in the neighborhood of the distinction sought by the proponent of the substantial conception (i.e. one which marks off cases of "philosophical" nonsense from (other) cases of mere nonsense) – but only that there are no logically distinct kinds of nonsense (or more precisely: that talk of "logically distinct kinds of nonsense" is itself to be recognized as (mere) nonsense). The coherence of the entire procedure of the work, indeed, rests upon the assumption that there is a distinction to be drawn in the neighborhood of the distinction sought by the proponent of the substantial conception; but, as we shall see, the *Tractatus* takes it to turn on psychologically distinct kinds of nonsense. Early Wittgenstein here retains something that the later Wittgenstein comes to view with increasing suspicion: namely, Frege's broad (what we might call) "garbage-can" conception of the psychological (which encompasses everything which does not count, for Frege, as "strictly logical").

45 I say "reformulation of Frege's second principle" (rather than re-statement of it) because the *Tractatus* is concerned to refashion Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. §3.3 is worded as it is precisely in order to mark a departure from Frege in this regard. Just what sort of departure from Frege is here being marked, however, is far less clear (at least to me). In Friedrich Waismann's *Thesen* (which is an attempt to furnish the members of the Vienna Circle with an overview of the main ideas of the *Tractatus*, based on detailed conversations with Wittgenstein), we find the following: "A proposition has *Sinn*, a word has *Bedeutung*" (*Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, edited by Friedrich Waismann; Oxford: Blackwell, 1979). Should this be taken to mean that words do not have *Sinn* or that propositions do not have *Bedeutung*? Enigmatic as this remark may seem, it is straightforward compared to anything to be found anywhere in the *Tractatus* itself on the subject. §3.3 (along with §3.144) does appear to seek to exclude the applicability of *Sinn* to any kind of symbol other than a *Satz*. When read in the light of §3.3, a number of earlier passages (§§3.142, 3.144, 3.203, 3.22) also appear to be worded in a manner suggesting that the overall doctrine of the work indeed is that (at least) *names* – i.e. the constituent parts of a fully analyzed sentence – do not have *Sinn*. The corresponding principle in regard to *Bedeutung* does not obviously hold, however: the application of *Bedeutung* in the *Tractatus* does not appear to be restricted (as the passage from Waismann's *Thesen* might seem to imply) to the sub-judgmental components of propositions. Throughout the *Tractatus*, the term '*Bedeutung*' is employed in a (relatively non-technical) manner so as to suggest that any sign (including a *Satz*, i.e., a propositional sign) with a determinate linguistic function can be said to have a *Bedeutung* (see, e.g., §5.451 for the claim that the negation sign has a *Bedeutung*), and, as such, is to be contrasted only with a sign which has no *Bedeutung* or (as the

proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning." Then, beginning immediately thereafter (with §3.31), comes the following commentary:

Every part of a proposition which characterizes its sense I call an expression (a symbol).

(The proposition itself is an expression.)

Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression.

An expression is the mark of a form and a content.

An expression presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions... (§§3.31-3.311)

An expression has meaning only in a proposition... (§3.314)

I conceive the proposition – like Frege and Russell – as a function of the expressions contained in it... (§3.318)

The sign is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the senses. (§3.32)

Two different symbols can therefore have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common – they then signify in different ways. (§3.321)

It can never indicate the common characteristic of two objects that we symbolize them with the same signs but by different *methods of symbolizing*. For the sign is arbitrary.

We could therefore equally well choose two different signs [to symbolize the two different objects] and where then would remain that which the signs shared in common? (§3.322)

The point of the commentary is in part to clarify the notion of 'proposition' which figures in the context principle (only the *proposition* has sense; only in the context of a *proposition* has a name meaning⁴⁶). The relevant notion is one of a

Tractatus prefers to say) to which no *Bedeutung* has been given (see, e.g., §§5.4733, 6.53).

46 A number of commentators have attributed to the *Tractatus* the view that a special mental act (of intending to mean a particular object by a particular word) is what endows a name with meaning. If textual support for this attribution is adduced at all, it is usually through appeal to texts outside of the *Tractatus*. There is no reference anywhere in the *Tractatus* to such a distinct act of meaning (through which a *Bedeutung* is conferred on a sign). The passage from the *Tractatus* most commonly adduced to provide a semblance of textual support for this psychologistic attribution is §3.11 which Pears and McGuinness translate as follows: "The method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition." So translated, this remark can be taken to refer to an act of thinking and to ascribe an explanatory role to such an act. The Ogden translation is more faithful: "The method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition." Rush Rhees glosses this (quite properly, I think) as: "The method of projection is what we mean by 'thinking' or 'understanding' the sense of the proposition." (*Discussions of Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1970; p. 39). Acknowledging the justice of Rhees's criticism, and finding it more natural in English to place the *explanandum* on the left, McGuinness later recanted his

certain kind of a symbol – not a certain kind of a sign – something which only has life in language.⁴⁷ The sign, Wittgenstein says, "is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the senses" (what is now sometimes called the sign design). The symbol is a logical unit, it expresses something which propositions – as opposed to propositional signs – have in common.⁴⁸ Thus the sentences "Trieste is no Vienna" and "Vienna is the capital of Austria" have the sign 'Vienna' in common. These two sentences taken together offer an instance of what Wittgenstein means when he says (in §3.321) "two different symbols can have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common – they then signify in different ways". The sentences "Trieste is no Vienna" and "Vienna is the capital of Austria" have no symbol in common – all they have in common are the signs 'Vienna' and 'is'.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein argues that there will always be room for a question as to whether a given sign, when it occurs in two different sentences of ordinary language, is symbolizing the same way in each of those occurrences. And this question cannot be settled simply by appealing to the fact that the same word (sign) ordinarily occurs (symbolizes) as a name⁴⁹ (for example, as a name

and Pears's original translation of §3.11 and proposed the following translation instead: "Thinking the sense of the proposition is the method of projection". McGuinness goes on to offer the following lucid summary of the actual point of the passage: "Thinking the sense into the proposition is nothing other than so using the words of the sentence that their logical behaviour is that of the desired proposition" ("On the So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*", in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, edited by Irving Block; Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1981; pp. 69-70).

47 Although the notion of *Satz* which figures in the context principle (only the *Satz* has sense; only in the context of a *Satz* has a name meaning) is of a certain kind of a symbol, the term '*Satz*' in the *Tractatus* floats between meaning (1) a propositional symbol (as, e.g., in §§3.3ff and 4ff) and (2) a propositional sign (as, e.g., in §§5.473 and 6.54). It is important to the method of the *Tractatus* that the recognition that certain apparent cases of (1) are merely cases of (2) be a recognition that the reader achieve on his own. Consequently, at certain junctures, the method of the *Tractatus* requires that the reference of *Satz* remain provisionally neutral as between (1) and (2). At the corresponding junctures in my own discussion, I leave *Satz* untranslated.

48 Wittgenstein's distinction between *propositional sign* and *propositional symbol* parallels the distinction between *string of words* and *proposition* which Geach draws in the following passage:

'Recognizing repeated occurrences of the same proposition is not merely mechanical; the identity of a proposition is not the identity of a string of words. The proposition "Socrates was bald" occurs over again in "Socrates, who taught Plato, was bald", but does not occur in "A philosopher whose teacher was Socrates was bald".' ("Kinds of Statement", in *Intention and Intentionality*, edited by Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1979; p. 221-2)

49 This is not to claim that it is possible to understand a sentence, if none of its constituent signs symbolize in the same manner in which they symbolize in other senten-

of the capital of Austria). How can this question be settled? Wittgenstein says: "In order to recognize the symbol in the sign we must consider the context of significant use" (§3.326). We must ask ourselves on what occasion we would utter this sentence, and what, in that context of use, we would then mean by it. (This is what we saw Frege do in his handling of the example "Trieste is no Vienna".) In asking ourselves this, we still rely upon our familiarity with the way words (signs) ordinarily occur (symbolize) in propositions to fashion a segmentation of the propositional sign in question.⁵⁰ (One standard way of contrasting early and later Wittgenstein is to say that later Wittgenstein rejected his earlier (allegedly truth-conditional) account of meaning – in which considerations of use have no role to play in fixing the meaning of an expression – in favor of (what gets called) "a use-theory of meaning".⁵¹ Our brief examination of §3.326 should already make one wary of such a story.) The point of §3.326 can be brought out by returning to Dummett's example. If, for example, we attempt to provide a context of significant use for "Chairman Mao is rare", it becomes possible to see the symbol in the sign in ways which Dummett does not consider. There are two equally *natural* ways to segment this string: (1) to construe 'Chairman Mao' as

symbolizing a first-level function⁵², (2) to construe 'rare' as symbolizing a first-level function⁵³. These are "natural" ways of "reading" the string because each reading segments the string along lines dictated by an established usage (i.e., an established method of symbolizing by means) of signs.⁵⁴ The expression '___ is rare' has an established use in the language (in sentences such as "An honest politician is rare") as a second-level function; the expression 'Chairman Mao' has an established use in the language (in sentences such as "Chairman Mao ate only boiled rice") as a proper name. Each of these established uses dictates a possible segmentation of the string – each of which excludes the other.⁵⁵ There isn't anything which is simultaneously segmenting the string along both lines at

ces. (Hence *Tractatus*, §4.03: "A proposition must use old expressions to communicate new senses.") It is only to claim that not *all* of the constituent signs must symbolize in a precedented fashion. But an unprecedented usage of a sign will only be intelligible if the constituent signs which symbolize in the "old" manner determine a possible segmentation of the propositional sign – where such a segmentation specifies both (i) the logical role of the sign which symbolizes in an unprecedented manner and (ii) the position of the resulting propositional symbol in logical space (see note 55).

- 50 In the absence of any familiarity with the way words (signs) ordinarily occur (symbolize) in propositions, we would have no basis upon which to fashion possible segmentations of propositional signs, and hence no way to *recognize* (rather than simply fantasize) the symbol in the sign. (This is the situation we find ourselves in when faced with a sentence of a language which we do not know and which does not in the least resemble any which we do know.)
- 51 The popularity of this story rests largely on an additional piece of potted history, according to which the *Tractatus* advances the doctrine that it is possible (and indeed, according to most readings, semantically necessary) to fix the meanings of names prior to and independently of their use in propositions (either through ostensive definition or a through some special mental act which endows a name with meaning). This putative teaching of the *Tractatus* is standardly taken to be the primary target of the opening sections of *Philosophical Investigations*. But the whole point of §3.3-3.344 of the *Tractatus* is that the identity of the object referred to by a name is only fixed by the use of the name in a set of significant [*sinnvolle*] propositions. An appeal to use thus already plays a critical role in Wittgenstein's early account of what determines both the meaning of a proposition as a whole and the meanings of each of its "parts".

- 52 On the model of "You're no Jack Kennedy". On this reading of Dummett's example, the sentence might mean something like "The kind of exemplary statesmanship Chairman Mao exhibited is rare".
- 53 The second reading is more readily available in this case than it might otherwise be for a reason to which Dummett is strangely oblivious: there is already an established English usage in which 'rare' expresses a first-level function (as in "That piece of meat is rare!"). Admittedly, it still requires a bit of a stretch to bring Chairman Mao under *that* concept. But one might try to prepare the way for such a use with: "Chairman Mao is going to get a terrible sunburn [i.e. will soon be well done] if he doesn't come in out of the sun soon!"
- 54 Our established conventions for employing signs *underdetermine* the segmentation of the propositional sign 'Chairman Mao is rare': there is no *single* reading that our established conventions (for employing the signs 'Chairman', 'Mao', 'is', and 'rare') naturally favor. That our established conventions, in this case, favor to an equal degree two alternative readings based upon logically distinct segmentations, will play a crucial role in the Tractarian account of what is (not logically, but rather psychologically) distinctive about cases such as this (of apparently substantial non-sense).
- 55 The segmentation of a propositional sign, for Frege and Wittgenstein, is a function of its position (or better: the position of the proposition it symbolizes) in a network of inferential relations – its position in (what the *Tractatus* calls) logical space. To fix the position of a proposition in logical space is to fix how its logical constituents occur in other propositions. To segment 'Chairman Mao is rare' in accordance with the first proposal is to take it to express a judgment which licenses inferences of certain patterns; e.g., the inference from the conjunction of (1) "Chairman Mao is rare" and (2) "The sort of politician that Dan Quayle is (an example of) is not rare" to (3) "Dan Quayle is no Chairman Mao". To segment 'Chairman Mao is rare' in accordance with the second proposal is, again, to take it to express a judgment which licenses certain inferences of certain patterns; e.g., the inference from the conjunction of (1) "Chairman Mao is rare" and (2) "This steak is rare" to (3) "There are (at least) two things that are rare!". The conjunction of (1) and (2), on the other hand, is logically inert: it licenses no inference because these two propositions have no symbol in common.

once.⁵⁶ Segmenting it either way, we supply a possible context of significant use and thus confer upon the string 'Chairman Mao is rare' a sense. According to the *Tractatus*, until we have done this, we have yet to confer any method of symbolizing on any of the signs which make up the string.⁵⁷

There is here an important continuity in the views of Frege, early Wittgenstein and later Wittgenstein concerning the nature of ordinary language: in ordinary language we are constantly extending the uses of our words and thereby creating new possibilities of meaning for them. The expressions of ordinary language can be – and indeed constantly are – used in logically (later Wittgenstein prefers to say: grammatically) unprecedented yet perfectly intelligible ways. For all sorts of bizarre forms of words for which there is at present no language-game, we can dream up a context of significant use (in Wittgenstein's later idiom: a language-game) in which we would be drawn without loss of intelligibility to call upon that particular form of words.

In §3.326, "the context of significant use" translates *sinnvollen Gebrauch*; "recognize" translates *erkennen*, which might also be translated "perceive". The latter is the same word that occurs in §6.54: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually perceives them as nonsensical." It is a condition of being able to perceive the symbol in the sign that the string in which the sign occurs be *sinnvoll*. To recognize a *Satz* as nonsensical [*Unsinn*] is to be unable to recognize the symbol in the sign. For the

56 Or, to put the point in a way which brings out the incoherence in question more vividly – in Frege's idiom: there isn't anything which is a proposition's simultaneously standing in two logically distinct sets of inferential relations with respect to other propositions – in the idiom of the *Tractatus*: there isn't anything which is a proposition's occupying two different positions in logical space at the same time. "The proposition determines a place in logical space: the existence of such a place is secured through the existence of its constituent parts alone, through the existence of the significant [*sinnvollen*] proposition" (§3.4). The determination of the logical segmentation of a propositional sign (and thus the conferral of a method of symbolizing on each of its constituent signs) is the specification of a determinate position in logical space. If the "proposition" in question is not *sinnvoll* then it determines no place in logical space. Thus one way of putting the illusion which underlies the substantial conception would be to say that it imagines that logical segmentation can proceed outside logical space.

57 Our familiarity with previous occurrences of the expressions 'Chairman Mao' and '_____ is rare' furnish alternative natural proposals (without determining any single proposal) for conferring sense upon the propositional sign "Chairman Mao is rare"; but, according to the *Tractatus*, we only determine the sense of these expressions in a particular occurrence of the propositional sign "Chairman Mao is rare" when we adopt one of these proposals for determining a possible method of logically segmenting the string.

Tractatus, these two forms of recognition eclipse one another. To recognize a *Satz* as nonsensical [*Unsinn*], for the *Tractatus*, is not a matter of recognizing that it is attempting to say something that cannot be said, but rather a matter of recognizing that it fails to say anything at all. Building on Frege's own methodological practice, the *Tractatus* argues that in the case of a piece of nonsense – that is, in the absence of the provision of a context of *sinnvollen Gebrauch*: a possible logical segmentation of the *Satz* – we have no basis upon which to isolate the logical roles played by the working parts of a proposition. One can identify the contribution the senses of the parts of a proposition make to the sense of the whole only if the whole has a sense – if it stands in some identifiable location with respect to the other occupants of logical space. According to the *Tractatus*, there are no examples of a proposition's failing to make sense because its parts do not "fit" together.⁵⁸ Thus there are no examples of the sort Dummett was looking for – examples of putting a proper name where a concept word belongs – for if one can properly make out that what belongs in that place is a concept word, then that is a sufficient condition for treating whatever is in that place as a concept word. There isn't anything, on the conception of nonsense which the *Tractatus* advances, which corresponds to a proposition's failing to make sense because of the meaning which the parts already have taken in isolation.⁵⁹ On the Tractarian conception, the only way a sentence can be *Unsinn* is by its failing to symbolize.⁶⁰ This conception does not rule out the possibility of *Sätze* (such as tautologies and contradictions) which have logical structure and yet are devoid of

58 This Tractarian insight becomes a pervasive theme of Wittgenstein's later thought. Here is a representative example:

'You want to say that the use of the word 'not' does not fit the use of the word 'apple' ... that *apple* is one thing or idea which is comparable to a definite shape, whether or not it is prefaced by *negation*, and that *negation* is like another shape which may or may not fit it... We cannot ask whether the uses of these two words fit, for their use is given only when the use of the whole phrase "not apple" is given. For the use they have *they have together*... [I]f negation is to be defined by its use, it makes no sense to ask whether 'not' fits 'apple'; the idea of fitting must vanish. For the use it has is its use in the combination'. (*Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935*, edited by Alice Ambrose, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1979; pp. 63-64).

59 We can now begin to see how misleading the standard attribution to early Wittgenstein of (what gets called) a "logical atomist theory of meaning" is. It is just such a theory that is under indictment in passages such as §§3.3, 3.314, 3.341 and 3.344.

60 Again, this is the point of the 'only' in "[I]f [a proposition] has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts" [my emphasis] (§5.4733). Most commentary on the *Tractatus*, in attributing to that work the substantial conception of nonsense, leaves that 'only' here looking as if it must be a slip of the pen.

Sinn.⁶¹ It only rules out a sentence's having a fully determinate yet logically impossible sense – a sense that it *cannot* have because of the logically determinate but logically mutually incompatible senses that its parts already have.

Most readings of what the *Tractatus* means by 'nonsense', when it declares in its famous penultimate section that the reader is to recognize its sentences as "nonsense", attribute to the book a doctrine which presupposes just the possibility that the *Tractatus* is most concerned to repudiate: the possibility of identifying the logical category of a term outside the context of legitimate combination – of identifying the manner in which a sign symbolizes in a context in which the reference of the parts of a sentence does not determine the reference of the whole. This repudiation is perhaps most explicit in the series of remarks which lead up to the passage in which Wittgenstein locates the difference between his own conception of nonsense and that of Frege. Here is the full context of that passage:

Logic must take care of itself.

A possible sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted. ("Socrates is identical" means nothing because there is no property which is called "identical". The proposition is nonsensical because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol itself is impermissible.)

In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic. (§5.473)

We cannot give a sign the wrong sense. (§5.4732)

Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given *no meaning* to some of its constituent parts.

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

Thus "Socrates is identical" says nothing, because we have given *no* meaning to the word "identical" as *adjective*. For when it occurs as the sign of equality it symbolizes in an entirely different way – the symbolizing relation is another – therefore the symbol is in the two cases entirely different; the two symbols have the sign in common with one another only by accident. (§5.4733)

These remarks express in an extremely compressed fashion some of the central ideas of the *Tractatus*. Let us begin by looking at the example of *Unsinn* ("Socrates is identical") and the commentary on it which Wittgenstein offers here. It is the sort of combination of words that Dummett might be tempted to analyze as an instance of substantial nonsense – as an attempt to employ the

61 To think that it did would be to lose sight of the distinction between that which is *Unsinn* and that which is *sinnlos*. In order to count as *sinnvoll* a *Satz* has to be able to serve as a vehicle of *communication*: it has to make a *statement* about how things are – it has to *assert* what is the case [*der sinnvolle Satz sagt etwas aus*] (§6.1264). Such a *Satz* is characterized by both a form [*Form*] and a content [*Inhalt*] (§3.31). A *Satz* which is *sinnlos* possesses a (logical) form but no content. *Unsinn*, on the other hand, possesses neither a form nor a content.

identity sign (i.e. an expression which symbolizes the relation of identity between objects) as if it were a concept-expression. Wittgenstein says in this passage that the nonsensicality of the string is due not to an impermissible employment of a symbol, but rather to our failing to make a determination of meaning. Wittgenstein says: "If it has no sense this can *only* be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts." The "only" here signals that for Wittgenstein all apparent cases of substantial nonsense are (in the words of §6.54) "eventually to be recognized as" cases of type austere nonsense.

According to the *Tractatus*, there isn't anything which is an instance of a proposition's containing two logical elements which are incompatible. What there can be is a case in which there are two natural directions in which to seek a sense for a sentence whose sense is as yet undetermined, as is the case with Dummett's example. Each of the available readings of Dummett's sentence eclipses the other – as each reading of a duck-rabbit figure eclipses the other. There isn't anything which is having a part of the sentence as it is segmented on one reading illegitimately combined with a part of the sentence as segmented on the other reading – anymore than one can have only the eye of the rabbit taken from one reading of a duck-rabbit figure occur in combination with the face of the duck. To see the drawing as a picture of the face of a duck *is* to see the, as it were, argument place for an eye in the picture filled by the eye of a duck – that is what it is to see the dot (that sign) *as* an eye of a duck (*as* that kind of a symbol).

If we have not made the necessary assignments of meaning to cure Dummett's example of its emptiness then, according to the *Tractatus*, what we have before us is simply a string of signs – a string which has a surface resemblance to propositions of two distinct logical patterns. For Wittgenstein, the source of the clash is to be located in *our relation* to the linguistic string – not in the linguistic string itself. The problem, according to the *Tractatus*, is that we often believe that we have given a meaning to all of a sentence's constituent parts when we have failed to do so. We think nonsense results in such cases not because of a failure on our part, but because of a failure on the sentence's part. We think the problem lies not in an absence of meaning (in our failing to mean anything by these words) but rather in a presence of meaning (in the incompatible senses the words already have – senses which the words import with them into the context of combination). We think the thought is flawed because the component senses of its parts logically repel one another. They fail to add up to a thought. So we feel our words are attempting to think a logically impossible thought – and that this involves a kind of impossibility of a higher order than ordinary impossibility.⁶²

62 Here, again, we have the anticipation of a recurring theme of Wittgenstein's later thought:

Wittgenstein's teaching is that the problem lies not in the words, but in our confused relation to the words: in our experiencing ourselves as meaning something definite by them, yet also feeling that what we take ourselves to be meaning with the words makes no sense. We are confused about what it is we want to say and we project our confusion onto the linguistic string. Then we look at the linguistic string and imagine we discover what *it* is trying to say. We want to say to the string: "We know what you mean, but 'it' cannot be said." The incoherence of our desires with respect to the sentence – wishing to both mean and not mean something with it – is seen by us as an incoherence in what the words want to be saying. We displace our desire onto the words and see them as *aspiring* to say something they never quite succeed in saying (because, we tell ourselves, "it" cannot be said). We account for the confusion these words engender in us by discovering in the words a hopelessly flawed sense. "We ... hover", Wittgenstein says, "between regarding [a sequence of words] as sense and regarding it as nonsense, and hence the trouble arises."⁶³

The context of this latter remark runs as follows:

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

Wittgenstein's description here of the task – to show that there is in fact no logical difference between these two cases of nonsense – is equally accurate as a description of the task of his early and his later work. Certain passages in the

⁶³ The difficulty is in using the word "can" in different ways, as "physically possible" and as "making no sense to say ..." The logical impossibility of fitting the two pieces seems of the same order as the physical impossibility, only more impossible! (*Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935, op. cit.*, p. 146)

⁶³ The quotation is from Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Personal Experience* (Michaelmas Term, 1935, recorded by Margaret MacDonald, edited by Cora Diamond; unpublished manuscript).

later work, however, in which Wittgenstein speaks, e.g., of "excluding certain combinations of words from our language", might seem to contradict this, inviting a reading of Wittgenstein along the following lines: certain combinations of words are to be identified as impermissible on the grounds that these combinations violate the principles governing which combinations of words are grammatically well-formed.

It is precisely such a reading of his work which Wittgenstein seeks to fend off in §500 of *Philosophical Investigations*:

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation.

The preceding section (§499) begins as follows:

To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason.

This raises the question: what are Wittgenstein's reasons for proposing that we exclude particular combinations of words from the language? In the *Philosophical Grammar*, we find this:

How strange that one should be able to say that such and such a state of affairs is inconceivable! If we regard a thought as an accompaniment going with an expression, the words in the statement that specify the inconceivable state of affairs must be unaccompanied. So what sort of sense is it to have? Unless it says these words are senseless. But it isn't as it were their sense that is senseless; they are to be excluded from our language as if they were some arbitrary noise, and the reason for their *explicit* exclusion can only be that *we are tempted* to confuse them with a proposition of our language.⁶⁴

Wittgenstein proposes that we explicitly exclude an expression from the language – not because its sense is senseless (i.e., because it violates some set of principles for the legitimate combination of signs) – but because "*we are tempted to confuse*" one kind of sign for another.⁶⁵ We are tempted to confuse sentences in which words figure senselessly (because we have not given them a sense) with sentences in which each word has been given a determinate sense. Thus the only

⁶⁴ *Philosophical Grammar*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1974 p. 130; I have amended the translation.

⁶⁵ And if measures can be taken to prevent us from being thus tempted into confusion, then there is no reason not to introduce these forms of words back into circulation: "Sometimes an expression has to be withdrawn from language and sent for cleaning – then it can be put back into circulation." (*Culture and Value, op. cit.* p. 39)

sort of *Sätze* that Wittgenstein ever talks of excluding are propositional *signs* – not propositional *symbols* – ones (1) whose exclusion from the language is *optional*, and (2) whose exclusion is proposed on *pragmatic* grounds (namely, that they incline us to mistake a mere sign for a propositional symbol). Instead of excluding them, we could retain these sentences and give them a sense:

In speaking of that which is impossible it seems as though we are conceiving the inconceivable. When we say a thing cannot be green and yellow at the same time we are excluding something, but what?... We have not excluded any case at all, but rather the use of an expression. And what we exclude has no semblance of sense. Most of us think that there is nonsense which makes sense and nonsense which does not – that it is nonsense in a different way to say "This is green and yellow at the same time" from saying "Ab sur ah". But these are nonsense in the same sense, the only difference being in the jingle of the words.... The word "nonsense" is used to exclude certain things, and for different reasons. But it cannot be the case that an expression is excluded and yet not quite excluded – excluded because it stands for the impossible, and not quite excluded because in excluding it we have to think the impossible. We exclude such sentences ... because we do not want to use them. Of course we could give these sentences sense.⁶⁶

When Wittgenstein argues in his later writings that we cannot give a word a "senseless sense" (e.g., *Philosophical Investigations*, §500), he is refashioning the Tractarian point that we cannot give a sign "the wrong sense". Not only does Wittgenstein never speak in the *Tractatus* of "violations of logical syntax", but later Wittgenstein only occasionally mentions the idea of "violations of grammar", and always in the service of encouraging the reader to be puzzled by what such a thing could be – as, for example, in the following passage:

How can one put together *logically* ill-assorted concepts (in violation of grammar [*gegen die Grammatik*], and therefore nonsensically) and significantly ask about the possibility of the combination?⁶⁷

The continuity in Wittgenstein's thought to which I am seeking to draw attention here is roughly the opposite of the one usually remarked upon by commentators. The following passage from Baker and Hacker offers a fairly standard story of how an appeal to rules of logical syntax in the *Tractatus* gives way in later Wittgenstein to an appeal to rules of grammar:

Wittgenstein had, in the *Tractatus*, seen that philosophical or conceptual investigation moves in the domain of rules. An important point of continuity was the insight that philosophy is not concerned with what is true and what is false, but rather with what makes

sense and what traverses the bounds of sense... [W]hat he called 'rules of grammar' ... are the direct descendants if the 'rules of logical syntax' of the *Tractatus*. Like rules of logical syntax, rules of grammar determine the bounds of sense. They distinguish sense from nonsense... Grammar, as Wittgenstein understood the term, is the account book of language. Its rules determine the limits of sense, and by carefully scrutinizing them the philosopher may determine at what point he has drawn an overdraft on Reason, *violated the rules for the use of an expression*, and so, in subtle and not readily identifiable ways, traversed the bounds of sense.⁶⁸

I agree with Baker and Hacker that the later conception of grammar is the heir of the earlier conception of logical syntax. But I disagree with their characterizations of these conceptions – e.g., as turning on an aspiration to formulate rules that will "determine the limits of sense" and thus "determine at what point" the philosopher has "traversed the bounds of sense" – a point reached when the philosopher "violate[s] the rules for the use of an expression".

It would be a mistake to think that the crucial difference between my interpretation of Wittgenstein and that of Baker and Hacker is that, whereas they, on the one hand, think that when Wittgenstein wrote his early work he thought that there were ineffable truths that cannot be stated in language and later came to see that this is misconceived, I, on the other hand, think that already in his early work he thought this misconceived. The more important difference between their reading and mine is that I think that Wittgenstein (early and late) thinks that the view that they attribute to later Wittgenstein is a disguised version of the view that they attribute to early Wittgenstein. I take the continuity in Wittgenstein's thought to lie in his espousal of the austere conception of nonsense; they take it to lie in his espousal of the substantial conception. Within this overarching difference, it is a matter of secondary importance which variant of the substantial conception they attribute to which Wittgenstein. As it happens, they attribute the ineffability variant of the substantial conception to early Wittgenstein and the positivist variant to later Wittgenstein. This is not, by my (early or later) Wittgenstein's lights, a story of philosophical progress. Indeed, by his lights, their version of "early Wittgenstein" is bound to seem in some respects philosophically more acute than their version of "later Wittgenstein". For he comes closer to appreciating that the two variants of the substantial conception are only apparently distinct; whereas their "later Wittgenstein", in exchanging the ineffability

66 *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935; op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

67 *Philosophical Grammar* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1974), p. 392.

68 [Their emphasis] G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) pp. 39-40, 55. I should say that I gather from conversations with Gordon Baker that he no longer espouses the reading of Wittgenstein that (the authors I am here referring to as) "Baker and Hacker" defend in this book.

variant for the positivist variant of the substantial conception, takes himself to have made an important advance.

Consider the following pair of passages from Baker and Hacker:

Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' serve only to *distinguish sense from nonsense*... They settle what makes sense, experience settles what is the case... Grammar is a free-floating array of rules for the use of language. It determines what is a correct use of language, but is not itself correct or incorrect.

What philosophers have called 'necessary truths' are, in Wittgenstein's view, typically rules of grammar, norms of representation, i.e., they fix concepts. They are expressions of internal relations between concepts... Hence they license (or prohibit) transitions between concepts, i.e. transitions from one expression of an empirical proposition to another.⁶⁹

Each of the phrases italicized in the above passages mark a moment in which Baker and Hacker attribute to later Wittgenstein an instance of the very misunderstanding that he was already seeking to exorcize in his early work – one which conceives of the possibilities of meaningful expression as limited by “general rules of the language” (be they called “rules of logical syntax” or “rules of grammar”) and which imagines that by specifying these rules one can identify in advance which combinations of words are licensed and which prohibited.

The heart of the Tractarian conception of logic is to be found in the remark that “we cannot make mistakes in logic” (§5.473). It is one of the burdens of the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus* to try to show us that the idea that we can violate the logical syntax of language rests upon a conception of “the logical structure of thought” according to which the nature of logic itself debars us from being able to frame certain sorts of “thoughts”. Wittgenstein says: “Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted” (§5.473). If a sentence is nonsense, this is not because it is trying but failing to make sense (by breaking a rule of logic, or grammar), but because we have failed to make sense with it: “the sentence is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination of sense, not because the symbol in itself is impermissible” (my emphases; §5.473). The idea that there can be such a thing as a kind of proposition which has an internal logical form of a sort which is debarred by the logical structure of our thought rests upon what Wittgenstein calls (in the Preface) “a misunderstanding of the logic of our language”. In ascribing to the *Tractatus* a commitment to the substantial conception of nonsense, commentators have ascribed to that work a commitment to the very misunderstanding which the elucidatory strategy of the work as a whole is centrally concerned to exorcize.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 269. I am indebted to Martin Gustafsson for drawing these two passages to my attention.

In §4.1212 of the *Tractatus*, we are told that a work of philosophy “consists essentially of elucidations”. “Philosophy” here means: philosophy as practiced by the author of the *Tractatus*. The notion of elucidation is tied in §4.1212 to the idea of philosophy being a certain kind of activity:

Philosophy is not a theory [*Lehre*] but an activity.

A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. (§4.112)

The word '*Lehre*' – which Ogden translates as 'theory' – is rendered as 'body of doctrine' by Pears and McGuinness. The elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus* depends on the reader's provisionally taking himself to be participating in the traditional philosophical activity of establishing a doctrine through a procedure of reasoned argument; but it only succeeds if the reader fully comes to understand what the work means to say about itself when it says that philosophy, as this work seeks to practice it, results not in doctrine but in elucidations. And the attainment of this recognition depends upon the reader's actually undergoing a certain *experience* – the attainment of which is identified in §6.54 as the sign that the reader has understood the author of the work: the reader's experience of having his illusion of sense (in the “premises” and “conclusions” of the “argument”) dissipate through its becoming clear to him that (what he took to be) the *philosophische Sätze* of the work are *Unsinn*. The “problems of philosophy” that the *Tractatus* sets itself the task of “solving” are all of a single sort: they are all occasioned by reflection on possibilities (of running up against the limits of thought, language or reality) which appear to come into view when we imagine ourselves able to frame in thought violations of the logical structure of language. The “solution” to these problems (as §6.52 says) lies in their disappearance – in the dissolution of the appearance that we are so much as able to frame such thoughts. The mode of philosophy which this work practices (as §4.112 says) does not result in “philosophical propositions”: the “philosophical propositions” we come out with when we attempt to frame such thoughts are to be recognized as *Unsinn*. Thus the aim is the same as that of Wittgenstein's later philosophy; as he puts it in *Philosophical Investigations*, §464:

My aim in philosophy is to take you from something which is disguised nonsense to something which is undisguised nonsense.

The sign that this passage from latent to patent nonsense has been achieved by a reader – of either the *Tractatus* or the *Philosophical Investigations* – comes when the reader's phenomenology of having understood something determinate

by a particular form of words is suddenly shattered. The reader undergoes an abrupt transition: one moment, imagining he has discovered something, the next, discovering he has not yet discovered anything, to mean by the words. The transition is from a psychological experience of entertaining what appears to be a fully determinate thought – *the* thought apparently expressed by *that* sentence – to the experience of having that appearance (the appearance of there being any such thought) disintegrate. No “theory of meaning” could ever bring about the passage from the first of these experiences (the hallucinatory one) to the second (the experience of discovering oneself to be a victim of a hallucination).

As long as we retain the relevant phenomenology (as long as it appears to us that, by golly, we *do* mean something determinate by our words), our conviction in such an experience of meaning will always lie deeper than our conviction in anything we are told by a theory of meaning concerning what sorts of things we are and are not able to mean by our words.⁷⁰ Both the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* seek to bring their readers to the point where the reader can recognize sentences displayed within the pages of the work as nonsensical, not by means of a theory which legislates certain sentences out of the realm of sense, but rather by bringing more clearly into view for the reader the life with language he already leads – by harnessing the capacities for distinguishing sense from nonsense (for recognizing the symbol in the sign and for recognizing when no method of symbolizing has yet been conferred upon a sign) implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language which the reader already possesses. As the Preface of the *Tractatus* says: “The limit ... can only be drawn *in language* and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.” Just as, according to the *Tractatus*, each propositional symbol – i.e., each *sinnvoller Satz* – shows its sense (§4.022), so the *Tractatus* shows what it shows (i.e., what it is to make sense) by *letting language show itself* – not through “the clarification of sentences” but through allowing “sentences themselves to become clear” (through *das Klarwerden von Sätzen*, §4.112). The work seeks to do this, not by instructing us in how to identify determinate cases of nonsense, but by enabling us to see more clearly what it is we do with language when we succeed in achieving determinate forms of sense (when we succeed in projecting a symbol into the sign) and what it is we fall short of doing when we fail to achieve such forms of sense (when we fail to confer a determinate method of symbolizing on a propositional sign).

70 Hence the ineffectuality of someone like Carnap’s methods.

In *Tractatus*, §5.5563, we find :

All propositions of our everyday language are actually, just as they stand, logically completely in order.

The *Tractatus* wants to show how Frege’s theory of *Begriffsschrift* – his theory of a logically perfect language which excludes the possibility of the formation of illogical thought – is in fact the correct theory of symbolism *überhaupt*. Language itself, the *Tractatus* says, prevents the possibility of every logical mistake (§5.4731).⁷¹ Ordinary language is in this respect already a kind of *Begriffsschrift*. What for Frege is the structure of an ideal language is for early Wittgenstein the structure of all language. In his remarks clarifying his emendations of Ogden’s initial attempt to translate §5.5563, Wittgenstein explains:

By this [i.e., §5.5563] I meant to say that the propositions of our ordinary language are not in any way logically *less correct* or less exact or *more confused* than propositions written down, say, in Russell’s symbolism or any other *Begriffsschrift*. (Only it is easier for us to gather their logical form when they are expressed in an appropriate symbolism.) [emphases in the original]⁷²

Already in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein’s interest in a logical symbolism is not that of someone who seeks to overcome an imprecision in ordinary thought through recourse to a more precise medium for the expression of thought.⁷³ The *Tractatus* is interested in successors to Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* (in what the *Tractatus* calls “logical grammars”) because such systems of notation exclude a multiplicity of kinds of use for individual signs, allowing one to see in a more perspicuous manner what kind of logical work (if any) a given term in a given sen-

71 This, of course, does not mean that language itself prevents us from ever making “logical mistakes” in the ordinary (non-philosophical) sense of the expression “logical mistake” – i.e., that it keeps us from ever contradicting ourselves! Indeed, the possibility of forming contradictions is, according to the *Tractatus*, a constitutive feature of any symbolism (which, for the *Tractatus*, means any system capable of expressing thought). What this passage refers to rather is the prevention of the possibility of the (peculiarly philosophical) sort of “logical mistake” that Russell’s theory of types or Carnap’s theory of logical syntax sought to exclude. This latter notion of “a violation of logic” depends upon a philosophical *theory* (which seeks to draw a limit to the sorts of thoughts that are so much as possible).

72 *Letters to C. K. Ogden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973); p.50.

73 Thus what is standardly put forward by commentators as a criticism later Wittgenstein directs against his earlier work is in fact already developed in the *Tractatus* as a criticism of Frege and Russell.

tence is doing.⁷⁴ It allows us to see *how* – and, most importantly, *whether* – the signs we call upon (in giving voice to the thoughts we seek to express) symbolize. The advantage of a logical symbolism, for the *Tractatus*, lies not in *what* it permits (or forbids) one to say, but in the perspicuity of its mode of representation: in how it allows someone who is drawn to call upon certain words to see what it is (if anything) he is saying.⁷⁵ The reason ordinary language can lead us philosophically astray is not to be traced to its (alleged) capacity to permit us to formulate illogical thoughts (i.e. to give a sign the wrong sense).⁷⁶ Rather, it is to be traced to the symbolic imperspicuity of ordinary language – our inability to read off of it what contribution, if any, the parts of a sentence make to the sense of the whole. It is this lack of perspicuity in our relation to our own words which allows us to imagine that we perceive a meaning where there is no meaning, and which brings about the need for a mode of perspicuous representation of the possibilities of meaning available to us.

74 It is perhaps worth mentioning that this employment of *Begriffsschrift* (as a tool for the perspicuous representation of the logical structure of sentences of ordinary language) for the purposes of philosophical clarification – though by no means Frege's primary reason for developing his ideography – was nonetheless envisioned by him from the start as one of its possible applications:

'If it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare those misconceptions which through the use of language all but unavoidably arise, then my ideography, if it is further developed with an eye to this purpose, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.' (*Begriffsschrift*, Preface, eighth paragraph; my translation.)

And, when advertising the virtues of his *Begriffsschrift*, Frege not infrequently remarks upon the value it could have in this regard for philosophy:

'We can see from all this how easily we can be led by language to see things in the wrong perspective, and what value it must therefore have for philosophy to free ourselves from the domination of language. If one makes the attempt to construct a system of signs on quite other foundations and with quite other means, as I have tried to do in creating my concept-script, we shall have, so to speak, our very noses rubbed into the false analogies in language.' (*Posthumous Writings* [Blackwell: Oxford, 1979], p. 67)

75 The *Tractatus* sacrifices all the other ends to which Frege and Russell sought to put a *Begriffsschrift* to the sole end of notational perspicuity. Early Wittgenstein champions a logical syntax which avoids a plurality of logical constants because such a plurality frustrates the sole application which the *Tractatus* seeks to make of a logical syntax: to allow the logical form of propositions to appear with "complete clarity". A plurality of logical constants frustrates this end in two ways: (i) it permits the same thought to be rendered in diverse ways, and (ii) it obscures the logical relations between propositions.

76 See also §3.03 and §5.4731.

Both early and later Wittgenstein trace our philosophical failures of meaning to our tendency to transfer an expression without transferring its use (in the language of the *Tractatus*: to employ the same sign without transferring the method of symbolizing). Thus both have an interest in finding a mode of perspicuous representation – a mode of representation which makes perspicuous to a philosophical interlocutor (1) the contexts of use within which a word has a particular meaning (in the language of the *Tractatus*: the contexts within which a sign symbolizes in a particular way), (2) how the meaning shifts as the context shifts, (3) how "it very often happens" in philosophy that we are led into "confusions" by "the same word belonging to two different symbols" without our realizing it (§§3.323-3.234), and (4) how nothing at all is meant by a word – how one "has given no meaning to certain signs" (§6.53) – as long as one hovers indeterminate between contexts of use. The underlying thought common to early and later Wittgenstein is that we are prone to see a meaning where there is no meaning because of our inclination to imagine that a sign carries its meaning with it, enabling us to import a particular meaning into a new context merely by importing the sign.⁷⁷

The assumption underlying Tractarian elucidation is that the only way to free oneself from such illusions is to fully enter into them and explore them from the inside. This assumption – one which underlies both Wittgenstein's early and later work – is nicely summarized in the following remark (from a 1931 manuscript of Wittgenstein's):

In philosophy we are deceived by an illusion. But this – an illusion – is also something, and I must at some time place it completely and clearly before my eyes, before I can say it is only an illusion.⁷⁸

The illusion that the *Tractatus* seeks to explode, above all, is that we can run up against the limits of language. The book starts with a warning about a certain

77 Though the conception of philosophical elucidation remains in many respects the same (one of taking the reader from latent to patent nonsense), there is also an important difference here between early and later Wittgenstein: on the later conception, once one has completed the work of perspicuously displaying the possible contexts of significant use, there is no elucidatory role left for a *Begriffsschrift* to come along and play. What the *Tractatus* sees as a preliminary task in the process of elucidation (namely, the consideration of contexts of significant use) becomes for later Wittgenstein a comparatively central exercise – one which usurps the role previously played by the rendition of sentences into a perspicuous logical symbolism.

78 *Manuscript 110* of Wittgenstein's *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, p. 239 (quoted by David Stern in *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995; p. 194).

kind of enterprise – one of attempting to draw a limit to thought. In the body of the text, we are offered (what appears to be) a doctrine about "the limits of thought". With the aid of this doctrine, we imagine ourselves to be able both to draw these limits and to see beyond them. We imagine ourselves able to do what the Preface warns we will fall into imagining ourselves able to do (once we imagine ourselves able to draw a limit to thought): we imagine ourselves able "to think both sides of the limit" (and hence "able to think what cannot be thought").⁷⁹ The aim of the work is to show us that beyond "the limits of language" lies – not ineffable truth, but rather – (as the Preface cautions) *einfach Unsinn*.⁸⁰ At the conclusion of the book, we are told that the author's elucidations have succeeded only if we recognize what we find in the body of the text to be nonsense. In §6.54, Wittgenstein does not ask his reader here to "grasp" the "thoughts" which his nonsensical propositions seek to convey. He does not call upon the reader to understand his sentences, but rather to understand *him*, namely the author and the kind of activity in which he is engaged – one of elucidation. He tells us in §6.54 how these sentences serve as elucidations: by enabling us to recognize them *as* nonsense.⁸¹ One does not reach the end by arriving at the last page, but by arriving at a certain point in an activity – the point when the elucidation has served its purpose: when the illusion of sense is exploded from within. The sign that we have understood the author of the work is that we can throw the ladder we have climbed up away. That is to say, we have finished the work, and

79. "The book will, therefore, draw a limit ... not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought)." (*Tractatus*, Preface)

80. "The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be *simply nonsense*." [my emphasis] (*Ibid*)

81. In §6.54, Wittgenstein draws the reader's attention to a kind of employment of linguistic signs which occurs within the body of the work. Commentators fail to notice that what Wittgenstein says in §6.54 is not: "all of my sentences are nonsensical" (thus giving rise to the self-defeating problematic Geach has nicely dubbed *Ludwig's Self-mate*). §6.54 characterizes the way in which those of his propositions which serve as elucidations elucidate. He says: "my sentences serve as elucidations in the following way: he who understands me recognizes them as nonsensical"; or better still – to quote from the English translation of §6.54 that Wittgenstein himself proposed to Ogden: "my propositions elucidate – *whatever they do elucidate* – in this way, he who understands me recognizes them as nonsensical" (*Letters to C.K. Ogden*, p. 51). The aim of the passage is (*not* to propose a single all-encompassing category into which the diverse sorts of propositions which comprise the work are all to be shoehorned, but rather) to explicate how those passages of the work which succeed in bearing its elucidatory burden are meant to work their medicine on the reader.

the work is finished with us, when we are able to *throw* the sentences in the body of the work – sentences about "the limits of language" and the unsayable things which lie beyond them – *away*.

The section preceding §6.54 describes what it calls "the only strictly correct method" of philosophy; and it turns out to be quite different from the method actually practiced by the *Tractatus*. The practitioner of the strictly correct method eschews nonsense, confining himself to displaying what can be said and to pointing out where the other has failed to give a meaning to one of his signs; whereas the practitioner of the elucidatory method of the *Tractatus* permits himself to be engaged in the production of vast quantities of nonsense. The former method depends on the elucidator always being able to speak second; the latter attempts to achieve the aims of the former but in a situation in which the interlocutor is not present. The actual method of the *Tractatus* is thus a literary surrogate for the strictly correct method – one in which the text invites the reader alternately to adopt the roles played by each of the parties to the dialogue in the strictly correct method. As the addressees of this surrogate form of elucidation, we are furnished with a series of "propositions" whose attractiveness we are asked both to feel and to round on.

The tale told in this essay is a prolegomenon to the reading of later Wittgenstein. To understand why Wittgenstein's later writing comes to assume the particular form that it does – that is, why later Wittgenstein's writing involves a very different kind of literary surrogate for philosophical dialogue than does his earlier writing – we need to understand how the *Tractatus's* conception of its *method* unwittingly relies upon the very metaphysical doctrines it seeks to undermine, and thus why Wittgenstein thought that his earlier choice of an elucidatory method could never fully succeed in its aim. And to understand this requires understanding why it is that, by the lights of his later philosophy, the very idea of "a strictly correct method" – of an elucidatory method which aspires to the ideal of being able to hold all nonsense at arm's length, treating philosophical questions from a position which involves having achieved immunity to the forms of perplexity that they involve – itself presupposes these same metaphysical doctrines. To understand this is to understand why Wittgenstein comes to think that philosophical elucidation ought not to assume the form of a ladder (that one climbs up and throws away). To draw the reader into the illusion that there is a ladder to be climbed up is already to direct his attention in the wrong direction, away from the place at which he needs to arrive in his philosophizing – the place where he already is and which he (needs to come to recognize he) has never left. It is the place which Wittgenstein, in his later writings, sometimes calls the *ordinary* or the *everyday*. To understand what Wittgenstein means by these words requires not only understanding what it is to arrive at such a place in one's phi-

osophizing but why it is that later Wittgenstein thinks that the method of the *Tractatus* necessarily obstructs the possibility of such an arrival. To understand all this – that is, to understand why, in Wittgenstein's later work, the aim of elucidation becomes that of returning us to the ordinary, yet in such a way that we are, under the pressure of philosophy, able to recognize it *as* ordinary (as if seeing it for the first time) – is to understand what is genuinely *new* in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. But that is a tale for another occasion.⁸²

82 This paper inherits many of the intellectual debts acknowledged in the final endnote of *TM* – the most pervasive and profound of these being to Cora Diamond.

Chantal Mouffe

Wittgenstein and the ethos of democracy

The aspect of Wittgenstein's legacy that I want to stress in this intervention concerns his contribution to what I take to be an urgent issue today: how to envisage a new way of theorizing about the political. There are several ways in which I could have approached this question. For instance I could have traced the influence of Wittgenstein in the transformation of disciplines like cultural anthropology or the history of political ideas. Here one would have to mention the 'new history' pioneered by Quentin Skinner who envisages political writing as a way of acting with words and insists that political thought cannot be grasped without being situated within the politico-historical context in which this acting took place. And with respect to anthropology the work of Clifford Geertz and James Clifford who following the lead of Wittgenstein have criticized the homogeneous and bounded view of identity dominant in modern political theory and proposed to replace it by a new vocabulary of identity in terms of 'family resemblance', as an overlapping of similarities and differences. This kind of anthropology has important consequences for envisaging the task of a new political theory which as Clifford Geertz has recently argued should not be an 'intensely generalized reflection on intensely generalized matters, an imagining of architectures in which no one could live, but should be, rather, an intellectual engagement, exact, mobile, and realistic, with present problems'.¹

The strategy I have chosen to follow is a different one. I have decided that a good way to bring to the fore Wittgenstein's relevance for political theory would be to tackle some of the most disputed issues in political theory today and to show how several of his insights play an important role, even if it is in a way that is not always clearly acknowledged, in the debates currently central in political theory. My aim is to highlight the fact that, on the most important issues discussed nowadays, it is the political theorists who are inspired by Wittgenstein who represent the more promising alternative and who are likely to come up with adequate answers.

1 Clifford Geertz, 'What is a Culture if not a Consensus?', conference given in June 1995 in Vienna at the Institute for Human Science, mimeo, p.23.

Universalism versus contextualism

One of the most contentious questions among political theorists in recent years has to do with the very nature of liberal democracy. Should it be envisaged as the rational solution to the political question of how to organize human coexistence? Does it therefore embody the just society, the one that should be universally accepted by all rational and reasonable individuals? Or does it represent one form of political order among other possible ones? A political form of human coexistence, which, to be sure, can be called just, but that must also be seen as the product of a particular history, with specific historical, cultural and geographical conditions of existence? In this case, one would have to acknowledge that there might be other just political forms of society, products of other contexts, and that liberal democracy should renounce its claims to universality. This does not mean, contrary to what the universalists claim, that such a position necessarily entails accepting a relativism that would justify *any* political system. Indeed one could think in terms of a *plurality* of just answers to the question of what is the just political order.

It is clear that what is at stake in this debate is also the nature of political theory itself. Two different positions confront each other. On one side we find the 'rationalist-universalists' who like Ronald Dworkin, the early Rawls and Habermas assert that the aim of political theory is to establish universal truths, valid for all independently of the historico-cultural context. Of course, for them, there can only be one answer to the inquiry about the 'good regime' and much of their efforts consist in proving that it is constitutional democracy that fulfills the requirements.

It is in intimate connection with this debate, that one should envisage the other one, which concerns the elaboration of a theory of justice. It is only when located in this wider context that one can really grasp, for instance, the implications of the view put forward by a universalist like Dworkin when he declares that a theory of justice must call on general principles and its objective must be to 'try to find some inclusive formula that can be used to measure social justice in any society.'²

The universalist-rationalist approach is the dominant one today in political theory but it is being challenged by another one that can be called 'contextualist' and which is clearly influenced by Wittgenstein. Contextualists like Michael Walzer and Richard Rorty deny the availability of a point of view that could be situated outside the practices and the institutions of a given culture and from where universal, 'context-independent' judgments could be made. For Walzer, the

2 Ronald Dworkin, *New York Review of Books*, 17 April 1983.

theorist must 'stay in the cave' and assume fully his status as a member of a particular community; and his role consists in interpreting for his fellow citizens the world of meanings that they have in common.³

Using several wittgensteinian insights, the contextualist approach dismantles the kind of liberal reasoning that envisages the common framework for argumentation on the model of a 'neutral' or 'rational' dialogue. Indeed Wittgenstein's views lead to undermining the very-basis of this form of reasoning since, as it has been pointed out, he reveals that 'Whatever there is of definite content in contractarian deliberation and its deliverance, derives from particular judgments we are inclined to make as practitioners of specific forms of life. The forms of life in which we find ourselves are themselves held together by a network of pre-contractual agreements, without which there would be no possibility of mutual understanding or therefore, of disagreement.'⁴

According to the contextualists, liberal democratic 'principles' cannot be seen as providing the unique and definite answer to the question of what is the 'good regime' but only as defining one possible political 'language game' among others. Since they do not provide the rational solution to the problem of human coexistence, it is then futile to search for arguments in their favour which would not be 'context-dependent' in order to secure them against other political language games.

Envisaging the issue according to a wittgensteinian perspective brings to the fore the inadequacy of all attempts to give a rational foundation to liberal democratic principles by arguing that they would be chosen by rational individuals in idealized conditions like the 'veil of ignorance' (Rawls) or the 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas). As Peter Winch has indicated with respect to Rawls, 'The "veil of ignorance" that characterizes his position runs foul of Wittgenstein's point that what is "reasonable" cannot be characterized independently of the *content* of certain pivotal "judgments".'⁵

For his part Richard Rorty - who proposes a 'neo-pragmatic' reading of Wittgenstein - has affirmed, taking issue with Apel and Habermas, that it is not possible to derive a universalistic moral philosophy from the philosophy of language. There is nothing, for him, in the nature of language that could serve as a basis for justifying to all possible audiences the superiority of liberal democracy. He declares that 'We should have to abandon the hopeless task of finding politically neutral premises, premises which can be justified to anybody, from which to infer

3 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, New York: basic Books, 1983, p.xiv.

4 John Gray, *Liberalisms: Essays in Political Philosophy*, London and New York 1989, p 252.

5 Peter Winch, 'Certainty and Authority' in A. Philipps Griffiths (ed), *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, Cambridge, 1991, p.235.

an obligation to pursue democratic politics.' ⁶ He considers that envisaging democratic advances as if they were linked to progresses in rationality is not helpful and that we should stop presenting the institutions of liberal western societies as the solution that other people will necessarily adopt when they cease to be 'irrational' and become 'modern'. Following Wittgenstein, he sees the question at stake not as one of rationality but of shared beliefs. To call somebody irrational in this context, he states, 'is not to say that she is not making proper use of her mental faculties. It is only to say that she does not seem to share enough beliefs and desires with one to make conversation with her on the disputed point fruitful.'⁷

Democratic action in this wittgensteinian perspective, does not require a theory of truth and notions like unconditionality and universal validity but a manifold of practices and pragmatic moves aiming at persuading people to broaden the range of their commitments to others, to build a more inclusive community. Such a perspective helps us to see that, by putting an exclusive emphasis on the arguments needed to secure the *legitimacy* of liberal institutions, recent moral and political theory has been asking the wrong question. The real issue is not to find arguments to justify the rationality or universality of liberal democracy that would be acceptable to every rational or reasonable person. Liberal democratic principles can only be defended as being constitutive of our form of life and we should not try to ground our commitment to them on something supposedly safer. As Richard Flathman – another political theorist influenced by Wittgenstein – indicates, the agreements that exist on many features of liberal democracy do not need to be supported by certainty in any of the philosophical senses. In his view, 'Our agreements in these judgments constitute the language of our politics. It is a language arrived at and continuously modified through no less than a history of discourse, a history in which we have thought about, as we became able to think in, that language.'⁸

6 Richard Rorty, 'Sind Aussagen universelle Geltungsansprüche?', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 6, 1994, p.986.

7 Richard Rorty, 'Justice as a larger Loyalty', paper presented at the Seventh East-West Philosophers Conference, University of Hawaii, January 1995, published in *Justice and Democracy: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. R.Botenkoe and M. Stepaniants, University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p.19.

8 Richard E. Flathman, *Towards a Liberalism*, Ithaca and London, 1989, p.63.

Democracy as substance or as procedures

An approach inspired by Wittgenstein's conception of practices and languages games is also very fruitful for clarifying some of the issues at stake in the contemporary debates about the role of procedures in the modern conception of democracy. For Wittgenstein, to have agreements in opinions, there must first be agreement on the language used. And he also alerted us to the fact that those agreements in opinions were in fact agreements in forms of life. As he says: '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'.⁹

With respect to the problem that interests us here, this points to the fact that a considerable number of 'agreements in judgments' must already exist in a society before a given set of procedures can work. For Wittgenstein, to agree on the definition of a term is not enough and we need agreement in the way we use it. He puts it in the following way: 'if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments.'¹⁰

Procedures only exist as complex ensembles of practices. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that makes possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgments that procedures can be accepted and followed. They cannot be seen as rules that are created on the basis of principles and then applied to specific cases. Rules, for Wittgenstein, are always abridgments of practices, they are inseparable from specific forms of life. The distinction between procedural and substantial cannot therefore be as clear as some would have it. In the case of justice, for instance, I do not think that one can oppose, as so many liberals do, procedural and substantial justice without recognizing that procedural justice already presupposes acceptance of certain values. It is the liberal conception of justice which posits the priority of the right over the good but this is also the expression of a specific good. Democracy is not only a matter of establishing the right procedures independently of the practices that makes possible democratic forms of individuality. The question of the conditions of existence of democratic forms of individuality and of the practices and language games in which they are constituted is a central one, even in a liberal democratic society where procedures play a central role. Procedures always involve substan-

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 241, Oxford 1953.

10 *Ibid.*, I, 242.

tial ethical commitments. For that reason they cannot work properly if they are not supported by a democratic ethos.

This last point is very important since it leads us to acknowledge that a liberal democratic conception of justice and liberal democratic institutions require a democratic ethos in order to function properly and maintain themselves. This is something that Habermas's discourse theory of procedural democracy is unable to grasp because of the sharp distinction that Habermas wants to draw between moral-practical discourses and ethical-practical discourses. It is not enough to state as Habermas does, criticizing Apel, that a discourse theory of democracy cannot be based only on the formal pragmatic conditions of communication and that it must take account of legal, moral, ethical and pragmatic argumentation. What is missing in such an approach is the crucial importance of a democratic 'Sittlichkeit'.

Democratic consensus

By providing a practice-based account of rationality, Wittgenstein in his later work opens a much more promising way for thinking about political questions and for envisaging the task of a democratic politics than the rationalist-universalist framework. It is necessary to realize that it is not by offering sophisticated rational arguments and by making context-transcendent truth claims about the superiority of liberal democracy that democratic values can be fostered. The creation of democratic forms of individuality is a question of *identification* with democratic values and this is a complex process that takes place through manifold practices, discourses and language games.

The contextualist approach in political theory, precisely because it inscribes itself within a wittgensteinian perspective, is able to envisage the conditions for the emergence of a democratic consensus in a radically different way. As Wittgenstein says: 'Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.'¹¹ For him agreement is established not on significations (Meinungen) but on forms of life (Lebensformen). It is *Einstimmung*, fusion of voices made possible by a common form of life, not *Einverstand*, product of reason - like in Habermas. This, I believe, is of crucial importance and it not only indicates the nature of every consensus but also reveals its limits: 'Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each

man declares the other a fool and an heretic. I said I would "combat" the other man, - but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*.¹²

However, in order to bring to the fore the more radical aspect of Wittgenstein's reflection for a new thinking about democracy, a word of caution is needed. Indeed, within the general contextualist perspective many different directions can be taken and it does not constitute just one straight road that should be followed by all those who share Wittgenstein's understanding of the centrality of practices and forms of life. Even among those who agree broadly on the significance of Wittgenstein's later work, there are significant divergences and they have implications for the way in which one is going to develop a new way of political theorizing under wittgensteinian lines. In that respect, I consider that the criticisms levelled by Stanley Cavell towards the assimilation between Wittgenstein and pragmatists like John Dewey have important implications for envisaging the democratic project. For Cavell when Wittgenstein says: 'If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do"¹³, he is not making a typically pragmatic move and defending a view of language according to which certainty between words and world would be based on action. In Cavell's view, 'this is an expression less of action than of passion, or of impotency expressed as potency.'¹⁴ Discussing Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as making a skeptical discovery to which he gives a skeptical solution, Cavell argues that this misses the fact that for Wittgenstein 'skepticism is neither true nor false but a standing human threat to the human; that this absence of the victor helps articulate the fact that, in a democracy embodying good enough justice, the conversation over how good its justice is must take place and must also not have a victor, that this is not because agreement can or should always be reached but because disagreement, and separateness of position, is to be allowed its satisfactions, reached and expressed in particular ways.'¹⁵

This has far-reaching implications for politics since it precludes the type of self-complacent understanding of liberal democracy for which, for instance, many have criticized pragmatists like Richard Rorty. A radical reading of Wittgenstein needs to emphasize - in the way Cavell does in his critique of Rawls¹⁶ - that bringing a conversation to a close is always a personal choice, a *decision*

12 Ibid., 611-612.

13 *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 217.

14 Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Chicago, 1988, p. 21.

15 Ibid., p. 4.

16 For this criticism of Rawls by Cavell see Chapter 3 of his *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*.

11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, London 1969, 204

which cannot be simply presented as mere application of procedures and justified as the only move that we could make in those circumstances and that we should never refuse bearing responsibility for our decisions by invoking the commands of general rules or principles. It is essential to stress that what Wittgenstein's philosophy exemplifies is not a quest for certainty but a quest for responsibility. In Cavell's view, he teaches us that entering a claim is making an assertion, something human *do* and for which they should be answerable.

In the context of our conference it is worth stressing that a reading like Cavell's brings to light many important points of convergence between Wittgenstein and Derrida's account of undecidability and ethical responsibility. For Derrida, undecidability is not a moment to be traversed or overcome and conflicts of duty are interminable. I can never be satisfied that I have made a good choice since a decision in favour of some alternative is always to the detriment of another one. In the perspective of deconstruction, 'The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost – but an essential ghost – in every decision'.¹⁷ This requires that we give up the dream of total mastery and the fantasy that we could escape from our human forms of life. In our desire for a total grasp, says Wittgenstein, '[w]e have got on the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!'¹⁸

17 Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: the "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in D. Cornell et al. (eds) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, New York 1992, p.24.

18 *Philosophical Investigations*, op.cit. 107.

David Owen

Democracy, perfectionism and "undetermined messianic hope"

Cavell, Derrida and the ethos of democracy-to-come

Our only task is to be just. That is, we must only point out and resolve the injustices of philosophy, and not posit new parties - and creeds.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

To speak of Wittgenstein's legacy with respect to the field of political philosophy may still seem curious, even perverse, despite (or perhaps because of) the existence of literatures claiming Wittgenstein's philosophy for the articulation of conservative or, more rarely, radical attitudes. Yet it is this legacy of which this essay will attempt to speak. It will do so by seeking to elucidate Wittgenstein's legacy via a consideration of the topics of justice, democracy and perfectionism in the work of Stanley Cavell, and to draw out some similarities between this position and that presented by Jacques Derrida.

In 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy', Rorty offers a deflationary pragmatist endorsement of Rawls' political liberalism which argues both against the need for philosophical justifications of democracy: '[it] is not evident that [democratic institutions] are to be measured by anything more specific than the moral intuitions of the community that has created those institutions'¹ – and against the relevance of any connection between democracy and perfectionism: 'even if the typical character types of liberal democracies are bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic, the prevalence of such people may be a reasonable price to pay for political freedom.'² By contrast, I will suggest that Derrida and Cavell can both be characterised as arguing, in their different ways, that it is precisely because there is no foundational justification for democracy that we engage in philosophical reflection on democracy as expressions of (as well as challenges to) the moral intuitions of the community in question and that in reflecting philosophically on democracy we can elucidate the sense in which a processual perfectionism is essential to the ethos of democracy. In this essay, I will attempt to sketch some similarities between Derrida's and Cavell's arguments on 'the

1 Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 190.

2 *Ibid.*

promise of democracy'; however as a preface to this sketch I'd like to offer some preliminary remarks on Wittgenstein.

I.

To situate Wittgenstein in relation to political philosophy, we can begin by reflecting on one of the most widely cited remarks from *Philosophical Investigations*:

115. 'A picture held us captive. [*Ein bild hielt uns gesangen.*] And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.'³

This remark sets the scene for Wittgenstein's sketch of the practice of philosophy as seeking to release us from the grip of such pictures, pictures which have become part of our second nature and that, because we have forgotten that they are pictures, we experience as 'universal, necessary, obligatory' in Foucault's perspicuous phrase. (Note that this is to say nothing against pictures *per se*; on the contrary, it points to the centrality of pictures to the activity of philosophy and, indeed, the activity of thought.) But what is the sense of this remark, this claim that pictures can hold us captive? With this question, I want to draw attention to the way in which the opening sentence of this passage invites us (in both German and English) to consider two different images of being bound. The first is given by reading the sentence thus: 'A picture – held us captive.' Here the sense of the sentence is of being bound by force, of being held in captivity (as if in chains). The second is given by the stressing the sentence thus: 'A picture held us – captive.' The sense of the sentence here is of being spell-bound, of being captivated (as if hypnotised). Both ways of understanding this remark point to us as being enthralled by a picture and, thus, to a condition which obstructs self-government; indeed, the two ways of taking Wittgenstein's remark illustrate the two uses of the concept 'enthralled' (i.e., enslaved and entranced). The former highlights the obstruction of that aspect of self-government which concerns our capacity for agency, our capacity to act on the basis of our own judgments; the latter foregrounds the obstruction of that aspect of self-government which concerns our capacity for judging, our capacity to make our own judgments. Acknowledging these senses of Wittgenstein's remark guides us to the recognition that what he is drawing to our attention in this passage is the way in which the

3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), s.115.

exercise of our capacity for self-government *qua* agency is blocked by a picture because the exercise of our capacity for self-government *qua* judging is obstructed by this picture: we are enslaved because we are entranced. This point is confirmed by the following example from *Culture and Value*:

A man will be imprisoned in a room with a door that's unlocked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to pull rather than push it.⁴

Imagine: entranced by a picture of doors as opening outwards, Wittgenstein's man pushes and pushes with increasing frustration, with an increasing sense of powerlessness – and so experiences himself as imprisoned, as subject to external constraints on his capacity for agency, precisely because the idea that doors only open outwards is taken as prior to judgment, as a principle of judgment rather than as subject to judgment. Wittgenstein's purpose as it is expressed through his advocacy of 'perspicuous representation' is that of philosophy as directed to freeing us from pictures which 'generate insoluble problems by exercising an imperceptible tyranny over our thinking'.⁵ As Baker puts it:

The cure is to encourage surrender of the dogmatic claims 'Things *must/cannot* be thus and so' by exhibiting other intelligible ways of seeing things (other *possibilities*), that is, by showing that we can take off the pair of spectacles through which we now see whatever we look at. ... To the extent that philosophical problems take the form of the conflict between 'But this isn't how it is!' and 'Yet this is how it *must* be!' ..., they will obviously be dissolved away once the inclination to say 'must' has been neutralised by seeing another possibility.⁶ (1991: 48-9)

An example of such conflict in the domain of political philosophy is provided in the recent work of Quentin Skinner. I'll describe this example briefly to give a clearer sense of the claim being advanced here.

In *Liberty before Liberalism*, Skinner reconstructs a neo-roman theory of liberty which has been thoroughly eclipsed by the liberal analysis of negative liberty in terms of the absence of coercive impediments, most famously presented by Berlin. As Skinner puts it:

With the rise of the liberal theory to a position of hegemony in contemporary political philosophy, the neo-roman theory has been so much lost to sight that the liberal analysis

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.42.

5 Gordon Baker, 'Philosophical Investigations section 122: neglected aspects' in R. Arrington & H-J. Glock (eds) *Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations': text and context* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.49.

6 *Ibid.* p.48-9.

has come to be widely regarded as the only coherent way of thinking about the concept concerned.⁷

So, for example, when we are subject to the status of social and/or political dependence, we may want to say both that liberal theory does not fit (is not true to, does not speak to) our inchoate experience of this status as unfreedom (and that this sense of the infelicity of liberal theory will be inchoate in no way prevents it from being experienced as pressing!) and yet that liberal theory *must* be the appropriate way of bringing our experience to choate expression, if only because its hegemony is such that it appears to be the *only* coherent way of talking about our experience with respect to freedom. In this context, liberal theory fails to acknowledge our inchoate sense that subjection to arbitrary or discretionary powers is a form of servitude by obstructing the choate articulation of this judgment. In other words, captivated by the liberal picture of freedom, we are captured by it; left without the conceptual resources to adequately express our inchoate sense of servitude, we are unable to integrate and give expression to this experience - and thus, we remain bound, obscure to ourselves. In this context, Skinner's excavation of the neo-roman theory of liberty functions as a perspicuous representation just because it frees us from subjection to the liberal picture and, in particular, the conceptual divorce between dependency and freedom which that picture imposed on us. In performing this role, Skinner assembles reminders (the neo-roman theory of freedom) which dissolve our predicament (the conflict between 'But this isn't how it is!' and 'Yet this is how it *must* be!') and thus facilitate self-government (becoming intelligible to ourselves).

This example suggests that Wittgenstein's relation to political philosophy does not take the form of advancing theses but rather of dissolving the despotic demands of pictures which we have forgotten are pictures. Moreover, insofar as such forgetting is a standing possibility with respect to our ways of thinking in the world, so too does Wittgenstein's commitment to the method of perspicuous representation stand as a processual perfectionist orientation to self-government, that is, an ongoing orientation to becoming intelligible to ourselves. It is this commitment which is taken up and developed in Cavell's Emersonian Perfectionism with respect to democracy as an ethical ideal.

7 Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p.113.

II.

Cavell offers a sketch of the main feature of Emersonian perfectionism in terms of attention to the aesthetic aspect of moral judgment. The following passage provides this sketch:

Attention to the aesthetic aspect of (moral) judgment suggests a way of accounting for my speaking of Perfectionism not as a competing moral theory ... but as emphasizing a dimension of the moral life any theory of it may wish to accommodate. Any theory must, I suppose, regard the moral creature as one that demands and recognizes the intelligibility of others to himself or herself, and of himself or herself to others; so moral conduct can be said to be based on reason, and philosophers will sometimes gloss this as the idea that moral conduct is subject to questions whose answers take the form of giving reasons. Moral Perfectionism's contribution to thinking about the moral necessity of making oneself intelligible (one's actions, one's sufferings, one's position) is, I think it can be said, its emphasis before all on becoming intelligible to oneself, as if the threat to one's moral coherence comes most insistently from that quarter, from one's sense of obscurity to oneself, as if we are subject to demands we cannot formulate, leaving us unjustified, as if our lives condemn themselves. Perfectionism's emphasis on culture or cultivation is, to my mind, to be understood in connection with this search for intelligibility ...⁸

In order to understand this emphasis on intelligibility, on what Cavell refers to as 'the absolute responsibility of the self to make itself intelligible', I'll begin by focusing on Cavell's reference to the 'aesthetic aspect of (moral) judgment'.

To grasp the sense of this reference, we can start with a remark of Wittgenstein's on the concept of understanding:

We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than a musical theme can be replaced by another.)

In the one case, the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem.)⁹

These two uses of the concept of understanding draw attention respectively to the descriptive (i.e., periphrastic) and expressive (i.e., non-periphrastic) dimensions of our linguistic practices. As Wittgenstein's parenthetical illustrations suggest, Cavell's reference to the 'aesthetic aspect' of (moral) judgment points us to the expressive dimension of (moral) judgment and, thereby, to the fact that he is

8 Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxxi-xxxii.

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), s.531.

using the concept of intelligibility to mark this expressive dimension of subjectivity. Thus we can surmise that moral perfectionism is concerned with that dimension of moral life which involves the self's understanding of itself from an expressive point of view, i.e., the self's understanding of itself in its individuality. Cavell's frequent references to Emerson's advocacy of moral perfectionism in terms of an aversion to, or turning away from, conformity stresses the significance of just this expressive aspect of our actions, our sufferings and our position.¹⁰

Given this perfectionist concern with individuality, how are we to understand Cavell's advocacy of democracy as an ethical ideal, that is as an ideal for me in my individuality? A starting point is provided by Cavell's discussion of social contract theory. In the discussion, Cavell draws attention to the fact that consent is not simply a question of obedience but also of membership:

What I consent to, in consenting to the contract, is not mere obedience, but membership in a polis, which implies to two things: First, that I recognize the principle of consent itself, which means that I recognize others to have consented with me, and hence that I consent to political *equality*. Second, that I recognize the society and its government, so constituted, as *mine*; which means that I am answerable not merely to it, but for it. So far, then, as I recognize myself to be exercising my responsibility for it, my obedience to it is obedience to my own laws; citizenship in that case is the same as my autonomy; the polis is the field within which I work out my personal identity and it is the creation of (political) *freedom*.¹¹

Conceived in this way, the social contract theorists are not providing an answer to the question 'Why ought I obey?' in terms of the general advantages of citizenship but, rather, specifying the terms on which, given the imperfections of all actually existing states, the question of whether I should withdraw my consent can be taken up. What is involved in asking and attempting to answer this question? On the one hand, this teaching enjoins that I work out what is involved in consenting to membership with (equal) others in society. This is to clarify the character of political identity as a mode of being-with-others (which can be contrasted to other modes of community). On the other hand, it also instructs me to attend to *what* it is that I am consenting to, to the content of *my* membership in *this* society. This is to clarify the extent to which I am in community with the

10 The Emersonian theme of aversion to conformity runs through Cavell's reflections on moral perfectionism in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. For some salient commentary on this issue, see Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1994), especially chapter 11.

11 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 23.

society of which I am a member, the extent to which I assent to, or dissent from, *what* is said in my name.

With respect to consenting to membership, to what is involved in (any) acts of consent, Cavell argues that:

To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind. Who these others are, for whom you speak and by whom you are spoken for, is not known a priori, though it is in practice generally treated as given. To speak for yourself then means risking the rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – of those for whom you claimed to be speaking; and it means risking having to rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – those who claimed to be speaking for you.¹²

In this respect, consent is the condition of having a political voice and claiming a political voice is the expression of consent. As Stephen Mulhall put it:

Possessing a political voice is a matter of claiming to speak for others because it is equivalent to speaking as a citizen, and being a citizen is a matter of being one member of a community of fellow citizens; the extent of that community may be open to empirical investigation, but the implication that your speech is representative of *some* community or other is not. By the same token, one cannot possess a political voice without allowing that others may speak for you, since being a citizen involves consenting to be identified with the words and deeds of one's fellow citizens; once again, their identity and numbers may be open to dispute, but their existence is not.¹³

In this respect, the specific relationship between democracy and perfectionism lies (1) in the sense that processual perfectionism in its political aspect is dependent on conditions of democracy in that membership in a democratic polis is the condition of free political individuality, and (2) the claim that democratic institutions and practices rely on the existence of individuals who are prepared to take responsibility for their speech and for the actions of the polis. It is against this background that Cavell advances his criticisms of John Rawls' work as captured by a picture which leaves blind to the significance of the aesthetic dimension of our judgments and thus to the role of perfectionism.

We can begin by noting that the grounds on which Cavell advances his criticisms hang on his account of consent:

I assume that we know in the original position that any actual society will be imperfectly just; I assume, that is, that the theory of *A Theory of Justice* is composed only with

12 *Ibid.* 27.

13 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 62.

knowledge available in the original position, and it says that existing constitutions are bound to fall short of what is just (p.360) and that "the measure of departure from the ideal is left importantly to intuition" (p.246). The idea of directing consent to the principles on which society is based rather than, as it were, to society as such, seems to be or to lead to an effort to imagine confining or proportioning the consent I give to my society – to imagine that the social contract not only states in effect that I may withdraw my consent from society when the public institutions of justice lapse in favor of which I have foregone certain natural rights (of judgment and of redress) but that the contract might, in principle, specify how far I may reduce my consent (in scope or degree) as justice is reduced (legislatively or judicially). But my intuition is that my consent is not thus modifiable or proportional (psychological exile is not exile): I cannot keep consent focused on the successes or graces of society; it reaches into every corner of society's failure or ugliness.¹⁴

Three questions are raised by this passage. How is Rawls committed to this picture of consent as directed at principles? What does this involve? And, finally, what is the significance of this commitment for Cavell's advocacy of moral perfectionism?

There are, Cavell notes, two instances of what may be called the conversation of justice in *A Theory of Justice*. The first conversation concerns the constitution of the original position and involves a process whereby principles and intuitions are matched against one another. This conversation of justice comes to an end in a state of reflective equilibrium. The second conversation concerns the degree of compliance with, or departure from, the principle of justice decided in the first conversation, where „the measure of departure from the ideal is left importantly to intuition.“¹⁵ For Rawls, it seems, this conversation also involves the matching of principles and intuitions, not least in the sense that "if an initial [i.e., intuitive] judgment that an injustice is being perpetuated cannot ultimately be backed up by reference to (or articulated in terms of) a principle of justice, then it must be rejected; and those of us to whom the accusation was voiced can think of ourselves and „our conduct [a]s above reproach“.¹⁶ Cavell's suspicion is that "Rawls is taking encouragement from the proof concerning the resolution for the original position, to regard „above reproach“ as a rational response to the question of affirming a plan of life in our actual society."¹⁷ But this could only be the case if we could expect the proof of an optimal resolution in the first conversation also held for the second conversation – and Cavell argues that there is "no such proof to be expected that the conversation of justice has an optimal, or any, resolution, when it is directed to the constitution of our actual set of institu-

14 Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 107.

15 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 246.

16 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 272.

17 Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, xxv.

tions.¹⁸ Cavell's grounds for this claim are articulated by sketching how the appeal to intuition in the second conversation differs from the appeal to intuition in the first conversation:

In the latter case, our "judgments of the basic structure of society" which are to be matched with the principles of justice are, before that matching, made "intuitively, and we can note whether applying these principles would lead us to make the same judgments ... in which we have the greatest confidence ...; or whether, in cases where our present judgments are in doubt and given with hesitation ..., these principles offer a resolution which we can affirm on reflection". ... But the matching of principles with considered judgments yielding reflective equilibrium does not describe the process of bringing a present perception ... under what Kant describes ... as reflective judgment. In the former case, intuition is left behind. In the latter case, intuition is left in place.¹⁹

Cavell acknowledges that there is "an idea or picture of matching in play" in both cases, but insists on the difference between them. In arriving at reflective equilibrium "the picture is that judgment finds its derivation in a principle, something more universal, rational, objective, say a standard, from which it achieves justification or grounding".²⁰ Whereas in reflective judgment, "the idea is of the expression of a conviction whose grounding remains subjective – say myself – but which expects or claims justification from the (universal) concurrence of other subjectivities, on reflection; call this the acknowledgement of matching."²¹ The failure to mark the distinction between the modes of matching at play in the two conversations, that is, the treatment of the second conversation as involving the same picture of matching as the first, entails that Rawls' principle-based picture of consent is carried over from the first conversation to the second. This has two related consequences.

First, it appears that our (rational) consent to society is proportional to the compliance of society to the principles of justice. Thus, for Rawls, the degree to which I am joined to society is simply a function of the degree to which it embodies the principles of justice. But this picture precludes the possibility of the experience, highlighted by Cavell's non-proportional account of consent, of being answerable for society as mine. It occludes the sense in which I can experience myself as implicated in, and compromised by, unjust actions or practices performed in my name; the sense that I cannot, in truth, avoid responsibility for such actions and that this is part and parcel of the damage that such unjust actions or practices do. Second, it appears that we are only open to, or obligated to en-

18 Ibid. xxv.

19 Ibid. xxv-xxvi.

20 Ibid. xxvi.

21 Ibid. xxvi.

gage with, charges of injustice expressed in terms of these principles. The implication of this claim is that the nature and form of our political identities are (exhaustively) specified and fixed by the principles of justice. Political activity does not concern the exploration, extension, revision or transformation of our political identities but, rather, the affirmation and re-affirmation of these identities – the depth and extent of our political identities is determined in advance. It is this point to which Cavell is referring us when he comments:

It seems to me that Rawls is taking encouragement from the proof concerning the resolution for the original position, to regard "above reproach" as a rational response to the question of affirming a plan of life in our actual society. Whereas this bottom line is not a response to but a refusal of further conversation.²²

Is this refusal justified? Responding to this question requires that we return to the issue of having one's own political voice and, thereby, return to the question of the place of moral perfectionism.

Let us begin by noting that, on Cavell's account of the theory of social contract, what calls for response in my expression of a conviction of injustice is not that the conviction of injustice to which I give voice can be articulated in terms of a principle of justice, but, rather, that in giving voice to this conviction I speak for you as well as myself, I (claim to) speak for *us*. In this respect, to refuse to acknowledge the conviction I express as an offer of conversation (if it is not – if it cannot be – expressed by reference to the principles of justice) is to deny me a political voice, it is to render me politically voiceless, mute. It is this experience of voicelessness which Cavell finds expressed by Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. In this play, Nora struggles to express, to bring to expression, her inchoate sense of injustice: '„I could tear myself to pieces"²³ and '„I must find out which is right – the world or I"²⁴. The dilemma in which Nora finds herself is that to speak in the language of the moral consensus, represented by her husband Torvald, who has managed 'for the eight years of their marriage, to control her voice, dictate what it may utter and the manner in which it may utter it',²⁵ is not to be able to give expression to her conviction of injustice; while to find other, new, words and ways of speaking capable of expressing this conviction is to be held not to speak in terms which we are required to acknowledge, that is, not to speak (in the relevant sense) at all – as, for example, when Torvald responds to her need to know if she or the world is right '„You're ill, Nora – I almost believe

22 Ibid. xxv.

23 Ibid. 109.

24 Ibid. 110.

25 Ibid. xxvi.

you're out of your senses."²⁶ or, again, when he disqualifies her voice by claiming '„You're talking like a child."²⁷ What Cavell draws to our attention with the example of Nora (and Torvald) is the way in which the moral consensus of society denies Nora's (political) voice and, thus, leaves her out of the conversation of justice – her (political) identity remains obscure because the terms on which she could make intelligible (i.e., express) her sense of injustice are denied to her. Thus, as Cavell puts it, Nora has been deprived of a voice in her own (political) history.²⁸

The problem with Rawls' position on Cavell's reading is, thus, that Rawls' account of our political identities and the field of our political voices as (contractually) specified and fixed by the principles of justice entails that his theory of justice is blind to the possibility of the problem that 'the whole framework of principles in terms of which [we] must conduct the second conversation of justice is experienced as so pervasively and systematically unresponsive to [our] suffering that it appears to stifle [us], to constitute a vocabulary in which nothing that can be said truly speaks [our] mind, gives expression to [our] experience.'²⁹ This is, of course, just to say that precisely to the extent that Rawls' theory of justice specifies and fixes our political identities by reference to a set of formal principles, it is aspect-blind, unable to see the aesthetic (i.e., expressive) dimension of human identities, and thus unable to recognize violations of this dimension of our identities. The place of moral perfectionism is to alert us to the possibility of such violations and, thereby, to the need for openness and responsiveness to claims to injustice expressed in other terms than our own.

III.

Now I'd like to align this ethical dimension of Wittgenstein's legacy as it is presented in Cavell with, what I take to be, a related ethical dimension of Derrida's thinking which is expressed in terms of 'the experience of undecidability'. Thus, for example, in *Limited Inc.* he writes that the undecidable, in the sense that concerns him,

remains *heterogeneous* both to the dialectic and to the calculable. In accordance with what is only ostensibly a paradox, *this particular* undecidable opens the field of decision

26 Ibid. 110.

27 Ibid. 115.

28 Ibid. xxxvii-xxxviii.

29 Stephen Mulhall, 'Promising Consent and Citizenship', *Political Theory* 25 (2), 1997, 186.

or of decidability. It calls for decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility. It is even its necessary condition. A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes. There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and passage by way of the undecidable. Even if a decision seems only to take a second and not to be preceded by any deliberation, it is structured by this *experience and experiment of the undecidable*. If I insist on this point from now on, it is, I repeat, because this discussion is, will be, and ought to be at bottom an ethical-political one.³⁰

I take it that Derrida's point is that the space of moral and political judgment is opened up by 'the experience of the undecidable' just in the sense that the intelligibility of this space requires that it is always possible to re-describe, to see under another aspect, and hence entails that acknowledgment that no description is final or exhaustive, that closure cannot be complete. In this respect, even if a decision only takes a second and, as Derrida adds, is not preceded by any deliberation, it is structured by this experience and experiment of the undecidable just in the sense that undecidability is a transcendental condition of decidability, of the possibility of deciding, because it is only the fact that we can go on differently which makes the concept of decision an intelligible one, a concept which acknowledges that we are responsible agents and not merely the vehicles of an algorithm. One can no more have decision without undecidability than we can have power without freedom.

This hinge on which the practice of deconstruction swings raises as a central ethical topic for itself the issue of the *orientation* of deconstruction. Derrida acknowledges this point when he insists that undecidability implies that at root our discussion, including our discussion of discussion, is ethico-political. Consequently Derrida in his more recent writings seeks to argue that 'deconstruction would always begin to take shape as the thinking of the gift and of undeconstructible justice, the undeconstructible condition of any deconstruction'³¹ – and, relatedly, to insist that seeking to do justice to the other requires that the decision traverses the experience of undecidability, which means simply that the decision acknowledges that the system of judgment in terms of which the decision is reached be subject to the demand that it acknowledges the alterity of the other and seeks to render the other their due. We can unpack this orienting of deconstruction in terms of Derrida's distinction between law and justice, a distinction which marks the aporetic relationship between the orders of generality and of singularity. Consider Wittgenstein's remark in s.531 of *Philosophical Investigations* (which we have already cited in relation to Cavell):

30 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p.116.

31 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.28.

We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than a musical theme can be replaced by another.)

In the one case, the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem).

Wittgenstein's distinction between the periphrastic and the non-periphrastic uses of the concept 'understanding' illustrates just the sense in which Derrida distinguishes between law (periphrastic) and justice (non-periphrastic) – and as such elucidates the sense in which Derrida can argue that there is a necessarily aporetic relationship between law (as the means through which justice is given) and justice (as the impossible demand of an unlimited responsibility to the singularity of the other).

This aporetic relationship structures Derrida's understanding of the ethos of democracy as promise, of democracy-to-come, as

the opening of this gap between the infinite promise (always untenable at least for the reason that it calls for the infinite respect of the singularity *and* infinite alterity of the other as much as for the respect of the countable, calculable, subjectal equality between anonymous singularities) and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise. To this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise ... will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.³²

This notion of 'democracy-to-come' thus discloses Derrida's commitment to an ethos of what he terms 'undetermined messianic hope'. The question which this raises is whether this ethos is to be (or can be) conceived as a form of processual perfectionism.

Two considerations tell in favour of identifying the ethos of which Derrida speaks with Cavell's processual perfectionism. First, Cavell and Derrida both articulate their views of democracy(-to-come) in terms of a concern with the aesthetic dimension of our judgments and our experience. For both, democracy is a form of polity in which the free relation of singular individuals is at stake and hence an appropriate concern with democracy can never be specified solely in terms of (constitutional) law but will always need to refer to *ethos*. Second, Derrida's 'undetermined messianic hope' is best conceived as an ethical relationship in which we stand to the past, present and future, whereby we seek ways of accommodating the singularity of individuals. 'Undetermined' precisely because any

32 Ibid. p.65.

final determination would deny the singularity which the messianic hope addresses and articulates. Democracy is the form of this non-determination – and it is 'to-come' because it is itself, as the political form of this undetermined messianic hope, always already open to the acknowledgment of its own avoidances.

Against this argument, it might be pointed out that Derrida, unlike Cavell, does not specifically identify an internal link between perfectionism and democracy. For Cavell, it is clear that the absolute responsibility to become intelligible to oneself is discharged in and through one's relationship with others; thus, the exercise of one's political voice 'is at once a means of exploring one's individuality and one's community; it constitutes a mode of establishing a form of self-knowledge which is simultaneously a knowledge of others.'³³ For Derrida, by contrast, it is not one's absolute responsibility to become intelligible to oneself but rather one's unlimited responsibility to the singularity of the other (which does not mean "unlimited responsibility to the other") that animates the spirit of democracy. I am not sure that very much hangs on this distinction since it seems to me that Derrida does in this way establish an internal relationship between democracy and perfectionism, namely, that it is in acting democratically that I discharge (but never finally) my obligations to concrete others as singular individuals and that this "acting democratically" has the form of a dialogue in which we work out the terms on which we speak for ourselves and each other. For Derrida, as for Cavell, responsibility is tied to responsiveness.

IV.

Given the relentlessly abstract nature of this discussion, it may be as well to conclude this paper by referring to some examples which allow us to see the similarities between the approaches of Cavell and Derrida.

Struggles for cultural recognition represent one of the most pressing issues for political theory and practice. The salient similarities of such struggles can be expressed in terms of three related claims:

First, demands for cultural recognition are aspirations for appropriate forms of self-government. ... What they share is a longing for self-rule: to rule themselves in accord with their customs and ways. ... The second similarity is the complementary claim that the basic laws and institutions of modern societies, and their authoritative traditions of interpretation, are unjust in so far as they thwart the forms of self-government appropriate to the recognition of cultural diversity. ... The final similarity I wish to draw to your attention is the ground of both the aspiration to culturally appropriate forms of self-rule and

the claim of injustice. It is the assumption that culture is an irreducible and constitutive aspect of politics. The diverse ways in which citizens think about, speak, act and relate to others in participating in a constitutional association (both the abilities they exercise and the practices in which they exercise them) ... are always to some extent the expression of their different cultures.³⁴

With respect to Cavell's analysis, the fundamental point to note about such struggles is that they do not involve 'the undoing of consent' but rather charge that our present arrangements are unfaithful to the convention of consent precisely insofar as these arrangements fail to acknowledge that culture is an irreducible and constitutive aspect of politics. In other words, these arrangements fail to acknowledge that the issue of consent *qua* the terms and conditions of our constitutional association 'becomes the issue of whether the voice I lend in recognizing a society as mine, as speaking for me, is my voice, my own.'³⁵ The point to which Cavell directs our attention is the significance of experiencing one's political voice as one's own voice. This aspect of the issue of consent marks out the sense in which one can be estranged from one's political voice, experience it as alien, precisely insofar as the language of self-government in and through which one is constrained to speak - if one is to speak politically at all - is not one's own. It is in just this respect that those engaged in struggles for recognition are caught in the same double bind as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. As James Tully puts it:

How can the proponents of [cultural] recognition bring forth their claims in a public forum in which their cultures have been excluded or demeaned for centuries? They can accept the authoritative language and institutions, in which case their claims are rejected by conservatives or comprehended by progressives within the very languages and institutions whose sovereignty and impartiality they question. Or they can refuse to play the game, in which case they become marginal and reluctant conscripts or they take up arms.³⁶

Unable to bring their sense of injustice to expression within the language of modern constitutionalism or, to put it another way, unable to describe their sense of injustice by reference to, say, Rawls' principles of justice, the proponents of cultural recognition are denied a voice in their own political history. Their political identities remain obscure to them because the terms on which they could render their civic identities intelligible are obstructed by a modern constitutional

34 James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4-6.

35 Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 27.

36 *Ibid.* p. 56.

33 Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, 65.

language in which the refusal to engage with the offer of conversation at stake in struggles for cultural recognition is construed as 'above reproach'.

By contrast, Cavell's approach acknowledges the 'first and often overlooked step in any enquiry into justice', namely, 'to investigate if the language in which the enquiry proceeds is itself just: that is, capable of rendering the speakers their due'.³⁷ In this respect, Cavell's account directs us to two significant general points with respect to struggles for cultural recognition. First, it indicates the sense in which the avoidance of cultural recognition constitutes a harm, namely, that such avoidance fails to acknowledge the significance of not simply have a voice but having *one's own* voice and, thus, at best marginalises and at worst silences the voices of citizens who do not belong to the culturally hegemonic group(s). It is in just this respect that Cavell's argument entails that there is 'a certain priority' with respect to cultural recognition in comparison with the many other questions of justice that a constitution must address. As Tully puts it: 'since other questions must be discussed and agreements reached by the citizens, the first step is to establish a just form of constitutional discussion in which each speaker is given her or his due, and this is exactly the initial question raised by the politics of cultural recognition.'³⁸ Second, Cavell's argument entails that we re-conceive our constitutional association as a process in which the terms of association are always provisional and defeasible. This point follows from Cavell's acknowledgement that citizenship is not, as Rawls would argue, 'a special kind of institutionally defined or practice-based office' but 'rather a basic dimension of human existence and relationship that is essentially open or partly undefined in advance.'³⁹ In other words, because, on Cavell's account, the terms and conditions of our association express, rather than define, the form of our political community, the ongoing process of working out our community with other citizens is also the ongoing negotiation and re-negotiation of terms and conditions of the constitutional association which sustains our identities as free citizens.

Now, consider in relation to Cavell's position as it has been sketched, the following two sets of remarks by Derrida:

[1] ... it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity, and in advancing itself in an exemplary way towards what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other, indeed - and this is perhaps something else

37 Ibid. 34. See also David Owen 'Political philosophy in a post-imperial voice', *Economy and Society* 28, no.4 (1999), for a full consideration of Tully's argument which explores aspects of its affinities to Cavell's work.

38 Ibid. 6.

39 Mulhall, 'Promising, consent and citizenship', 189.

altogether - toward the other of the heading, which would be beyond this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.⁴⁰

and

[2] There is today an aspiration towards a bond between singularities all over the world. This bond not only extends beyond nations and states, such as they are composed today or such as they are in the process of decomposition, but extends beyond the very concepts of nation or state. For example, if I feel in solidarity with this particular Algerian who is caught between F.I.S. and the Algerian state, or this particular Croat, Serbian or Bosnian, ... it's not a feeling of one citizen towards another, it's not a feeling peculiar to a citizen of the world, as if we were all potentially or imaginary citizens of a great state. No, what binds me to these people is something different than membership of a world nation-state or of an international community extending indefinitely what one still calls today "the nation-state." What binds me to them - and this is the point: there is a bond, but this bond cannot be contained within traditional concepts of community, obligation and responsibility - is a protest against citizenship, a protest against membership of a political configuration as such. This bond is, for example, *a form of political solidarity opposed to the political qua a politics tied to the nation-state.*⁴¹

These two sets of remarks are consistent insofar as the first casts a critical but hopeful look to Europe, to the idea of Europe and the political reality of the EU, as a topos which is capable in its self-reflection of giving expression to the form of political solidarity of which the second passage speaks. What is essential to my purposes here is that these passages illustrate the character of Derrida's commitment to democracy as an ethical ideal by calling for (1st passage) and supporting (2nd passage) a responsiveness to and responsibility for those aspects of our political identities which are occluded or repressed by the hegemonic "nation-state" understanding of political community. Moreover, just as Cavell's argument entails that the promise and task of democracy is always beginning again, that our political practices must always be taken as provisional and defeasible, so too does Derrida's deconstructive contribution. As David Campbell puts it, perhaps the most important feature of deconstructive thought 'is its recognition that in order to enact the promise of democracy, justice and multiculturalism, all political proposals have to be *preceded* by the qualification of a "perhaps" and *followed* by an insistent and persistent questioning':

40 Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 29.

41 Jacques Derrida, 'Nietzsche and the Machine. Interview with Richard Beardsworth', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 7 (Spring 1994) pp. 47-8, cited in David Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 239.

With this all-important temporal dimension, deconstructive thought calls for an ongoing political process of critique and invention that is never satisfied that a lasting solution can or has been reached. As Derrida observes, "once again, here as elsewhere, whatever deconstruction is at stake, it would be a matter of linking an *affirmation* (in particular a political one), *if there is any*, to the experience of the impossible which can only be a radical experience of the *perhaps*."⁴² (Campbell, 1998: 242)

In other words, it is in its exemplification of just those features which Cavell's Wittgensteinian approach also exemplifies that deconstruction's significance for political philosophy lies. In both cases, an acknowledgment of the violence involved in the occlusion or repression of salient aspects of our political identities drives a commitment to reminding us of the contingent character of our pictures, that they are pictures forged in a particular set of circumstances and in relation to particular practical questions, and opening up the space of our political imaginations by dissolving the dogmatic claims 'Things *must/cannot* be thus and so'.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay is to suggest that, first, that Wittgenstein has a significant legacy for political philosophy which can be seen by reference to the work of Cavell and, second, that there are significant similarities between Wittgenstein's legacy and the independent path traced by Jacques Derrida. Having said this, it should not be thought that I am suggesting the identity of Wittgensteinian and deconstructive approaches - far from it! Rather I simply focus on the similarities here in order to open a debate in which the differences will no doubt be of crucial import. In particular, I have tried to highlight the way in which the accounts of the ethos of democracy advanced by both Cavell and Derrida involve dissolving a picture of democracy in which the aesthetic dimension of our being as political subjects is elided for purposes of political reflection (a picture itself closely linked to the equally misleading picture of reasons as necessarily independent of their expression which Cavell and Derrida also seek to dissolve).

42 David Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 242.

Ludwig Nagl

"How hard I find it to see what is right in front of me"¹

Wittgenstein's quest for "simplicity and ordinariness"²

Is Wittgenstein's search for "Einfachheit" an attempt to return to "commonsense": to a trustful relationship with reality that allows us to overcome skepticism "pragmatically"? Is his method to achieve this - his struggle against the bewitchments of language - "deconstructive" (in a Derridaian sense)?

1) Pragmatism?

In spite of the fact that there are significant similarities between, f.i., William James's subversions of the "copy theory of truth" by means of a pragmatic pluralism and Wittgenstein's analyses of the "multiplicity of language games" (Phl 23), in spite of the fact that Wittgenstein was an admirer of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* - and even in spite of the "emphasis on the primacy of practice" that Wittgenstein, Peirce and James have in common³, we have clear indications that Wittgenstein was not at all in sympathy with any full-blown version of pragmatism, and especially not with a pragmatism of the Deweyan type. Hilary Putnam shows that the structural resemblances between Wittgenstein's and James's arguments are, at least in part, due to a shared intellectual background: "Wittgenstein's reflections flow from and continue some of Kant's reflections [...] and parallel [thus] a certain strain in pragmatism". (WWP 27). This, however, does not imply that Wittgenstein is in favor of any explicit pragmatic method. Stanley Cavell makes us aware of this in his paper "What is the use of calling Emerson a pragmatist?"⁴ where he emphasizes the obvious "difference of style" between Dewey and Wittgenstein - a difference which is far from being only formal: Wittgenstein's insistent fight against, and acknowledgment of, skepticism attributes to philosophy (and its history), according to Cavell, "a weight, which nowhere is found in Dewey." Both Putnam and Cavell convinc-

1 "Wie schwer fällt mir zu sehen, was vor meinen Augen liegt"; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (English translation of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*/Translator Peter Winch), University of Chicago Press 1980 (= CV39e).
2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, New York 1953 (= PhI), 123.
3 Hilary Putnam, "Was Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?", in *Pragmatism. An Open Question*, Oxford/Cambridge 1995 (= WWP), p.52.
4 Stanley Cavell, "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?", in: Morris Dickstein (ed.), *The Revival of Pragmatism*, Duke University Press 1998.

ingly show that Wittgenstein is neither a "deflationary" thinker nor "simply an 'end of philosophy' philosopher". His "practice cannot be understood as a repudiation of something called 'traditional philosophy'; Wittgenstein is as much continuing a tradition of philosophical reflection as he is repudiating certain kinds of philosophical reflection." (WWP 31) All easy ways out of "philosophy" - for instance those that "liberal ironists" like Rorty seek - lead ultimately to a dead end since philosophy "buries its undertakers": "We remain to be troubled with questions which cannot be ignored because they spring from the very nature of reason", writes Kant, - questions which, at the same time, "cannot be answered because they transcend the power of human reason" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface). Sceptical reflection, although it can be stopped for a while, cannot be stopped altogether - it is here, if not to stay, at least to return; we cannot hope, in following the algorithms of scientific enlightenment, to reach a secure, "commonsensical" world-orientation once and for all.

When Wittgenstein - by destroying "false pictures" of language and the world - tries to make visible the "overlooked" and the "common", he does so in indirect ways. The ordinary is never seen as a haven of regression: its structure is full of ambivalences and interpenetrated by "illusion". ("Alltäglichkeit", for Wittgenstein, is an ethically charged locus, not a locus of rest). Wittgenstein is very much aware of the de-differentiating potential of any "pragmatism" trivially read: When, in *On Certainty*, he writes that what he "wants to say [...] sounds like pragmatism", he is quick in adding: "Mir kommt hier eine Art Weltanschauung in die Quere" (OC 422) ("Here a kind of world view thwarts my plans"). "Weltanschauungen" are oversimplifications: Wittgenstein knows that "a petty age" has the potential "to misunderstand all others in its own nasty way." (CV 86e). It would, e.g., be a misunderstanding to proclaim that "metaphysics" can be quickly "set aside" and forgotten (an idea that Rortyan neopragmatists share with Logical Empiricists): Wittgenstein, in strict opposition to this, keeps emphasizing that the *conditio humana* is a "conditio" of ongoing "struggles" against those "false pictures" that "hold us captive" and distort our experiences: such pictures are not only generated by (classical) metaphysical excesses (by "Überschwang", in Kant's sense): they are generated also - in dangerous and covert ways - by exaggerated idealizations in (and of) science and mathematics: by the compulsive ideal of "crystalline purity" (PhI 107): that is, by the pretense that the reach of our "logical" concepts is absolute - that we have the privilege of a "God's Eye View" in the field of "the analytic": "What I am opposed to", writes Wittgenstein, "is the concept of some ideal exactitude given us a priori, as it were. At different times we have different ideals of exactitude; and none of them is supreme." (CV 37e)

In struggling with these "misleading pictures", Wittgenstein aims at ordinari-ness. But he keeps, at the same time, all explicit pragmatisms at a distance: he is neither a Peircean, nor a Deweyan, nor - for that matter - anything like the precursor of neo-pragmatism.

1.1. The classical recourse to "commonsense" is not identical with Wittgenstein's "deconstructive" quest for the ordinary.

Stanley Cavell shows that Wittgenstein's notion of "ordinariness" is characterized by deep ambivalences: ambivalences which are repressed when "Alltag" is read as a "commonsense"-based form of immediacy (regained), or as a "practical" orientation "beyond skepticism". In "Declining Decline" Cavell writes: "Wittgenstein's appeal or 'approach' to the everyday finds the (actual) everyday to be as pervasive a scene of illusion and trance and artificiality (of need) as Plato or Rousseau or Marx or Thoreau had found. His philosophy of the (eventual) everyday is the proposal of a practice that takes on, takes upon itself, precisely (I do not say exclusively) that scene of illusion and of loss; approaches it, or let me say reproaches it, intimately enough to turn it, or deliver it; as if the actual is the womb, contains the terms, of the eventual. The direction out from illusion is not up, at any rate not up to one fixed morning star; but down [...] Philosophy (as descent) can thus be said to leave everything as it is because it is a refusal of, say disobedient to, (a false) ascent, or transcendence. [...] Plato's sun has shown us the fact of our chains; but that sun was produced by our chains."⁵

1.2 "Descent", "false ascent", and Wittgenstein's reflection on the "eternal and important" (CVB 80).

Cavell shows, in his extensive readings of the *Investigations*, that Wittgenstein resists all "false ascent, or transcendence". Wittgenstein's complex moves against our excesses of idealization cannot, however, be read as a denial of - in Wittgenstein's words - "the eternal and important". (Philosophy "turned", or "philosophy as descent", is not simply a re-enactment of the post-Hegelian, say Feuerbachian, attempts to critically unsettle, and re-situate, transcendence "immanentistically" - quite the opposite, it may seem: the destruction of false "noumenal" claims [Derridians might call them "onto-theological" claims] takes to heart - in a transformed way - something similar to Augustine's [self-jadmonition "In te ipsum redi".]) In *Vermischte Bemerkungen* Wittgenstein writes: "What is eternal and important is often hidden from a man by an impenetrable veil. He knows: there's something under there, but he cannot see it. The veil reflects the daylight." (80, 1949) Feuerbachian "immanentists" will claim that this image is but the (old) lure of "false metaphysics". Is Wittgenstein's aphorism just ironic?

5 Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline", in *The Cavell Reader* (ed. Stephen Mulhall) Cambridge 1996 (= DD), p. 332.

Is it the re-deployment of a "metaphysical illusion" that reflects Plato's illusionary "sun" in the "daylight" of a (treacherous) "presentism"? Does this re-deployment organize the seduction that we must resist in all autonomous, disobedient philosophizing? But - if this is what Wittgenstein is really up to - how then are we to understand that other reflection (CV 57e) where - after asking himself: "Is what I am doing really worth the effort?" - Wittgenstein answers: "Yes, but only if a light shines on it from above"? Is this light just the light of "Übersicht" (the post-Tractarian goal of philosophizing) - or is it a light which, in Wittgenstein's view, makes "Übersicht", as far as it ever gets real, possible? Be this as it may: Wittgenstein, it seems, carefully avoids any image that promotes Feuerbachian readings of the world; readings in which we see ourselves - due to an "immanentistic" turn - freed altogether from the (troublesome) notion of "the eternal and important". In Wittgenstein's thought something different (and rather "untimely") seems to go on: it's not easy to guess what. Something, maybe, like a "struggle with" (CV 86e), and reflection on, Augustine's notion of grace? (For textual support of this - not unrisky - suggestion see Wittgenstein's references to "Gnadenwahl"/Predestination in CV 30e, 32e, 72e, 77e.)

2) Deconstruction?

By considering those hints that indicate Wittgenstein's sustained interest in Augustine, I hope to be able to show (some) limits of (some) "deconstructivist" readings of Wittgenstein. The *Investigations*, in its opening passages, "deconstruct"; as we know, the "Augustinian picture" of language. In his elaborate study, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, Henry Staten gives impressive and multifaceted examples of Wittgenstein's various subversive moves. What, however, is the terminus ad quem of Wittgenstein's deconstructive activities? When Staten writes "that Wittgenstein's style in the *Investigations* is deeply involved in the kind of liberation of language as material substance from the domination of meaning which we associate with modern poetry"⁶, this could be read (or, would Staten rather say: misread?) as the idea that Wittgenstein, in his late writings, encourages something like an "experimenting" meaning relativism, a playful "aesthetisation", or "aesthetic liberation", of our world experience (which, as far as I see, Wittgenstein de facto nowhere does). "Language games", in Wittgenstein, are - at least in part - not "playful" at all: they form the "bedrock" of all our explorative capabilities. They are neither socio-"contractual", nor biologically "grown": if they are "our nature", their "naturalistic" quality can certainly not be explained, say, by Quine's behavioristic conception of "naturalism" (let alone by Darwin's concept of evolution); "unsere Naturgeschichte" (PhI 25) has - "classically" expressed - something close to a "transcendental" quality. Wittgenstein's

6 Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, University of Nebraska Press 1984, p.88.

"Sprachspiele" are thus situated beyond the categorical division of "Spiel" and "Ernst" (beyond "playfulness" and "sincerity"). Wittgenstein's struggle with the "bewitchment of language" nowhere terminates, it seems, in rhetorical "disseminations". Wittgenstein sets out - in his *Investigations* - to subvert the Augustinian picture of language: an abstract, noun-oriented conception, which fails to see the "different kinds of words" (PhI 1). But - to indicate the difference between a deconstructive reading of the "author" Augustine, and Wittgenstein's actual activities: the subversion of Augustine's "abstract" picture of language is, in Wittgenstein, nowhere transformed into a grandiose Anti-Augustinian Theory; Wittgenstein's critical reading of passages from Augustine does not imply anywhere that Augustine is *all* wrong (or, as some deconstructivists would have it, that he is an exponent of "logocentrism"). (Wittgenstein doesn't, e.g., suggest what M.F. Burnyeats recently claimed, that "Augustine's problem must now [under the conditions of modernity/postmodernity] be solved in purely human terms"⁷. Although Wittgenstein criticizes Augustine as a thinker who develops a flawed concept of language, he neither interprets nor rejects Augustine as a "Platonist", let alone as a *thorough* Platonist. The "Augustinian picture" - so similar to some ideas of the *Tractatus* - is embedded, in Augustine's book, in an ongoing and intense process of self-questioning that, according to the testimony of Wittgenstein's friends, made the *Confessions* for Wittgenstein "possibly the most serious book ever written".⁸ Augustine - this is what we actually learn from the *Investigations* - was in error with respect to the structure of language. But, as Wittgenstein writes in his *Remarks on Frazer*, Augustine was not at all "in error [...]" when he called upon God on every page of the *Confessions*.⁹ Error only arose "when he set forth a theory" (Ibid.).

Thus, what Wittgenstein is up to when he dissolves "pictures that have a grip on us", can not be seen the way Rorty tries to see it: "When Wittgenstein is at his best", writes Rorty, "he resolutely [...] sticks to pure satire. He just shows, by example, how hopeless the traditional problems are [...] and makes fun of the whole idea that there is something here to be explained".¹⁰

- 7 Burnyeat, M.F., "Wittgenstein and Augustine *De magistro*", in *The Augustinian Tradition* (ed. Gareth B. Matthews), University of California Press 1999, p.300.
- 8 See M. O.C. Drury, in: Rush Rhees (ed.), *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford/New York 1984.
- 9 Wittgenstein, "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough", *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (ed. James C. Klage and Alfred Nordmann), Indianapolis/Cambridge 1993, p. 119.
- 10 Richard Rorty, "Keeping Philosophy Pure", in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton 1982 (= CP), p. 34.

The tone of most of Wittgenstein's aphoristic remarks (as well as the whole setting of his *Investigations* - where Wittgenstein speaks with "two voices", the "voice of temptation" and the "voice of correctness": voices that struggle with each other "spiritually", as Cavell says [DD 326]) comes nowhere close to "playful" aestheticism, let alone to (proto-nihilistic) irony. All this does not fit into Rorty's reading. It suggests, on the contrary, that Wittgenstein's later philosophy - radically subversive as it is - nowhere follows the strategy Rorty assumes it to follow: to render important matters irrelevant by "simply changing the subject" (CP XIV). What is rendered irrelevant is the speculative illusion of importance only; nowhere "important matters" themselves.

Wittgenstein's thought, it seems, is of a complex, ethically charged kind, and has two vanishing points: of the first Wittgenstein speaks in *Culture and Value* when he writes: "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 16e); the second - also in *Vermischte Bemerkungen* - is linked to the first as its "subjectivist" complementum: "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 way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them.)" (CV 16e)

Are these philosophical thoughts - if not close enough to Rorty's neopragmatic re-reading of (aspects of) "deconstruction"¹¹ - close enough to the agenda of "deconstruction" proper: to its ethically charged resistance against "the closures of metaphysics"¹²; and to its attempts to make visible the "traces" of the "inexpressible" - in Derrida's reflections on Levinas's philosophy¹³, as well as in his recent remarks on the "difficult" new phenomenon "so hastily called the 'return of the religions'"?¹⁴

11 See Richard Rorty, "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism", in: *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (ed. Chantal Mouffe), London/New York 1996.

12 See Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Oxford 1982, Chapter 2.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris 1997.

14 Jacques Derrida/Gianni Vattimo, *Religion*, Cambridge 1998, p. 5. See also: Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore/London 1999), a recent study that deals with "the recurrence of certain religious and theological motifs" in the later writings of Derrida.

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