Swansea University E-Theses

An instinct for meaning.

Knott, Hugh Andrew

How to cite:

Knott, Hugh Andrew (2002) *An instinct for meaning..* thesis, Swansea University.
http://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa42286

Use policy:

This item is brought to you by Swansea University. Any person downloading material is agreeing to abide by the terms of the repository licence: copies of full text items may be used or reproduced in any format or medium, without prior permission for personal research or study, educational or non-commercial purposes only. The copyright for any work remains with the original author unless otherwise specified. The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder. Permission for multiple reproductions should be obtained from the original author.

Authors are personally responsible for adhering to copyright and publisher restrictions when uploading content to the repository.

Please link to the metadata record in the Swansea University repository, Cronfa (link given in the citation reference above.)

http://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/researchsupport/ris-support/

AN INSTINCT FOR MEANING

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy of the University of Wales

By

Hugh Andrew Knott B.A. (Wales) M.A. (Wales) P.G.C.E (Bolton) M.Sc. (Wales)

ProQuest Number: 10797994

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

ProQuest 10797994

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

UNIVERSITY OF
LIBRARY
WALES SWANSEA

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently in candidature for any degree.

Signed........ ....(candidate)

Date...12.07.02....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed......... ....(candidate)

Date....12.07.02..

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary may be made available to outside organisations.

Signed......... ....(candidate)

Date....12.07.02...

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my indebtedness to the late R. W. Beardsmore without whose support and encouragement I would almost certainly never have embarked upon this work and who, as my teacher during my undergraduate years and supervisor of my M.A. thesis during the 1970's, is largely responsible for such understanding as I have of the philosophy of Wittgenstein. I would also like to thank Howard Mounce, firstly for agreeing to take over the supervision of this thesis following Dick's untimely death, and then for the invaluable advice and critical comment I have received from him since.

Contents

Acknowledgements iii
Summary vi
Abbreviations vii
A note on punctuation: the use of the dash viii
Chapter 1 ~ Introduction, a Survey of Issues 1
Chapter 2 ~ Facts, Concepts and Philosophy. 8
1 ~ Introduction 8
2 ~ Concepts and Facts 8
3 ~ Describing Grammar 9
4 ~ Facts, Concepts and Philosophical Investigation 16
5 ~ Facts, Concepts and Necessity 21
6 ~ Concepts, Generality and the World 25
7 ~ Conclusion 31
Chapter 3 ~ The Concept of Instinct in Wittgenstein's Writings 33
1 ~ Introduction 33
2 ~ The Instinct for Rules 34
3 ~ Forms of Life, Primitive Reactions and Concept-formation 39
4 ~ Conclusion 47
Chapter 4 ~ Concepts, Speaking and Persons. 49
1 ~ Introduction 49
2 ~ Wittgenstein's Builders 50
3 ~ Speaking and Knowledge of Grammar 55
4 ~ The Grammar of 'Belief' 60
5 ~ The Grammar of 'Time' 63
6 ~ Philosophical Problems and Grammar 66
7 ~ Conclusion 69
Chapter 5 ~ Language as Arising out of Instinctive Behaviour 71
1 ~ Introduction 71
2 ~ Wolgast's Interpretation of Wittgenstein 71
3 ~ The Ambiguity of Primitive Reactions 74
4 ~ Primitive Linguistic Reactions 76
5 ~ Language as Extending Pre-linguistic Behaviour 80
6 ~ The Language-game of Expressing Intention as an Extension of Primitive Behaviour 83
7 ~ Rhees on Behaviour as the 'Prototype of a Way of Thinking' 87
8 ~ Returning to Wolgast 92
9 ~ 'Having Something to Say' – Again 96
7 ~ Conclusion 97
Chapter 6 ~ Subjective Concepts and the Extension of Subjectivity 99
1 ~ Introduction 99
2 ~ The Objectification of Subjective Experience 102
3 ~ Nagel's Impasse 105
4 ~ The Subjective and the Objective Modes and 'What it is Like to be a...' 111
5 ~ Concepts and the Application of Criteria 115
6 ~ Mental Concepts: Criteria or Primitive Reactions? 119
7 ~ Inter-subjectivity: the 'Attitude towards a Soul' 123
8 ~ Inter-subjective Concepts as an Extension of Primitive Inter-subjectivity 125
9 ~ Philosophical Investigation in the Subjective Mode 128
10 ~ Conclusion 131

Chapter 7 ~ Knowledge, Doubt and Action 132
1 ~ Introduction 132
2 ~ Language as a System of Propositions 132
3 ~ Meaning and Use, and the Varieties of Hinge Propositions 135
4 ~ Propositional and Non-propositional Belief 146
5 ~ Doubt, Certainty and Action 151
6 ~ Possessing the Concepts of Certainty and Knowledge 159
7 ~ Conclusion 161
Chapter 8 ~ This Philosophical Form of Life 162
1 ~ Introduction 162
2 ~ Philosophy and the Grammars of Particular Expressions 163
3 ~ The Disease is Different from the Cure 166
4 ~ The Instinct for Metaphysics 168
5 ~ Instinctive Reactions and the Metaphysical Language-game 171
6 ~ Philosophical Perplexity and Natural Uncertainty 175
7 ~ The 'Outer-ness' of the Language-game and Psychological Concepts 176
8 ~ Subjective Sources of Philosophical Perplexity 179
9 ~ Our Concepts Passing us by 183
10 ~ Showing and the Contemplative Art of Philosophy (Instinct and the Expression of Understanding) 187
11 ~ Concluding remarks 191
Bibliography 193

Summary

The relationship between language and human action is a pervasive theme of Wittgenstein's writings. And yet explicit references to the essentially *instinctive* nature of the actions into which language is woven are sparse. This thesis, by explanation and by the further development of these few remarks, aims to advance our understanding of the rôle of instinctive reactions in the formation and possession of our concepts.

Wittgenstein has been criticised – rightly or wrongly – for viewing language too much on the model of the application of a technique, as if speaking were merely a system of rule-governed actions. Following Rush Rhees, I argue that speaking is more intimately woven into our constitution as *persons* than can be understood from such an over-simplified view. Wittgenstein has also been accused of harbouring a theory of concept-formation from instinctive behaviour – an accusation that is refuted. Our understanding of the nature and rôle of instinctive reactions (both linguistic and non-linguistic) in the constitution of our conceptual form of life must therefore take account of the more complex picture of the nature of speaking that emerges. Examples of concepts (psychological concepts and concepts to do with knowledge and belief) which are situated in complex ways within the instinctive dimension of our lives are then discussed in detail.

This investigation into the nature of the possession of our concepts is worked out in concert with a discussion of what concepts are, of what the relationship is between the conceptual and the factual, and of the level at which our concepts engage with the world. Finally, it is argued that instinctive reactions, akin to those which comprise the cornerstones of our language-games, are also implicated both in *generating* the perplexity that lies at the bottom of philosophical problems, *and* in its elucidation.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the text to refer to Wittgenstein's writings, and are listed in alphabetical order of the abbreviations.

BB	*The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. R Rhees, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).
BigT	'Philosophy', Sections 86-93 of the "Big Typescript"' in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993).
C&E	'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993).
CV	*Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. P. Winch, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).
Last1	*Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
Last2	*Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
NFL	'Notes for lectures on "private experience" and "sense data"' in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, trans. R. Rhees, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993).
OC	*On Certainty*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).
PI	*Philosophical Investigations*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1976).
RFGB	'Remarks on Fraser's *Golden Bough*', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, trans. J. Beversluis, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), and in *The Human World*, No. 3, May 1971.
RFM	*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, eds. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
ROC	*Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. Linda J. McAlister and Magarete Schättle, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).

RPP1 — *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

RPP2 — *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

Tractatus — *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, (London: Routledge, 1971).

Z — *Zettel*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

A note on punctuation: the use of the dash

In the text I use two 'dashes' – in addition to the short hyphen, which is used only to hyphenate words. The 'en' dash is used to place a phrase or clause in parenthesis, either within or at the end of a sentence. It never follows a punctuation mark. The 'em' dash is used quite differently to stress a connection of sense between clauses or sentences. It is only used after a punctuation mark. Most commonly is it used to connect sentences, but it is sometimes used after a semi-colon or a comma. This use of the 'em' dash is derived from Wittgenstein, who used it very frequently in this way.

Gensha was one day eating cakes with General Wei. The general said, "What is it which we use everyday, but don't know it?" Gensha picked up a cake and said, "Have one!" The general took it and ate it, and then repeated the question. Gensha said, "We use it everyday, but we don't know it." [1]

A monk said to Joshu, "From One lamp a hundred thousand lamps are lit; how is the first one lighted?" Joshu kicked off one of his shoes. Also he said, "A clever chap wouldn't ask such a question." [2]

...and write with confidence "In the beginning was the deed." [3]
(Ludwig Wittgenstein)

---

[1] R. H. Blyth, *Zen & Zen Classics, Volume II, History of Zen,* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1964), p. 52.
[2] R. H. Blyth, *Zen & Zen Classics, Volume III (Nangaku Branch), History of Zen,* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1964), p. 77.
[3] OC 402

Chapter 1 ~ Introduction, a Survey of Issues

The relation between language and human action is a pervasive theme in Wittgenstein's writings. Indeed his most well-known philosophical tool, the *language-game*, is defined as 'language and the actions into which it is woven'.[4] And yet explicit references to the fundamentally *instinctive* nature of the actions into which language is woven, and which are essential to it, are sparse. This apparently undeveloped aspect of his thinking has – perhaps rather predictably – lead to controversies of interpretation. Indeed, some commentators have taken him to be introducing a quite new element into the discussion, even to the extent of accusing him – quite obviously against the grain of his thought – of *a priori* theorising on the origins of language.

Now it will certainly be a *part* of my aim to demonstrate how these few remarks are in fact entirely consistent with the general direction of his philosophy; indeed the resolution of this uncertainty could well have provided a sufficient basis in itself for the development of a thesis. However it is not my intention to limit my discussion to this issue but to use it as a means of entry into the core topic, which can best be described as an investigation into the nature of our *possession* of our concepts,—of how our concepts are *seated* in our lives. For the recognition that the concept of language is the concept of something participating in instinctive, i.e. *groundless*, activity is the recognition of an important aspect of how our possession of our concepts is constituted. And the further elucidation of this relation takes us beyond into other most fundamental dimensions of our form of life – i.e. our relations to ourselves, to language and the world – which characterise that possession.

The investigation of what it is to possess concepts will also be an investigation into the nature of that which is possessed. Our concepts are a part of our relations both to the world and to ourselves. Insight into the nature of that possession will therefore also contribute to our understanding of how our concepts stand in relation to ourselves and the world, and therefore of what concepts *are*. It is for this reason that, before entering into the main body of the thesis, I examine in Chapter 2 the nature of the understanding of the world that lies in the very possession of our concepts, and differentiate this especially from our *factual* understanding of the world.

---

[4] PI 7.

It is fundamental to Wittgenstein's philosophy that philosophical perplexity itself arises out of faults in our capacity to reflect upon our concepts. Moreover, a confused understanding of the relation between factual and conceptual investigations is of the essence of these difficulties. The discussion in Chapter 2 is extended, therefore, to include a discussion of the bearing of these issues on the nature of conceptual investigation and philosophical understanding generally. I should perhaps add here a comment on my use of the term 'metaphysics'. It is fundamental to my approach to philosophy that, as a mode of investigation into the *nature* of phenomena, it is essentially conceptual and elucidatory and not factual and explanatory. That is, it is not my view that the aim of philosophy is to develop its own system of concepts to explain phenomena which are only partially, or confusedly, or provisionally captured in the concepts with which we engage with the world in our daily lives, or which are represented in the 'beliefs' or 'assumptions' that are supposed to underlie those concepts. I understand *metaphysics* to be the way of doing philosophy which *does* approach the philosophical investigation of phenomena from that point of view (inadvertently or otherwise). Whenever I speak of metaphysics, then, I am speaking of an approach which I take to be already in confusion. I accept, however, that others may use the term to refer to *any* philosophical investigation into the *nature* of phenomena, even where its methods and assumptions are legitimate. From this point of view my own investigation would be regarded as metaphysics.

This question of the nature of philosophical investigation is not an issue arising *only* in the introductory phase of this thesis. It is a central topic. For the difficulties we experience when reflecting on our concepts – the *reasons* why they are so difficult to reflect on clearly, and why our understanding of them is so easily deflected – has a great deal to do with our relations to them, with how they are *embedded* in our lives. Moreover, the spontaneous way in which philosophical problems arise has much in common with the instinctive responses that play such an important rôle in the use of language,—in both its daily employment and in the determination of its concepts. Consequently, this topic returns throughout the thesis and becomes the concluding issue in the final Chapter 8.

The main body of the thesis begins in Chapter 3, where I survey the various contexts in which the notion of instinct enters into Wittgenstein's discussions of the nature of language. These provide the background for the subsequent chapters. The first approach to establishing the link between language and behaviour is in the context of *action in accordance with a rule.* The use of language is, in an important sense, a rule-governed activity

– though of course it is in no wise wholly understandable in these terms. And so to this extent, the recognition of the limits to justifying how we apply a rule – which in turn entails the recognition that the substratum of rule-governed activity as such lies in spontaneous instinctive activity itself and not in some prior reasoning – is a first step in this direction. But the challenge then remains of showing how this relation to action survives the further recognition that *speaking* and the possession of concepts cannot be understood simply as *activities*,—that thay cannot be understood except in connection with the range of human qualities that are *constitutive* of persons. And this, of course, requires that we reintroduce into the equation the concepts of thinking and understanding,—and without any reduction of *them*, to mere activity or behaviour.

Chapter 3 therefore provides a specific point of departure for the following chapter in its identification of a possible limitation in Wittgenstein's discussions, namely his tendency to treat the use of language too closely on the model of the application of a *technique*. This is not to deny that in important respects this comparison can be illuminating. The shortcoming arises rather in a tendency – at times at least – to limit the discussion to this model. In Chapter 4, I take up Rush Rhees' criticism of Wittgenstein on this point, and try to develop his view that the use of language has to be seen not so much as an activity carried out *by* a person but as constitutive of the very being of a person. This requires that we bring simultaneously into view the whole spectrum of concepts that are characteristic both of the concept of a person and of the concept of language. Rhees sums this up with his epithet that a person who is speaking is not just *doing* something but has 'something to say',—which is different. This widening of the perspective demands that we also project our discussion of the nature of the possession of our concepts into this larger conceptual context. And of course it also has a bearing on the sense in which both the use of language and the possession of concepts are rooted in instinctive behaviour. For if the nature of speaking is not circumscribed by notions of instinctive action and reaction but is tied to the notions of thinking and understanding – which are not themselves reducible to action – then we are going to have to explain the relevance of maintaining the emphasis on instinct within this larger conceptual framework. Here I pay particular attention to the relationship between 'having something to say' and that suite of concepts – the possession of which is most fundamentally constitutive of our reality as persons – that are most intimately woven into the fabric of our thought and language, and which are also the greatest source of philosophical perplexity. The examples I discuss at this stage are *belief* and *time*, but it will include the

great range of psychological concepts, concepts to do with language, ethical concepts, and so on.

An important investigative tool in this thesis derives from the recognition that amongst our concepts are what I call the concepts of *the language-game in which a given concept is embedded.* For example, not only do we learn to *express* intentions and to follow others' expressions of intention, we also recognise (i.e. have a conception of) the circumstances in which people employ the *concept* of intention. In other words, the possession of concepts expressing a 'meta-view' of the employment of other concepts is a normal part of our conceptual armoury. Moreover, much of philosophy consists in elucidating just these views. There is great danger, however, of failing to recognise this relation; for is very important not to treat this as a 'transcendental' view, or as something that can be appealed to in *justification* of a concept. These are not concepts whose determination transcends, i.e. is not answerable to, the concepts of daily discourse; indeed they take for granted the concepts embedded in the language-game. They are concepts like any other, and have a normal part to play in our life with language. I emphasise this because it is essential to be clear about when, on the one hand, we are dealing directly with a concept (i.e. appealing to what it makes sense to say in its employment) and when, on the other, we are elucidating the concept of the language-game in which it is embedded. Muddle over the 'level' at which we are viewing a concept is the cause of endless confusion in philosophy.

This distinction has especially to be borne in mind when examining the way in which the concept is fabricated in our instinctive reactions; for this examination too may be mistaken for an attempt to explain our concepts by reference to these reactions. Our conception of the language-game in which a concept is embedded will *contain* reference to the instinctive reactions which give form to the language-game, such as the natural and verbal expressions of intention. But this is not to provide them with a ground. This point gains special prominence in Chapter 5, where I develop Wittgenstein's conception of language as arising out of instinctive behaviour. Much of this chapter is devoted to defending Wittgenstein against claims that his remarks contain the elements of a *theory* of concept-formation from instinctive reactions. My argument here is that Wittgenstein is trying to establish a *conceptual* not a *theoretical* link between the possession of certain concepts (and their formation), the forms of behaviour within which they have their life,—their sense or content. All of these are components of our conception of the

language-game in which the specific concepts are embedded, so that the elucidation of this conception is an elucidation of the conceptual links between these components.

In Chapter 6 I follow up these observations with a more detailed examination of how our possession of the concepts to do with mental life is woven into the manifold of our subjective lives. Our possession of these concepts *participates in* our subjectivity,—in our expressions of subjective states and in our inter-subjective relations with others. Our subjectivity is itself a component in their possession. Clearly an issue here is the need to distinguish this relationship (between subjectivity and the possession of certain concepts) from any notion of private ostensive definition. And again an important component in this discussion will be the recognition that we are dealing with the conceptual relations between the concept of the individual *qua* subjective agent and the concept of the possession of mental concepts. This has nothing to do with justifying our concepts by reference to our subjective states.

Chapter 6 also develops further the view (initiated in the previous chapters) of certain of our concepts as *extensions* of more primitive behaviour. This again is a conception that is apt to get confused with the idea that our concepts are *explained* by primitive non-linguistic behaviour; and again the real point is a conceptual one. For example, we may say that the expression of intention in language is an extension of the natural behavioural expression of intention. But this does not mean that natural expressions of intention explain the genesis of linguistic expressions (of what *makes* them linguistic expressions); rather it establishes the conceptual link between the behavioural and the linguistic expressions of intention, and that the former is *logically* prior to the latter.—That is, our concept of the linguistic expression of intention is *dependent* on the concept of natural intention and its expression.

The penultimate Chapter 7 applies similar principles to the concepts of belief, knowledge and certainty. Again I come to Wittgenstein's defence, this time against an attempt to exploit an apparent equivocation in his conception of the nature and rôle of 'hinge propositions' and to impute to him a metaphysical theory of such propositions. A main concern here is to tease out the relationship between the linguistic and behavioural expressions of belief, knowledge and certainty. The linguistic forms may in this way be shown to be extensions of the natural forms. Again I find that this needs to be understood in terms of the conceptual links between linguistic and non-linguistic expressions of belief, knowledge and certainty, that is, in terms of the *concept* of each (as expressed in either in words or through actions) and of the logical priority between them.

Emerging out of this discussion we see how the possession of the concepts of belief, knowledge and certainty is itself largely a function of the *manifestation* of these things in words and behaviour, i.e. that the things we say and do are *examples* of these things before being *claims* to them, and that this is important to our possession of the concepts. We may also express this the other way about by saying that the acquisition of these concepts is part and parcel of our capacity for speech,—of our ability to say anything at all. For if we are able to say anything at all, then we are *already* able to express beliefs, or to say things that demonstrate knowledge or certainty. This is already a large part of our acquiring a concept of them; they are not like other concepts of which we might say that a basic command of the language is a *prerequisite* for – but is not *structural* to – their possession.

In the final chapter, the argument is brought back to the nature of the philosophical mind. Philosophical perplexity has its *origins* in assertions or puzzlements about the nature of the mind, or reality, or truth, or whatever it may be, that arise spontaneously when we turn our attention in a reflective way upon these phenomena. In their most original forms these will appear to us either as self-evidently true or obviously unknowable or mysterious. In this respect they have much in common with the fundamentally groundless nature of language use, both insofar they are *not* founded on some prior reasoning and also insofar as they resemble the primitive reactions that are characteristic of concept-formation. Here they also have a kinship with the kinds of reactions that lie at the origin of superstitious beliefs.

The breeding grounds for these reactions are various: the misleading forms in the surface of our language and the false analogies between language-games, the 'craving for generality', the natural uncertainties that do in any case surround the determination of these concepts, and the various specific features of the circumstances in which we possess these concepts – the subjective impressions that naturally accompany the use of language, for example. But this leads to a puzzle regarding the failure of our native understanding of our concepts to protect us from these forces. Given that our normal command of our concepts is itself not *founded* upon some rational principle (which would be subject to human error in its application) but depends on the integrity of our instincts, why does this understanding not shine through these tendencies and prevent them from hardening up into conceptually confused, metaphysical beliefs? It is here, I maintain, that we need to recall once again one of the principle themes of the thesis, that is, that our relations to these concepts is not reducible to the command of a technique, but is a

complex interweaving of language into the constitution of ourselves as persons – in our 'having things to say', for example. It is in this arena that the circumstances are created in which the grammars of these concepts may fail to show themselves transparently and which leave us vulnerable to the illusory appearances of our concepts that arise in our reflective moments.

Finally, there is another theme which I first treat in Chapter 2, which is implicit throughout and which becomes more prominent in this last chapter: the philosophical notion of *showing*. Our concepts are placed centrally in our lives. They are not in this sense a tool which we may pick up or leave as we wish: our possession of them is constitutive of our lives, and *their* constitution too is a function of the way they are embedded in our lives. An aspect of this is reflected in the circumstances in which we are able to make their sense, and their relations of sense, clearer to ourselves. For their *necessarily* being taken for granted in our thinking – in our thinking anything at all – is one way of expressing the truth that our seeing into them more clearly has to be something that *shows* and cannot be *said* (it shows in what is said). Moreover, a relation can also be demonstrated between the instinctive, groundless nature of language and this philosophical concept of what can only be *shown*. For what can only be shown is precisely that which can only be grasped in the *practice* of language and not by explanation. And that which can only be grasped in the practice of language is that which can only be grasped spontaneously or instinctively. Hence it is something belonging to the *midst* of our lives in which our reflections must take place too, and not from some transcendent vantage point, not from the 'boundary' of our lives.

Chapter 2 ~ Facts, Concepts and Philosophy.

1 ~ Introduction

It is the aim of this thesis to examine the way that concepts are seated in our lives, that is, to try to understand better what it is to *have* concepts. But since it is also a fundamental presupposition of this thesis that its very *method* is by the elucidation of concepts, the outcome of the investigation is very likely to have a significant bearing on its own methods.—Our understanding of what concepts *are* ought to be relevant to the *conduct* of our conceptual examination of the nature of concepts. In anticipation of this, it will be helpful, therefore, to begin the thesis by examining certain aspects of the nature of conceptual investigation. At this stage, however, I shall concentrate on elements that neither anticipate too much, nor will be undermined by, the fruits of investigations in later chapters.

2 ~ Concepts and Facts

I follow Wittgenstein in the view that a philosophical investigation is essentially a conceptual investigation, in so far as the problems it has to deal with are problems arising out of how we conceive of things, and that the 'solutions' lie in tracing out the connections between the concepts that are at the root of the problems. A helpful way of bringing out some of the essential features of this enterprise will be to compare, from some quite different points of view, the relationships between *concepts* and *facts*, and to commence with what are, at first sight, some puzzling features.

Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical method is founded on a clear-cut distinction between factual and conceptual investigations. Indeed he identifies the prime manifestation of philosophical confusion, *metaphysics*, in the confusion of these two.—We treat philosophical problems as if they demanded a factual investigation of phenomena; we interpret what should properly be regarded as insights into the grammatical relations between our concepts as if they were statements of necessary facts about the world. For example, he remarks in *Zettel*:

> Philosophical investigations: conceptual investigations. The essential thing about metaphysics: it obliterates the distinction between factual and conceptual investigations. (Z 458)

We employ concepts in the representation of facts. Therefore an investigation into the grammar of our concepts must be distinct from an investigation of the world by means of those concepts. The difference seems obvious enough. However, when we examine his method more closely – and the other claims he makes for it – we find a re-emergence of interest in facts. In the first place, the representation of the grammar of a concept in philosophy is itself referred to by Wittgenstein as being by *description*, suggesting a comparison with factual investigation. In the second place, Wittgenstein entreats philosophers to remind themselves of *general facts of nature* – facts which we normally overlook just because of their great generality. Principal amongst these are descriptions of the factual circumstances in which linguistic expressions are used:

> What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes. (PI 415)

Furthermore, since there is a strong inclination to suppose that our knowledge and understanding of the world is constituted in the body of facts that we have built up about it (and here we might include religious and other beliefs), one might then wonder whether a conceptual investigation that yields no facts can yield any understanding of the world in its own right at all.

Clearly there are different issues at stake here, but at first sight a rather confusing picture emerges. My intention will be to separate out the issues and to try to resolve the apparent tensions between facts and concepts arising in these three areas.

3 ~ Describing Grammar

We may question how far the philosopher's representation of the grammar of a concept, in the service of the kind of account that is required in philosophy, may be fruitfully compared with factual description in general. Throughout most of his later period, Wittgenstein apparently saw no obvious difficulty in the idea that grammar can be *described*. Indeed he saw it as the principal job of the philosopher to describe grammar, or linguistic rules:

> Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs. (PI 496)

> There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets it

> light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language,.... (PI 109)

> (We want to replace wild conjectures and explanations by quiet weighing of linguistic facts.) (Z 447)

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. (PI 124)

> In giving explanations I already have to use language full-blown (not some sort of preparatory, provisional one); this by itself shews that I can adduce only exterior facts about language. (PI 120)

> When we say "Certain propositions must be excluded from doubt", it sounds as if I ought to put these propositions—for example, that I am called L.W.—into a logic-book. For if it belongs to the description of a language-game, it belongs to logic. (OC 628)

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

Only at the end of his life did he seem to become troubled that grammar might not be describable after all:

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

We may distinguish here between two different modes in the description of the grammar of a concept: 1) the description of the logical relations between the linguistic expressions expressing concepts, and 2) the description of the language-game, i.e. of 'language and the activities into which it is woven'.[5] In both cases we may question the status of the descriptions we may wish to offer.

With regard to the first, there is one obvious dimension in which the grammar of a concept *can* be described. I am thinking of the extent to which the account merely describes the way that an expression is used in connection with others, or how it may occur in propositions, etc. This easily falls within the category of factual description in general, because it simply describes *from an external point of view* the relations between expressions. We may refer to this as the *external* aspect of the account of the grammar of a concept. And generally, we may say that the external aspect of the account represents the extent to which the relations between concepts may be explained or represented without necessarily engaging an *understanding* of the concepts themselves. The crucial question, however, will be to determine the extent to which the account of the grammar of a concept that is required in philosophy *presupposes* an understanding of the concept

---

[5] PI 8.

being studied. For to this extent, the account will differ in important respects from what we would normally regard as a mode of description. Let us examine this.

If philosophical problems are conceptual in nature but are not merely 'operational' mistakes with signs,[6] then they will arise from *within* our understanding of our concepts and must therefore be addressed at that level. A philosophical investigation should promote an improved understanding of our concepts by bringing us to a more lively reflective awareness of their sense and the force of their internal connections, these being obscured in the circumstances that give rise to philosophical thinking. This is achieved by tracing out our understanding of the concept through the wider reaches of its grammatical relations and within a larger field of connections of meaning than may be expressly demanded in normal daily circumstances. This is what an account of the grammar of our concepts is intended to achieve. But evidently it cannot be achieved by *external* description of grammatical relations alone, since in its very nature this does not appeal to our understanding of the concepts and so cannot illuminate that understanding. For this we need to turn to the *internal* aspect of the account of a concept, the force of which will trade on an understanding of the concept itself; that is, the value of the account will depend on an appeal to our understanding of *what it makes sense to say* in the connections in which the concept is employed.

Similar considerations will apply where the description of a *language-game* is called for. If I am reporting a game that some people are playing, I will describe what they do. Out of this description I may be able to construct the rules that the players are following. Of some of the actions that I describe – for example, that when the ball lands out of the court the player is deducted a point – I may be able to conclude that this is one of the rules of the game. Here we will have no difficulty in making sense of the notion that the rules of the game are being *described*. We could also extend the example – perhaps along the lines of the simple language-games that introduce the *Philosophical Investigations* – to assign a *function* to any 'words' (i.e. signals) that are used within the course of the game. Again the description is *external*: the terms of the description are understood independently of the game; there is nothing in the game that has to be 'understood' prior to understanding the description of it.

[6] See Chapter 4 for a further development of this point.

Now when it comes to the description of the 'rules'[7] governing the use of a *word* that has currency in a spoken language[8], there will be many situations which may be accounted for in superficially similar terms. For example, I may give a functional account of the use of 'squirrel' by describing the circumstances in which it is used to refer to *this* (pointing to it). In this way I will have described a rule for the use of the word. Moreover, one might wish to claim that that in so doing I have successfully described the grammar of the word by employing an *external* description; for the concept 'squirrel' – as opposed to 'rat', or whatever else we may wish to contrast with it – will not have been taken for granted in the terms of the definition. But only the most superficial aspects of the grammar of the concept will have been represented in this way. To have a concept does not mean merely to be able to name or to distinguish one object verbally from another. Underpinning the grammar of 'squirrel' is the grammar of the concept *animal*, and then, at a deeper level, the grammar of the concept *material object*. It is these which show the 'logical space' that the concept occupies, and which must also be understood if the concept is to be understood. Understanding a concept means being able to distinguish relations of *sense*,—to be able to talk sense and make sense with the concepts as they occur in discourse generally. And as we reach into these deeper layers of our concepts – and of course it is these layers which become the objects of our elucidations – then it will become increasingly difficult to give any kind of account which does not itself *take for granted* these layers. This ties in with the fact that the call for any such elucidations in philosophy – as I have pointed out – is one that arises out of a confusion arising from *within* our understanding of the concept and not from difficulties that can be resolved by simple external descriptions or definitions.

In conclusion, to the extent that the grammar of the concept being 'described' is assumed within the grammars of the terms of the 'description', what we are offering will not, properly speaking, be description at all;—or, at least, it certainly deviates significantly from the description of natural phenomena. We will have shifted from *independent description* to *circular elucidation*. This corresponds to the distinction between 'saying' and 'showing', which has its origins in the *Tractatus* but which I believe still has an application in the later Wittgenstein. For the fruits of the elucidation will not be an external statement of facts about the grammar of the concept but a more lucid appreciation of its

---

[7] I speak of 'rules of language' here whilst acknowledging that whatever a rule of language is it cannot be given the same kind of account as the rule of a game. But for present purposes I do not need to anticipate what this amounts to.—Again, this will be treated more fully in Chapter 4.

[8] That is, beyond the narrow functional confines of a discrete language-game.

grammatical relations and ramifications as manifested in our ability to make the right connections between it and other concepts. The grammar of a concept is illuminated primarily by eliciting what already lies in our understanding and only secondarily by the external statements of fact about the relations between expressions that are adduced in the course of the account. So if we still wish to call this internal account a *description*, it will not bear comparison with, for example, describing the formal relations between symbols, or the rules of a game, or a purely functional system of signals. Generally, the more deeply a concept sits in our system of concepts as a whole, the less its grammar *can* be given a satisfactory treatment in purely descriptive terms; and it is of course these deeper aspects of our concepts that we are most concerned with in philosophy and which give rise to the puzzlement that is at the bottom of the most intractable philosophical problems. This circular appeal to our understanding of a concept we may refer to as the *internal* aspect of the grammatical account of the concept. An external description of its grammar needs to be supplemented by this. In any worthwhile philosophical investigation external description of grammatical relations will be woven together with an internal account.

Now I think it is a matter of conjecture how far Wittgenstein had already taken this distinction into account when he spoke of describing grammar; for it is arguable that the concept of description is broad enough to include accounts which contain circular elucidations. On the other hand, in his last writings it seems he was becoming increasingly aware that this circularity created difficulties to which he might not previously have given sufficient attention. In the *Remarks on Colour*, for example, he raises the question of whether sighted and colour-blind people can have the same conception of colour-blindness, and he asks what measure of communication can exist between those who do and those who do not have a given concept.[9] He goes on:

> And to whom can I describe all the things *we* normal people can learn?
> Understanding the description itself already presupposes that he has learned something. (ROC 121)
>
> How can I describe to someone how we use the word "tomorrow"? I can *teach* it to a child; but this does not mean I'm describing its use to him.
> But can I describe the practice of people who have a concept, e.g. 'reddish-green', that we don't possess? – in any case I certainly can't *teach* this practice to anyone. (ROC 122)
>
> Can I then only say: "These people call *this* (brown, for example) reddish green"? Wouldn't it then be another word for something that I have a word for? If they really

[9] ROC 119 & 120.

> have a different concept than I do, this must be shown by the fact that I can't quite figure out their use of words. (ROC 123)

> But I have kept on saying that it's conceivable for our concepts to be different than they are. Was that all nonsense? (ROC 124)

The impossibility of explaining a concept to someone who does not already possess it, or of imagining novel concepts that we admit fall outside the scope of our own, is essentially the same as the impossibility of presenting an account of one of our own concepts which does not already take for granted an understanding of it. That this difficulty only seemed to manifest itself latterly to Wittgenstein draws us to an aspect of his view of the nature of language which has been criticised especially by Rush Rhees (which I shall be discussing more fully in Chapter 4).[10] Rhees argues that Wittgenstein – at times at least – had too much the view of language as the operation of a *system*,—over impressed perhaps by his own comparisons between language and games. The view of language as a technique, i.e. thinking of it in functional terms as a 'way of doing things', lends itself to treating the use of a word as an object that can be completely described externally. On this account, direct descriptions of grammar will grade seamlessly into factual descriptions of the surrounding circumstances of the use of words – just as we may move from the description of the motions of a hammer on a nail to a wider description of the activity of building within which those motions occur. Wittgenstein's apparent lack of concern that there might be anything problematic in describing grammar until this late stage in his thinking is consistent with this alleged trend in his thinking.

My own view, as I have argued, is that there remain important differences between description in general and giving an account of the grammar of a concept. These differences can only be obscured by bringing them under the same heading, and for this reason it will cause least confusion[11] if we maintain the distinction between them. At best, the external description of grammatical relations will normally only play a limited rôle in any account of the grammar of a concept,—our real need being for a greater reflective *understanding* of the concept.

At this point we might turn our attention for a moment to one way in which the issue of the describability of grammar may get muddled up with other issues. Kathleen Emmett[12] berates the 'transcendentalist' philosophers[13] who hold that linguistic rules –

---

[10] Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the possibility of discourse*, ed. D. Z. Phillips, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), (Rhees1); see also Rush Rhees, "The Philosophy of Wittgenstein" (Rhees2) and 'Wittgenstein's Builders' (Rhees3), in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970).
[11] Cf. PI 16.
[12] Kathleen Emmett, 'Forms of Life', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:3, July 1990, pp. 213-231. (Emmett)

except in their most superficial aspects – are ineffable, i.e. they cannot be described and represent non-empirical necessities.[14] She holds that it is just an empirical fact that we have the rules that we do and not others, and that these can be described.[15] The problem with presenting the dichotomy in this way is that it ties together the separate issues of *describability* and *necessity*: if grammatical rules are not empirical then they must be both indescribable and necessary; so that if they turn out not to be necessary after all, then they must be describable. But I think that Emmett fails here to distinguish *empirical* fact from *contingent* fact. What she should have said is that it is a contingent fact that we have the concepts that we do have; hence the existence of concepts with these grammars is a contingent fact and not a necessary one (the wider issue of necessity will be returned to in later sections of this chapter). But this is not at all to say that our grasp of their properties is a matter of *sense* experience: of observation and description. Our relation to the grammars of our concepts is not essentially an empirical relation.

For example, if I want to understand the rule governing the use of your words – that is, to see the sense in the way you use a word – I do not describe what you are doing (still less have 'theory' of what you are doing); at best that might be a preliminary. Rather, I try to follow what you are *saying*. This, in fact, is another way of approaching the point made in the previous paragraphs: I cannot have a view of the linguistic rule that is being employed except insofar as I already understand and follow it; the sense and utility of any description of the circumstances of its use will depend on that. Within the terms available to me, I may describe all the facts surrounding its use (all the facts in which the concept is not taken for granted, that is) and still misunderstand it – as I may make all the observations I like of the tribe's use of colour words but still misunderstand 'reddish-green'.

A complicating factor here is that there is no doubt that in many cases concepts are determined by reference to facts. For example, a disease may be defined on the basis of the description of an array of symptoms and causes. Facts are part of the *constitution* of the concept; they are functionally part of its grammar. Understanding these constituent facts is, therefore, internal to the understanding of the concept, and citing them will belong to an internal account of the grammar of the concept. However, there are two points that should be made here. Firstly, citing these facts is not in itself a external description of the

---

[13] In particular she has in mind Bernard Williams, Jonathan Lear, and Lynne Rudder-Baker. Whereas I do not defend Emmett on this point, elsewhere I shall criticise the transcendentalist approach.
[14] Emmett p. 215.
[15] Ibid. p. 225.

grammar of the concept; on the contrary, the external aspect of the description of its grammar would lie in stating that these facts are constitutive of the concept (and how). Secondly, revealing the constitutive rôle of any such facts is not likely to be adequate to illuminating the most fundamental problems of philosophy. For philosophy is in its element when occupied with concepts that are deeply rooted in our *practices*[16] and which are not, in their most fundamental aspects, determined by reference to facts.—Hence the most fundamental investigations in philosophy must be of a different kind. Nevertheless, facts may have a part to play in philosophical discussion in certain specific contexts, and so we should devote some space to clarifying this.

4 ~ Facts, Concepts and Philosophical Investigation

In the quotation from *Philosophical Investigations* 415 in Section 2 above, Wittgenstein speaks of philosophy as supplying 'remarks on the natural history of human beings', these being observations of great generality which normally are overlooked. In the immediate context one might suppose his view to be that it is the failure to observe these facts that is at the bottom of philosophical problems. Philosophy is a factual investigation after all, since its aim is to reveal these facts. But this impression is in conflict with other remarks where the relevance of general facts of nature is stated to be dependent on setting the facts in a larger context,— a *logical* context:

> If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?—Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history—since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.
>
> I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. (PI p. 230)

[16] This point will be developed at length in subsequent sections.

And then:

> What kind of investigation are we carrying out? Am I investigating the probability of cases that I give as examples, or am I investigating their *actuality*? No, I'm just citing what is possible and am therefore giving grammatical examples. (BigT p. 187)

> 'The basic form of the game can't include doubt.' What we are doing here above all is to *imagine* a basic form: a possibility, indeed a *very important* possibility. (We very often confuse what is an important possibility with historical reality.) (C&E p. 377)

> We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena.....Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. (PI 90)

It now appears that it is not the facts as such but their *conceivability* that is relevant, the point of stating them being grammatical, i.e. logical. What are we to make of this apparent inconsistency? First of all, it follows from the point made in the last paragraph of the previous section, that facts *may* be relevant in philosophy just for the facts that they are, but in a way that does not compromise the grammatical nature of philosophical investigation. This can occur if the facts are constitutive of a concept: if the concept under philosophical investigation has facts integrated into it, then citing these facts will belong to the account we give of it in philosophy. Here their actuality *is* relevant to the grammatical investigation and so has logical significance.[17]

Now there is one particular circumstances where facts are commonly integrated into a concept which is of particular relevance in philosophy. Here it will be helpful to start by distinguishing between two conceptual 'levels' at which the philosophical investigations may be aimed. For example, if we are giving an account of the concept *intention*, the purpose of describing the language-game *might* be to illuminate the grammar of the concept as it is employed to articulate and express intentions. Here we will be concerned with showing what it makes sense to say in the articulation and expression of intentions. This I shall call the *first* level investigation. On the other hand, our interest might be with how we attribute intentions to others; for in addition to the employment of the concept of intention in our verbal expressions of intention, we also have a conception of the *expression* of intention as a mode of linguistic behaviour set in the larger context of human activity. Wittgenstein describes *language-games* where these are *defined* as 'language and the

---

[17] The phrase 'logical significance of facts' is borrowed from Hertzberg where he employs it – I believe – in the course of making a similar point: Lars Hertzberg, 'Primitive Reactions – Logic or Anthropology?', in *The Wittgenstein Legacy, Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, eds. French, Uehling & Wettstein, XVII, (Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 24-39. (Hertzberg)

actions into which it is woven.'[18] The point I want to emphasise here is that in addition to the concepts operating *within* the language-game, we also have a conception of the language-game *as such*, that is, as a functioning part of human life. Hence, when we are concerned with our conception of a language-game as a part of human life, our account will include a description both of the language use and of the surrounding circumstances of its use,—where those circumstances will include not only the actions themselves but their context in the social and material worlds in which the expressions are employed. This conception may also be investigated grammatically, and we may call this a *second* level investigation.

This 'functioning part' of human life may even be conceived of as a phenomenon in its own right, of which language is just one component. 'The expression of intention' is just such a phenomenon comprising linguistic and non-linguistic elements – other examples being: hope, belief, etc.[19] Hence the second level investigation may have just as much right to be called an investigation into a specific phenomenon within human life as the first level investigation.

Now of course the concepts that are subject to second level investigations are just as likely to have facts as a part of their constitution as any other concept.—Our conception of language as a phenomenon within human life, and as a component within other phenomena of human life, may itself be partly determined by reference to facts about human life. Here, then, is a significant area in which the description of facts about human life may play an important part in what remains otherwise a conceptual investigation.

The second level investigation may also be pitched at different levels. The second level investigation of intention, being an investigation into the way that language enters into the formation of the phenomenon of intention, may also be treated as belonging to an elucidation of the concept of *language*. By examining different modes in the use of language, and marking out the different grammars lying in our conceptions of different language-games, we say something about the variety of what counts as a grammar. By looking at how language enters into and is partly constitutive of phenomena such as intention, hope, or belief, we illuminate the concept *language*. Note that these are still all part of a *grammatical* investigation, not into the concept of the expression of intention but into the concept of language. In practice, of course, it may not be straightforward to separate second level from first level investigations, which will frequently be intertwined.

---

[18] PI 7.

[19] I shall be examining this in more detail in Chapter 5.

Certainly, a second level investigation may shed light on a first level one, and *vice versa*: the grammar of 'I intend….' is evidently connected with the grammar of 'He intends….'.

Before continuing there is an important *caveat* we should add. The failure to appreciate that the grammatical investigations may be carried on, or may have significance, at such different conceptual levels may give rise to confusion over which elements in the investigation are factual and which are purely conceptual. In the first place, in philosophy it is commonplace to utter propositions that resemble statements of general fact but which on examination turn out to be straightforwardly grammatical. This is a source of confusion in its own right. The proposition 'Every rod has a length', for instance, evidently looks like a statement of fact. But propositions of this type can be readily identified as *not* being ordinary statements of fact by trying to imagine the opposite:

> Of course, here "I can't imagine the opposite of this" doesn't mean: my powers of imagination are unequal to the task. These words are a defence against something whose form makes it look like an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one. (PI 251)

To try to state the opposite would be simply to violate the grammar of the concept *rod*,—for these are expressions of grammatical rules, not statements of fact. This impression of factuality is amplified by confusion over the conceptual level of the investigation. Consider the following remarks by Wittgenstein:

> I look at an animal and am asked: "What do you see?" I answer: "A rabbit".—I see a landscape; suddenly a rabbit runs past. I exclaim "A rabbit!"

He then comments:

> Both things, both the report and the exclamation, are expressions of perception and of visual experience. But the exclamation is so in a different sense from the report: it is forced from us.—It is related to the experience as a cry is to pain. (PI p. 197)

Evidently the comment is not meant to contribute to an understanding of the sense of the concept *rabbit*. Rather, the comment is concerned with the *kinds* of expressions that they are. They are observations of the nature of their use, and belong therefore to an account of their employment as linguistic expressions of a particular kind. It appears, then, that here we have a different kind of investigation; not a grammatical one, but one that contributes to a descriptive account of a whole dimension of human life. For the statement that the exclamation is forced from us looks like *a general fact of nature* belonging to a general factual account of the nature of language.

This impression is strengthened because the second order investigation looks like an instance of 'getting outside the language-game', of explaining the *possibility* of the language-game from without, the difference in kind between the modes of visual experience that the report and the exclamation express being explained by the fact that the one is forced from us whilst the other is not. This is a natural way of expressing the point, and it is common enough in philosophy, even in accounts of Wittgenstein's philosophy. For example, Elizabeth Wolgast (in a paper which I shall be discussing at length in a later chapter), remarks: 'In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein wrestled with the question *how there can be* such certainties, a task which a Kantian might call transcendental'.[20] But it is a confusion if we are led to think that we have *transcended* grammatical investigation; as if we were now in the realms of a transcendental investigation *as opposed to* a grammatical investigation and were observing the phenomenon of belief from a conceptually independent point of view and theorising upon its necessary conditions. For whilst the comments on these utterances may take the form of an external account of the circumstances of their use, they are still a part of an *internal* account of the grammar of a concept but at a different, i.e. *secondary*, level. For Wittgenstein's general observations about the nature and circumstances of the use of the phrase 'A rabbit!' are in fact grammatical remarks on the concepts *report* and *exclamation*, and link these concepts to the concepts *perception* and *visual experience*. The statement that the exclamation is *forced* from us is a grammatical remark: the concept of exclamation *contains* the concept of being forced; it is part of what distinguishes the concept of a report from that of an explanation. In virtue of this, the concepts *report* and *exclamation* help to determine different conceptions of visual experience and its expression.

Now the difference between the two concepts *could* be explained by saying that the *fact* that some utterances are forced from us whilst others are not is integrated into two contrasting concepts: *report* and *exclamation*. But this does not mean that they are distinguished by a general fact of nature. For whereas 'some utterances are forced from us, whilst others are not' is a general fact of nature, 'exclamations are forced from us' is not – and neither is 'reports are not forced from us'.—As I have said, they are grammatical remarks. Moreover, it would be misleading to present the genuine fact here as forming the basis of a theory explaining the possibility of different perceptual phenomena. It would be clearer to say that two different concepts of visual experience are (or can be) determined by reference to this fact.

[20] Elizabeth Wolgast, 'Whether Certainty is a Form of Life', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 147, 1987, pp. 151-165. (Wolgast1)

The second order grammatical investigation of the concept *of* the language-game will contain within it a perspective upon the concepts embedded *within* the language-game that is *once removed*.—Within the framework of an internal account of the concept of the verbal expression of intention, we have a higher order perspective on the concept of an intentional act. But this higher order perspective is not a transcendental perspective, for in philosophical terms it still belongs to what I have referred to as an internal grammatical account.—It still takes for granted the concept that is being investigated, and so it still trades on an understanding of the internal connections between the concept of intention and the concept of the language-game in which it is embedded. This remains essentially the case even though the concept of the language-game may *also* contain facts about the circumstances which surround the language-game but which do not in themselves take for granted the concepts being elucidated. For the concept of the expression of intention cannot be explained in terms of these facts alone (in the case of other concepts the situation may, of course, be different).

In conclusion, then, it is not inconsistent to suggest, on one occasion, that general facts of nature may be relevant in their own right to a philosophical investigation, whilst insisting, on another occasion, that it is the *possibility* of a fact[21] that is important because of what it shows of the grammar of the concepts involved. Only it is important to show that these apply to different situations in philosophy. Generally, whereas the elucidation of the grammar of a concept is not – at the most fundamental level, or in the case of the most fundamental concepts – a factual investigation, *facts* may nevertheless have logical significance within it. General facts of nature may have a place within what remains essentially a conceptual investigation.

5 ~ Facts, Concepts and Necessity

In the last section I explained how facts may have *logical* significance when integrated into a concept. This appeal to logic was also important to the argument in the second section of this chapter, where I argued that describing grammar is different from describing natural phenomena in as much as it takes for granted an *understanding* of the concepts whose grammar is being described; for the appeal to our understanding of a concept is also an appeal to what is *necessary* in its constitution. For this reason, another

[21] See quotation of PI 190 above.

difficulty in the description of grammar will be the failure of purely descriptive accounts of language-games to bring home what is *necessary* in them:

> Is grammar, *as I use the word,* only the description of the actual handling of the language//languages//? So that its propositions could actually be understood as the propositions of a natural science?
>
> That could be called the descriptive science of speaking, in contrast to that of thinking.
>
> Indeed, the rules *of chess* could be taken as propositions from the natural history of man. (As the games of animals are described in books on natural history.) (BigT p. 163)
>
> I should like to be able to describe how it comes about that mathematics appears to us now as the natural history of the domain of numbers, now again as a collection of rules. (RFM p. 230)
>
> What you say seems to amount to this, that logic belongs to the natural history of man. And that is not combinable with the hardness of the logical "must".
>
> But the logical "must" is a component part of the propositions of logic, and these are not propositions of human natural history. If what a proposition of logic said was: Human beings agree with one another in such and such ways (and that would be the form of the natural-historical proposition), then its contradictory would say that there is a *lack* of agreement. Not, that there is an agreement of another kind. (RFM pp. 352-3)

If a proposition is to be a proposition of logic, i.e. a philosophical proposition, then it cannot be merely a statement of natural history. If the account of the language-game is to have logical force, then the grasp of the 'must' must lie outside the simple statement of fact that the words are used in such and such a way. 'Logic' is of course a phenomenon of human life,—in other words, it is an aspect of a human activity. Moreover, that we have a concept of logic playing a special rôle in our concept of discourse is a part of our natural history. But propositions offered just from a natural historical point of view cannot be propositions of logic,—which have to be expressive *of,* and therefore must appeal *to,* the 'must'. Without this there is no internal connection between the account we are giving and the philosophical problems we are trying to understand. For the understanding that is required in philosophy is the understanding of why there is *confusion* if we try to speak in a particular way, not just that we do not speak in that way. Philosophy is a logical and not merely an anthropological investigation.

Even amongst Wittgensteinian philosophers there has been equivocation over this point. There is a nervousness of speaking of 'necessity' *at all.* This arises principally, I believe, because it is difficult to see how one can avoid sliding towards the idea of necessities inherent in the world. But these scruples are a misunderstanding in my view;

for the necessity relates *not* to the propositions themselves as statements of fact, but follows from the statements being given logical significance within the language-game.—Given the constitution of the concept, these facts are necessary components of it: if someone has measles, then *of necessity* we are talking of these observable symptoms and not others. The facts are necessary in as much as they are constitutive of the concept, which is not to deny that they are in themselves anything other than contingent. The facts could have been otherwise, and if so would simply have gone to determine different concepts.

The temptation to treat grammatical necessities as if they were worldly ones has its opposite in the temptation to dismiss logic and to deny necessity. Where a fact is integrated into a concept we may, of course, imagine circumstances where the fact is stated *without* the intention of drawing attention to its logical rôle. For instance, we may remark on some symptom that is exhibited by a patient without having in mind that this belongs to the definition of a disease. The same principle arises with the sorts of cases that we deal with in philosophy. For example, it may be a fact that, in the ordinary course of events, doubts are directed towards some states of affairs and not others. And it may be observed that as a matter of fact this is always the case where doubts are raised, i.e. that there is always something that is not doubted. It may then seem that drawing attention to such a fact is sufficient in itself to 'solving' the philosophical problem of scepticism, for example. From this it may look as if we can do philosophy *without* drawing upon any conception of necessity: it is not that we *cannot* doubt beyond this point – which just looks like an *a priori* prejudice – it is just that we *do not*, and that is enough. This would be a mistake. For it fails to acknowledge that the fact that doubting only goes *so far* determines our concept of the language-game of doubting, and that if we expressed 'doubts' in ways that differed radically from our usual ones, we would have the right to say that this is now not the same concept,—it is no longer what we call *doubt*.[22] Observing the limit we place to doubting is therefore a contribution to our understanding of its logic.[23] Recalling Wittgenstein's remark 'And everything descriptive of a language-game is part of logic',[24] no proposition can belong to logic unless it appeals to a conception of necessity. It is not that we are driven by necessity to stop doubting at a certain point; for as Phillips points out, in a certain sense it just is a fact that we stop doubting at this

[22] See e.g. OC 450 & 625, C&E p. 383.
[23] This may be said without having to deny that the limit of doubt is not fixed.
[24] OC 56.

point.[25] But in an important sense this is circular. For the fact that we do stop at a certain point 'is what characterises our thinking'.[26] And if normally we 'doubted' beyond that point, then it would not, as a matter of fact, be the same language-game, and 'doubting' would mean something different. The logical context of the description should be understood.

No doubt there are a great many concepts – perhaps the overwhelming majority – which might be regarded as *optional*. That is, we might imagine linguistic cultures in which just these concepts are lacking, or alternative ones take their place. Moreover, such variations may be observed both at the level where concepts are determined by reference to facts or at level at which concepts are determined in practice. The concepts that we might most easily imagine being dispensed with, or for which we might easily imagine alternatives, will perhaps be those defined by reference to facts; for as long as the concepts by means of which the facts are construed are familiar ones, we can always imagine the facts being other than they are, or different suites of facts being brought together to determine different concepts. However, we may also fairly readily imagine different concepts amongst those determined essentially in practice,—where the practice is in some obvious sense a variation on a practice belonging to the determination of concepts we already possess. For example, we might imagine a creature with the perceptual modes of a bat developing different perceptual concepts, but which are nevertheless strictly analogous to our own visual perceptual concepts. More intractable difficulties will arise, however, where the formation of the concept is a practical extension or addition to a form of life in a way that is not shared with others; here the imagination comes up against a limit. Be that as it may, even where there are limits to the sharing and understanding of alternative concepts, there will be plenty of cases where it remains possible to recognise the existence of different options. A quite different situation arises, however, in the case of those concepts which, if we are to imagine persons having concepts *at all*, it becomes difficult to suppose that *they* might either be lacking or be in a radically different form. These comprise most of the concepts that typically give rise to the problems of philosophy, and indeed it is no accident that puzzlement over them has endured across millennia. I am thinking here of those concepts which are taken for granted as soon as we begin to say anything at all: *language*, *meaning*, *concept*, *sense*; and all those related to them such as *belief*, *truth*, *knowledge*, *necessity*, and so on. These are structural to the whole of our thinking; they are the branch on which we sit. If we are speaking *at all*

[25] D. Z. Phillips, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). (Phillips)
[26] Phillips, p. 53.

then we have the concept of speaking; it is not an optional concept for a speaker. Hence, a kind of necessity attaches to these concepts which we will not find elsewhere. But again it should be emphasised that this is not a worldly necessity; rather: if we are to imagine a form of life differing in these dimensions, then we will just not be imagining one in which there is anything we understand as speech, meaning, belief, knowledge, etc.

6 ~ Concepts, Generality and the World

Finally I shall explore another area where the relations between facts and concepts give rise to uncertainties. It has become a commonplace, inherited from our positivist tradition,[27] to view concepts as essentially content-less vessels which do not in themselves embody anything we might call *knowledge* or *understanding* of the world. Only in the falsifiable proposition do we find any notion of 'what the world is like'. And so except insofar as our concepts are defined by reference to facts, concepts are merely the arbitrary system of measures from which propositions are fashioned,—any elucidations of our concepts being merely 'analytic', i.e. the straightening out of confusions over definitions. This strict dichotomy on the matter of content has been used, on the one hand, by some Wittgensteinians to defend a non-revisionist conception of philosophy, i.e. the view that there is no such thing as questioning the 'correctness' of our concepts (inside or outside philosophy). And it is used elsewhere by his critics, who put the point the other way about and complain he is committed to a negative conception of philosophy: since concepts have no content, a philosophy based on the elucidation of concepts cannot illuminate the *nature* of things. Either way, the idea of philosophy as essentially a conceptual inquiry condemns it to being a barren enterprise.

Now it may well be that there are remarks in Wittgenstein's writings that suggest an interpretation along these lines.[28] It is not my intention to defend a revisionist interpretation of Wittgenstein – the reasons for which will emerge later – but I think there is something wrong with the idea that concepts are not in their own right part of our understanding of 'what the world is like' (independently of whether or not they contain facts, that is), and that this may be derived from Wittgenstein's writings also. The dichotomy arises because we are dominated by one model of what constitutes an

[27] I am grateful to my supervisor H.O. Mounce for drawing my attention to this issue.
[28] Although points of interpretation will be raised from time to time, it is not my intention to try to settle this exegetical issue.

understanding 'what the world is like', namely, that which is expressed in statements of fact.

Let us remind ourselves of one of the essential differences between concepts and facts. When we look at the foundations of language, *bedrock* lies in the *practice* of language, i.e. in the *application* of a rule, unaided by the acknowledgement of any fact. Since the possibility of facts being integrated into concepts depends ultimately on the fact being formulated according to linguistic rules,[29] clearly we would have an infinite regress if the concepts were founded ultimately on facts. Facts take for granted the concepts by which they are expressed. Hence the establishment of linguistic practices is more fundamental to – and so in an important sense more *characteristic* of – the formation of concepts than the determination of concepts by reference to facts. What is at stake, therefore, in the matter of whether a conceptual inquiry carries substance, is how the formation of a linguistic practice may itself be regarded as constitutive of our understanding of 'what the world is like'.

Now the general distinction between concepts (*qua* linguistic practice) and facts *can* be made to correspond to the traditional distinction between analytic and empirical truths, that is, the distinction – roughly speaking – between propositions which are true by definition in contrast to those which state a *substantial* truth about the world. On this assumption, what we are searching for, in looking for an understanding of concepts as having content, would appear to be a class of propositions lying somewhere between analytic emptiness and factual substance. There have, of course, been previous attempts to find a middle way: the notion of *a priori*/synthetic propositions was introduced for just this purpose. But one trouble with this move – which is especially relevant to our present purposes – is that it presents the alternative as another mode of *factual* discourse; whereas, what we are interested in is precisely that which *cannot* be presented as fact, just because it lies essentially in the practice itself and not in any propositions generated by means of that practice. To avoid analytic emptiness in a conceptual inquiry, we therefore need to show:

1) How concept-formation *as such* represents, in some substantial sense, a grasp of 'what the world is like'; whilst showing
2) How what is grasped cannot be substituted for by the grasp of any fact – general or particular.

---

[29] The limitations of thinking of the employment of a concept as the application of a rule will be discussed at length in Chapter 4; the important point here is that the notion of applying a rule is at least an *aspect* of the notion of the employment of a concept – it is an *essential* aspect.

'Grasping what the world is like': we might begin by approaching this negatively by saying that concepts would *not* tell us what the world is like if they were 'arbitrary'. We could put it like this: if our concepts were arbitrary, then for any change in the world our concepts would not have to change except in so far as they embodied facts that had changed. On this view, *any* genuine change in the world would be reportable as fact, and any changes to our concepts would be driven by the recognition of these new facts, which might then be taken up into a new or revised concept (new facts about the nature or cause of a disease, for example). By contrast, if concepts are to be recognised as being non-arbitrary in their practical dimension, then this will be by observing how we may be forced to change our concepts in ways that cannot be accounted for merely in terms of the recognition of a need to integrate new facts into a language-game.

We might illustrate this with the – now rather hackneyed – example from physics: two modes of description, *particle* and *wave*, are effective up to a point in the description of sub-atomic phenomena, but are ultimately recognised as being conceptually incompatible.—We cannot make proper sense of the phenomena by using either mode, neither can they be integrated. This dilemma cannot be resolved by adducing new facts, but will be driven from within the practice of science to generate a new mode of description, and as a result a new concept, a new grammatical *form*, will come directly into being. In forming the new concept we have a new way of understanding the world, but not new facts – though of course new facts will now be expressible by means of it. We now see the world under the aspect of the new form,—from within a new formal relation to it. In this and related ways the world prompts us into forming new concepts. Moreover, the generation of the new concept is 'spontaneous', which means that it is *not* founded on the prior observation of some fact. Wittgenstein remarks:

> Something new (spontaneous, 'specific') is always a language-game. (PI p. 224).

One way of approaching the more positive view of conceptual content, then, would be to say that concepts are *not* arbitrary to the extent that they represent a grasp of the *form* of the world. This way of speaking does of course present immediate dangers. In particular, we should avoid the suggestion that there is some kind of *ontological* distinction between the *form* of the world and the *facts* (general or particular) that are constructed from it. To clarify this, let us ignore the world for the moment and look at how the distinction operates relative to the circumstance which make language 'possible'.

Firstly, it is clear that talk about the world requires that we have formal relations to it. Without this we have no means of making statements of fact (or any other kinds of

utterance). There would be no such thing as *saying anything* if there were nothing corresponding to a grasp of the form of the world as distinct from making actual statements of fact. When I speak of 'the form of the world', then, I am as yet presupposing nothing about the world. A distinction between *form* and *fact* is an inherent feature of conceptualising the world *at all*: it is a distinction that belongs to the grammar of 'talking about the world'. Our concepts are our formal relations to the world.

The distinction between form and fact represents, on the one hand, a quantitative transition in the *generality* of the level at which we understand the world (philosophy studies the world at the greater level of generality). But the transition also represents a change in *kind* from the factual to the conceptual. This difference in kind is necessary just because our intelligent engagement with the world reaches bedrock in a *practice* and not in the realisation of a fact (that too being a grammatical remark).

What is there to be said, now, in favour of saying that concepts *in themselves* embody a knowledge or understanding of the world is like? If I am learning how to measure using a ruler and am learning how to describe the lengths of objects, etc., I am getting the concept *length*. But we may also express this by saying that I know or am getting to understand what length *is*. It adds something to express the point this way just because it reminds us that to have a concept is not merely to operate with a sign or to have command over a technique; rather, it pervades our intelligent relations to the world. It shows not only in the methods I use to measure and compare, but is distributed throughout my ways of speaking and the *sense* that I make of things by means of language. It would not be difficult to imagine the breakdown of a person's grasp of the concept *length* and the loss of understanding and general intellectual collapse in the person's life that would manifest it. It would not be adequate in these circumstances to say that the person had merely lost the use of a word. Neither could it be accounted for as the loss of knowledge of any fact that might be referred to in the application of the concept. No, he no longer understands what length is; he is losing his grip on reality,—on 'what the world is like'.

Likewise, if a child is getting hold of the concept *cause*, this shows not merely in his ability to make simple judgements of the relation of one event to another; rather, it is something that is working its way into the whole of his thinking and is manifested in the myriad ways in which he is able to make connections between things that are said and things that are done. If, on the other hand, the child fails to become fluent in all these connections, again it would not be adequate to say that this is simply a failure to grasp

how to use a word (for one thing, it might fail to grasp the use of the word even if its grasp of the concept showed in others things that it said). Here again we would have the right to say that he is failing at the conceptual level to grasp the nature of the reality in which he lives. Beyond the reportage of facts, a person shows he has a grip on reality *in being able to talk sense.*

The formation of concepts has sometimes been called arbitrary on the grounds that the ways in which we construct the world through our concepts are *unlimited.* This is fine. But it is not all right if it means that *any* construction will do. If anything went, there would be no such thing as running into difficulty or inconsistency in the projection of our concepts into situations,—the only inconsistency would be *internal* to language. We go out into the world and we make rules out of the ways in which we engage with it. The phenomena we engage with are integrated into, and indeed become *part of*, the language. Wittgenstein speaks of this as the use of samples, and he insists that 'it is most natural....to reckon the samples among the instruments of the language'.[30] That our concepts are not arbitrary (the extent to which they are not arbitrary), therefore, shows in the fact that discord and confusion in our attempts to form and *apply* concepts cannot be ruled out. The failure to make consistent use of samples is one possible manifestation of this. Certainly, if we are unable to make consistent use of certain words, the propositions in which they occur will be useless, that is, *senseless.*[31] But this does not only reflect on the propositions; it reflects on our understanding of 'what the world is like'.

A related point is suggested in this remark by Wittgenstein:

> ....We don't perceive that we see space perspectivally or that the visual image is in some sense blurred near its edge. We don't notice this, and can never notice it, because it is the mode of perception. We never think about it, and it is impossible, because **the form of our world has no contrary**. (BigT p. 191) (my emphasis)

The relevance of this is that when we say that the formation of our concepts is a mode in our understanding of what the world is like, it might be objected that this cannot be right because – unlike statements of *fact* – we cannot imagine the opposite of what our world is like, and so our concepts cannot contain genuine content: if we try to imagine the opposite we are not, as it were, doing violence to the world, we are simply violating our system of definitions. But this is not correct. For – of course – our world is as it is, and unlike the contrast between possible facts *within* the world, the only contrary to the

[30] PI 16. It may be argued that often there are no – or very often no – such discrete reactions to samples in the formation or learning of a concept. This is not the point. Even if it is implicit, it is an aspect of the use of language.
[31] See RFM p. 200.

most general form of our world is *another* world. And in order to imagine this we would first have to create a different set of concepts ***within which*** to imagine possible states of affairs within it. And of course we cannot do this starting just from those we already have. So the fact that we cannot imagine the contrary is, in this instance, a sign that we have reached the highest generality in our understanding of the world in which we live. It is not a sign that we are no longer dealing with the content of that understanding, which would therefore have to reside solely in the world of facts.

To command a clear view of a concept, then, is to command a clear view of a phenomenon in its most fundamental aspect, namely at the level at which we construct it and integrate it into ('rule it into') our language in the form of a concept. To explore the grammar of a concept is to explore our intelligible relations to a phenomenon at their most general level, which is to explore the *nature* of the phenomenon in its most general aspect. Hence any question of 'what the world is like' on this level *has to be* a matter of logic and not fact, otherwise it would not be a question about the *essential* nature of the phenomenon.

The logical nature of a conceptual inquiry means that the content lying *within* our concepts remains in an important sense *prior* to fact. This lends itself to the supposition that philosophy is an investigation into necessary features of the world,—that the world has a necessary or logical structure that is mirrored in language. This impression is again encouraged by the idea – which I have already criticised – of *a priori* **truths**, i.e. by the idea that the concepts (as such and in general) are founded on factual truths which may be represented by means of *a priori*/synthetic factual propositions (their *a priori* necessity being all that distinguishes them from empirical truths). But such a point of view is not supported by the idea that a conceptual investigation may be 'about the world', at least not in the way that I have tried to explain this; for the *necessity* of logical insight lies within the terms of reference of our concepts and not with reference to the world. Clarifications of our concepts express necessity because they express what makes them the concepts they are; this is what is meant by the 'essential nature of the phenomenon'. But it does not follow from this that the understanding of the world that lies in the grasp of a concept is the grasp of a worldly necessity. The form of the world is no more necessary than any facts.

One case that might perhaps be regarded as an exception to this – and which I have already referred to in a related context at the end of the last section – is where the concepts in question are themselves to do with language: if we are raising any questions *at*

all, then we raise them in a language. And so in an obviously circular way, if we raise any questions at all, then the concepts of language and *any concepts to which they are internally related* (e.g. action, experience, etc.) must already be given. This might be regarded as a kind of necessity: you cannot saw off the branch you are sitting on. But still, the fact remains that there might not have been language at all.—The necessity is still grammatical.

In elucidating concepts, philosophy does not *itself* say anything about the world; rather it aims to show, in a specific context, what our concepts already show about the world.—We see the world more clearly because we see the grammar of our concepts more clearly (reflectively). We should remember that it is our *concepts* that are about the world, not our *statements about our concepts. A priori* and empirical propositions are, in this sense, not on the same plane; for insofar as statements of fact are about the world they complement *the concepts themselves*, not *a priori* grammatical propositions. The latter only illuminate the nature of the world because they illuminate what is already given in our concepts. It would be a confusion to think that whereas science finds new facts about the world philosophy also finds out new things about the world only on an *a priori*, conceptual level. Neither does it follow from our concepts being 'about the world' that it is the job of philosophy to correct our concepts and change them if necessary. Philosophy has no privileged access to the world; and if there is a demand to change our concepts, this arises not out of philosophy but directly out of our linguistic engagement with the world and is effected through the formation of new concepts. It may be part of the task of philosophy to warn of difficulties in our concepts; but the formation of new concepts remains 'spontaneous'.

7 ~ Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to set out some very general aspects of our relations to our concepts, which may be summarised as follows:

1) That concepts are determined primarily through the establishment of linguistic *practices* and only secondarily by reference to facts;
2) That illuminating the conceptual content that is established through these practices will be by a process that must take for granted an understanding of their content, and is therefore by internal elucidation, or 'showing', and not by external description of these practices, or 'saying';

3) That the philosophical method of describing the circumstances of a language-game is not to adopt – or *try* to adopt – a point of view that transcends normal discourse, but is a grammatical investigation in its own right into the concept of the language-game;
4) That the content of our concepts is not to be understood simply in terms of arbitrary rules governing the technique for using words, but represents our understanding of 'what the world is like' at its most general level.

The last point is made to emphasise that when we speak of the adoption of linguistic practices, and generally of how language is seated in our lives, we are not speaking merely of how a technique is acquired, we are speaking of how the most fundamental dimensions of our understanding of ourselves and the world are established in our lives. This will be an important underlying theme of this thesis and will be addressed explicitly in various contexts throughout.

Chapter 3 ~ The Concept of Instinct in Wittgenstein's Writings

1 ~ Introduction

The passage from Augustine's *Confessions* that introduces the *Philosophical Investigations* contains two assumptions[32] which together become major objects of criticism in Wittgenstein's subsequent discussions – indeed they ramify the whole of his later philosophy. The first is the monolithic view of language as a system of names. The second is the idea that the formation of concepts and the employment of language are grounded in an articulate, *subjective* mode of understanding that is prior to, or that anticipates, the use of language. This is the conception of an 'inner world' of meanings that is known as 'mentalism'. In response to this Wittgenstein strives to show the diversity in the functioning of language and concepts, and develops the idea that the use of language (and the expression of concepts) is to be understood essentially in connection with human *activity*, for which mentalist explanations are neither required nor can be given a coherent presentation. This notion of the fundamental rôle of activity is another expression of the spontaneous or instinctive nature of language use. In this chapter I shall trace its emergence in Wittgenstein's writings.

The purpose of this present chapter is exegetical and is intended primarily as a survey of the texts. By means of his most explicit statements, I shall trace the unfolding of his conception of the relation of language to action. In particular I shall try to illustrate the continuity in Wittgenstein's thinking, from the systematic development of the simple language-games in the *Philosophical Investigations*, to the remarks on concept-formation that are scattered throughout the later work. I leave it to later chapters to develop the interpretation of the remarks and to consider criticisms, contrary views and other aspects of these topics which are less clear or less well developed in Wittgenstein's own writings. I shall not attempt to expound Wittgenstein's critique of mentalism systematically, though I shall employ it where necessary.

[32] The passage does not of course contain *only* two points of departure for Wittgenstein. For a point of view on Wittgenstein's choice of this passage – with which I am entirely sympathetic – see Margaret Urban Walker, 'Augustine's Pretence: Another Reading of Wittgenstein's PI 1', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:2, April 1990, pp. 99-109.

Wittgenstein's first response to Augustine is to describe a series of very simple linguistic transactions in a shop. All that he describes are the different ways in which the 'words' function and then the fact that, without further ado or explanation, the shopkeeper *acts* in certain ways. Subsequent remarks[33] introduce more complex functions and their circumstances, and some references are made to mental processes accompanying the use of language.[34] However it is not until PI 33 that Wittgenstein turns his attention more explicitly to mentalistic accounts of the use of language. Here he begins by attacking one of its most familiar manifestations: the interpretation of the understanding of an ostensive definition (e.g. pointing to, or 'meaning', an object, its colour, or its shape) as a mental, spiritual, or 'occult' process:

> And *here* we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object. As we can also say the word "this" *to* the object, as it were *address* the object as "this"—a queer use of this word, which doubtless only occurs in doing philosophy. (PI 38)

Wittgenstein attends briefly to the supposed rôle of memory in determining, or grounding, *future* applications of a (colour) word,[35] but this topic – and hence the whole question of the relation between mentalism, concepts and action – is not treated thoroughly until his discussions of rule following and language are well under way.

The latter begins in earnest where Wittgenstein first introduces the example of a pupil who is given a formation rule for writing down a series of signs or numbers.[36] I think it is an important general point that Wittgenstein's extensive deployment of this, and subsequent related examples, is not intended to form the basis of a comprehensive account of what it is for an utterance to be a word with meaning; rather, the intention is to isolate and examine a particular aspect of language use, namely the nature of the *commitment* to the use of a word that we make when we learn to speak. His discussion is intended to shed light on the nature of logic and necessity, which is of prime interest to him; but it also serves to bring out – though probably in an oversimplified way, as we shall examine later – important aspects of speaking as *behaviour*, and provides a clear-cut context in which the assumptions of mentalism can be extracted and disposed of.

---

[33] PI 2-32.
[34] Ibid. 19 & 20.
[35] Ibid. 56.
[36] Ibid. 143.

The puzzle that Wittgenstein sets himself here is this. When we teach the pupil the rule, we are at the mercy of the his *reactions*;[37] moreover, if he doesn't react in the way we intended – in the 'right' way – then his learning will grind to a halt.[38] But what if he then *does* go on to 'get the system'? The criterion of his understanding is his correct application of the rule; and yet his understanding does not *consist* in his having made a correct application,[39] and neither does the pupil say that he understands on the basis of observing his own success.[40] Rather, his understanding would seem to consist in that state of mind from which the application flows.[41] Now, we are all familiar, directly and subjectively, with the phenomenon of realising that we have understood the system: we exclaim 'Now I can do it!';[42] and that *may* look like a manifestation of the said state of mind. But is *that* the understanding?[43]

To answer this Wittgenstein suggests that we begin by examining the *circumstances* in which we express understanding,[44]—a theme which he then develops by reference to the example of learning to read. The lesson drawn from this discussion is that we cannot give an account of reading in terms of the various experiences that may accompany it; neither is there any one act or process of deriving the words from the page which we might hold up and say '*This* is reading'. When we express ourselves as being guided by the letters, etc., we are *speaking for ourselves* and not on the basis of some external observations of our behaviour. But what this amounts to cannot be explained in terms of a mental state or reported experiences – these being phenomena which I interpret through the *medium* of the concept of being influenced or guided.[45] No, we are speaking *out of our lives.*

Wittgenstein now returns to the phrase 'Now I can go on!', as used to express the moment of grasping a rule.[46] Clearly it is closely akin to saying 'Now I can read'. Similarly, this is not the *description* of a state of mind or experience. At best we might call it a signal.[47] So, what is it? Again, we might express this by saying that it is an essential phenomenon of human life that we speak *from* it: the utterance of the phrase is an *expression* of our lives. It is a fundamentally characteristic feature of our form of life that

---

[37] Ibid. 145.
[38] Ibid. 143.
[39] Ibid. 146.
[40] Ibid. 147.
[41] Ibid. 146-149.
[42] Ibid. 151.
[43] Ibid. 152.
[44] Ibid. 154.
[45] Ibid. 177.
[46] Ibid. 179.
[47] Ibid. 180.

we respond like this. We anticipate our ability to carry out specific courses of action without either inner or external 'evidence'. If I suddenly remember a tune and am certain that I can sing it, this is not the expression of an experience; neither does it mean that it must have occurred to me in its entirety.[48] It is just a fact of life, and without it we would not be the creatures that we are.

We may now apply these thoughts to Wittgenstein's examples of extending arithmetical series. If I give the pupil a series of numbers to work out according to the formula +2, I know what I mean or intend him to do at any stage in the series even if I have never myself worked it out to that point.[49] Now of course there is no guarantee that the pupil will find it natural or obvious to do what I would do at any stage (nor that I might not breakdown myself). Again, his ability to follow my course of action may cease;[50] he may not be able to make any sense of, or understand at all, why I go on as I do; or indeed he may protest that his own way of continuing is in *accord* with his understanding of the rule. Now how does this bear on *my* certainty with respect to each application of the formula? My subjective certainty appears to be linked to something given in the formula which it seems could only be worked out in one way;[51] and yet it seems that there is nothing given absolutely in the formula which both constrains the individual to work out the series in one way rather than another and which corresponds to *my* subjective certainty (and to propose a further qualification or formula would only push the same problem a step further back[52]).[53] The mentalist conception of rule following – which supposes that if I know how to extend the rule then I must have something present to mind which anticipates all future applications – and the conception of the rule expression as, in some determinate way, containing *a priori* the possibility of all future applications are of a piece.

---

[48] Ibid. 184.
[49] Ibid. 187.
[50] Ibid. 185.
[51] Ibid. 188.
[52] Ibid. 201.
[53] One may argue that the plausibility of Wittgenstein's case here lies in the fact that he imagines his example series as being worked out in complete isolation – it has no compeer. If one imagines the working out of the series interacting with the working out of others, or being used in calculations engaging with other assumptions, etc., then it may seem less easy to present the behaviour of the pupil as being anything other that an aberration. The meaning of the formula +2 also lies in its relations to mathematics as a whole, not just to an isolated exercise. Well, this raises issues that will be returned to; but my own view is that whereas this does lead us into complexities that Wittgenstein seems not to have anticipated, it does not return us to the position he is attacking – his argument being that we cannot form a general conception of formulae as having determinate sense independent of their working out in practice. Wittgenstein's argument still captures the essence of this.

The answer is that the sense of the rule expression hangs together with the application in practice:[54] obeying a rule is a practice;[55] the essence of the language-game is a practical method.[56] Indeed:

> The rule can only seem to me to produce all its consequences in advance if I draw them as a *matter of course*. As much as it is a matter of course for me to call this colour "blue". (PI 238)

Removing the priority of both the rule expression and the mental accompaniments leads to the conclusion that any *justification* for how we are to obey the rule finds bedrock in the practice itself:

> Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do." (PI 217)

And this explains the remark:

> When I obey a rule, I do not choose.
> I obey the rule *blindly*. (PI 219)

Unless I am already following a rule there is no choosing; unless I am already following a rule there is no 'seeing'. Again it is important to emphasise that we are talking about *bedrock*. There remains a sense in which, in ordinary circumstances, we do not follow rules blindly. I have in mind here the fact that rules are not learned in isolation. As I argued in the previous chapter, the learning of many linguistic rules is surrounded by descriptions of the circumstances in which the rule is to be applied, the actions to be carried out, and so on. And if we are asked to justify why we go on in a particular way, we will refer to other rule expressions, etc., which are not a matter of dispute; we will try to show, for example, that anomalous results will ensue if we carry on in this way rather than that.[57] To this extent we do go into the learning of the rule with our eyes open. But this will not do as a general account of what it is to learn to follow a rule, since that already takes for granted that we are following rules in the descriptions we are employing. At this level, resort to mentalistic conceptions of an intelligibility given prior to the practice of language and which determines its application are of no help.[58] The subjective certainty

---

[54] PI 190.
[55] Ibid. 202.
[56] C&E p. 399.
[57] See previous footnote.
[58] At this juncture in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein moves on to expound the so-called 'private language argument' (PI 243). This is clearly no accident since the argument is an extension of the case against mentalism. Up to this point the argument has been that in essence the concept of following a rule is not the concept of an experience or mental state that accompanies a practice. However, the private language argument is more than just a corollary to this, for it argues that it makes *no sense* to speak of a rule (and hence of a language) as *founded* on subjective judgement. It is therefore a keystone in the attack on

with which we realise that 'Now I can go on' is, therefore, not a certainty derived from the direct introspection or intuition of a necessity determined *a priori.* Rather it is itself a primary manifestation of ourselves, *qua* willing subjects, as rule-following creatures. It is the subjective correlate of an otherwise outward manifestation of our lives; and of course we should *expect* there to be such a correlate.

We have arrived at the point where Wittgenstein has established the primacy of *practice* in his discussions. To speak of 'primacy' here is to speak of the essential blindness of linguistic practice;—and *this* is to speak of its essentially *instinctive* nature. The notion that the use of language is driven ultimately by blind, instinctive ways of acting is given expression by Wittgenstein in a variety of ways. It might be helpful to have some of the most striking of these before us:

> What *counts* as its test? [i.e. an empirical proposition]—"But is this an adequate test? And, if so, must it not be recognizable as such in logic?"—As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting. (OC 110)
>
> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)
>
> You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).
> It is there – like our life. (OC 559)
>
> I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination. (OC 475)
>
> Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well.) (OC 358)
> But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC 359
>
> Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself. (OC 139)
>
> The essence of the language-game is a practical method (a way of acting)—not speculation, not chatter. (C&E p. 399)
>
> To begin by teaching someone "That looks red" makes no sense. For he must say that spontaneously once he has learnt what "red" means, i.e. has learnt the technique of using the word. (Z 418)

---

mentalism. I do not intend to rehearse the argument again here – though I shall have occasion to make reference to it from time to time.

Bearing in mind that for Wittgenstein all philosophical remarks are grammatical, the notions of instinct and spontaneity should be treated as internally related to that of the ultimately ungrounded nature of linguistic practices,—to the notion that it makes no sense to speak of them emerging out of reasoning. The latter is, therefore, part of what is *meant* by saying, in the context of language use, that these reactions are *instinctive.*

3 ~ Forms of Life, Primitive Reactions and Concept-formation

At this point we should say more of the notion of a *form of life*, which plays an important though largely only implicit rôle in Wittgenstein's investigations. The responses which form the groundwork of our language-games belong to the larger picture of human life which Wittgenstein refers to as the 'hurly-burly':

> How could human behaviour be described? Surely only by showing the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed up together. Not what *one* man is doing *now*, but the whole hurly-burly, is the background against which we see an action, and it determines our judgement, our concepts, and our reactions. (RPP2 629; see also Z 567)

The particular and characteristic weaving together of those fundamental linguistic and behavioural reactions which make up the human 'hurly-burly' is what Wittgenstein refers to as our *form of life*.[59] Because of the paucity of references to forms of life in Wittgenstein's writings, it is a notion that has proven open to interpretation. But *I* take it as referring to the mode of life of the individual taken as a whole and in its most general and fundamental and therefore in its most *instinctive* aspects. It refers to what is not optional in the pattern that he shares with others of his kind and which makes up what we recognise as characteristic of human life. Later I shall discuss some of these other interpretations in more detail, however one variant which it might be helpful to mention to briefly is the interpretation – put forward by Hacker – that a form of life should be understood to be a cultural rather than a biological entity.[60] I think that this distinction is spurious since – as we shall later – Wittgenstein regards it important to see language as *extending* our pre-conceptual lives. To be sure, what makes the human form of life different from animal forms is *linguistic culture*; but that does not mean that what is animal in our constitution is not also constitutive of our form of life.

---

[59] And equally to the non-linguistic, animal forms of life.

[60] G. P. Baker & P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 238-243. (Hacker1)

Some authors[61] have argued that we have to make a choice between the notion of a form of life as the mode of our life *taken as a whole* and the notion of it as some *particular aspect* of our lives – such as *hope* – so that our form of life might be also be thought of as a composite of such lesser forms. But, again, this seems spurious. 'Form of life' is not an explanatory concept but a guide to exploring the grammars of our concepts of life and language. There is no reason especially why we should not use it to refer either to the mode of life taken as a whole or to an aspect of it – be it hope, intention or whatever. But for most purposes, we may take the form of life to be that larger framework of life,—the 'given' *within which* what is grounded or reasoned is generated.

The remaining uses of the phrase 'form of life' in Wittgenstein's texts are as follows:

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

> Instead of the unanalysable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affair [sic] thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others' feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said – are facts of living.[62] (RPP1 630)

> It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle.—Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others.—And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. (PI 19)

> Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (PI 23)

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

> Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.[63] (PI p. 174)

> I want to say: it is a feature of our language that it springs up // it grows // out of the foundations of forms of life, regular actions // that it springs up from the soil of firm forms of life, regular forms of actions. (Nachlass, Vol. XV, 148)[64]

---

[61] See Newton Garver, *This Complicated Form of Life*, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1994).
[62] "Forms of life" was a variant here. Trans.
[63] In the *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 1*, the variant is: 'The signs of hope are modes of this complicated pattern of life.' (Last1 365)
[64] Ludwig Wittgenstein, from unpublished notes, Volume XV cited in 'The Wittgenstein Papers' by G. H. von Wright, *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), pp. 480-506, here translated by G. P. Baker & P. M. S. Hacker in: Hacker1 p. 242.

Closely related to 'forms of life' is the notion of 'ways of living' – which occurs as a variant in some texts:

> I want to say: it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in steady ways of living, regular ways of acting.[65] (C&E p. 397)

And in a similar vein:

> Language, I should like to say, relates to a *way* of living. (RFM p. 335)

Remarks identifying primitive linguistic reactions, woven together with characteristic forms of behaviour, as the cornerstones of language-games and which contribute to determining the *nature* of the language-game are scattered throughout the later work. These remarks are usually combined with references to the fact that the emergence of these reactions belongs to concept-formation, the quotation above from the *Nachlass* being an obvious example. The fullest treatment of this is to be found in the notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', where Wittgenstein states the general point quite explicitly:

> The origin and the primitive form of the language-game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop.
>
> Language—I want to say—is a refinement. "In the beginning was the deed."[66] (C&E p. 395)

Elsewhere Wittgenstein uses the notion of 'spontaneity' to express the ungrounded, instinctive nature of the newly formed language-game, i.e. that the newly generated element is not anticipated in thought:

> Something new (spontaneous, 'specific') is always a language-game. (PI p. 224)

> 'We decide on a new language-game.'
> 'We decide spontaneously' (I should like to say) 'on a new language-game.' (RFM p. 236)

> What is essential for us is, after all, spontaneous agreement, spontaneous sympathy. (RPP2 699)

The following are perhaps some of the most striking instances of concrete examples of primitive reactions that go to form the foundations of language-games:

> ....It is a help here to remember that it is a primitive reaction to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is—and so to

[65]'Steady ways of living' here refers to the instinctive regularity that belongs to the notion of rule following as explained previously.
[66] Goethe, *Faust I*, opening scene in the Studierzimmer.

> pay attention to other people's pain-behaviour, as one does *not* pay attention to one's own pain behaviour. (Z 540)

> But what is the word "primitive" meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is a prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought. (Z 541)

> —Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive, kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour.) (Instinct). (Z 545)

The contribution of sympathetic responses to the determination of the language-games of pain and sympathy is complemented in the first person by the replacement of expressions of pain by linguistic responses:

> "So are you saying that the word 'pain' really means 'crying'?"—On the contrary: the verbal expression replaces crying and does not describe it. (PI 244)

And again:

> Primitive pain-behaviour is a sensation-behaviour; it gets replaced by a linguistic expression. "The word 'pain' is the name of a sensation" is equivalent to "'I've got a pain' is an expression of sensation". (RPP1 313)

Similarly:

> What is the primitive reaction with which the language-game begins, which can then be translated into words such as "When this word occurred I thought of..."? How do people get to use these words? (LAST1 133)
>
> "You said the word as if something different had suddenly occurred to you as you were saying it." One doesn't learn this reaction.
>
> The primitive reaction could also be a verbal one. (LAST1 134)

> "The word is on the tip of my tongue." What is going on in my consciousness? That is not the point at all. Whatever did go on was not what I meant by those words. It is of more interest what went on in my *behaviour*. What I said, which pictures I used, my facial expression. – "The word is on the tip of my tongue" is a verbal expression of what is also expressed, in a quite different way, by a particular kind of behaviour. Again, ask for the primitive reaction that is the basis of the expression. (LAST1 828)

What is primitive to the language-game determines what kind of language-game it is. A reaction that is primitive to a language-game is always instinctive: a new language-game is not *any* newly contrived way of speaking – such as might have been invented by giving a definition – since what is primitive to *that* will reside not in what is defined but in the terms of the definition. A genuinely new language-game will be irreducible, i.e. 'specific'.[67]

---

[67] PI p. 224.

It is most important to note here that, in referring to specific reactions as determining the nature of a language-game, we have moved on in our conception of instinct as an element in the use of language.—We have passed from the notion of instinct as a way of expressing just the groundlessness of linguistic practice *in general*, i.e. the groundless nature of rule following, to the notion that the *specific characteristics* of a language-game are determined fundamentally by specific kinds of response which, in that rôle, are essentially instinctive or ungrounded, i.e. not the *product* of thought. The mode of these spontaneous responses is constitutive of the grammar of the concept.

As has already been noted, the most continuous treatment of this topic is to be found in the notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness'. Here Wittgenstein describes a variety of primitive reactions which he identifies as being of the kind that belong to the origin of the language-game of cause and effect and language-games closely related to it. The remarks here are directed principally against the notion – which he finds in Russell – that the origin of our language-game might be found in an *intuition* (which we might construe as a version of mentalism).—Wittgenstein holds that it is to be found in the reactions themselves:

1)

> *We react to the cause.*
> Calling something 'the cause' is like pointing and saying: '*He's* to blame!'
>
> We instinctively get rid of the cause if we don't want the effect. We instinctively look from what has been hit to what has hit it. (I am assuming we do this.) (C&E p. 373)

2)

> [On cause and effect, intuitive awareness:]
>
> A sound seems to come from over there, even before I have investigated its (physical) source. In the cinema the sound of speech seems to come from the mouth of the figures on the screen.
>
> What does this experience consist in? Perhaps in the fact that we involuntarily look towards a particular spot—the apparent source of the sound—when we hear a sound. And in the cinema no one looks towards where the microphone is.
>
> *The basic form* of our game must be one in which there is no such thing as doubt.—What makes us sure of this? It can't surely be a matter of historical certainty.
>
> 'The basic form of our game can't include doubt.' What we are doing here above all is to *imagine* a basic form: a possibility, indeed a *very important* possibility. (We very often confuse what is an important possibility with historical reality.) (C&E p. 377)

3)

> There is a reaction which can be called 'reacting to the cause'.—We also speak of 'tracing' the cause; a simple case would be, say, following a string to see who is pulling

> at it. If I then find him—how do I know that he, his pulling, is the cause of the string's moving? Do I establish this by a series of experiments?
>
> Someone has followed the string and has found who is pulling at it: does he make a further step in concluding: so that was the cause—or did he not just want to discover if someone, and if so who, was pulling at it? Let's imagine once more a language-game simpler that the one we play with the word "cause".
>
> Consider two procedures: in the first somebody who feels a tug on a string, or has some similar sort of experience, follows the string—the mechanism—in this sense finds the *cause*, and perhaps removes it. He may also ask: "Why is this string moving?", or something of the sort.—The second case is this: He has noticed that, since his goats have been grazing on that slope, they give less milk. He shakes his head, asks "Why?"—and then makes some experiments. He finds that such and such a fodder is the cause of the phenomenon.
>
> ....
>
> In one case "*He* is the cause" simply means: *he* pulled the string. In the other case it means roughly: those are the conditions that I would have to change in order to get rid of this phenomenon.
>
> "But then how did he come by the idea—how was it even possible to come by the idea—of altering the condition *in order to* get rid of such and such a phenomenon? Surely that presupposes that he first of all senses there is some connection. Thinks there may be a connection: where no connection is to be seen. So he must already have got the idea of such a causal connection." Yes, we can say it presupposes that he looks round for a cause; that he doesn't attend to this phenomenon—but to *another* one.— (C&E pp. 387-391)

4)

> The primitive form of the language-game is certainty, not uncertainty. For uncertainty could never lead to action.....The simple form (and that is the prototype) of the cause-effect game is determining the cause, not doubting....The basic form of the game must be one in which we act. (C&E p. 397)

5)

> The game doesn't begin with doubting whether someone has toothache, because that doesn't—as it were—fit the game's biological function in our life. In its most primitive form it is a reaction to somebody's cries and gestures, a reaction of sympathy or something of the sort.... "The game can't begin with doubting" means: we shouldn't call it 'doubting', if the game began with it. (C&E pp. 381-383)

And another example of a primitive reaction which may anticipate a language-game:

> You can 'see the d<uck> and r<abbit> aspects' only if you are thoroughly familiar with the shapes of those animals; the principal aspects of the double cross could express themselves in primitive reactions of a child who couldn't yet talk. (Last1 700)

In Chapter 5 I shall consider some criticisms of Wittgenstein which – on the basis of these and similar remarks – interpret him as holding a *foundationalist* theory of concept-formation. My argument will be that this is not the correct interpretation. Closely

related to this – and which has attracted similarly misguided comment – is Wittgenstein's assertion that language-games may be viewed as *extensions* of primitive behaviour:

> Believing that someone else is in pain, doubting whether he is, are so many natural kinds of behaviour towards other human beings; and our language is but an auxiliary to and extension of this primitive behaviour. I mean: our language is an extension of the more primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is a piece of behaviour.) (RPP1 151; see also Z 545 and Z540 & 541 above.)

> I can easily imagine that a particular primitive behaviour might later develop into a doubt. There is, e.g. a kind of *primitive* investigation. (An ape who tears apart a cigarette, for example. We don't see an intelligent dog do such things.) The mere act of turning the object around and looking it over is a primitive root of doubt. But there is doubt only when the typical antecedents and consequences of doubt are present. (RPP2 345)

> In this way I should like to say the words "Oh, *let* him come!" are charged with my desire. And the words can be wrung from us,—like a cry. Words can be *hard* to say: such, for example, as are used to effect renunciation, or to confess a weakness. (Words are also deeds.) (PI 546; see also CV p. 46)

In these passages and elsewhere, I take the view that Wittgenstein does not mean that a *concept* is an extension of behaviour; rather, the behaviour – the character of which is partly determined in the way that language and its concepts are integrated into it – may be seen as an extension of the more primitive, non-conceptual behaviour that precedes it. Thus the primitive behaviour of the ape is the non-conceptual counterpart of that human behaviour in which doubt is expressed in both actions and words. 'I doubt' is a *deed* of doubting.

Finally, we should not overlook the fact that for Wittgenstein instinct also plays an important part in the generation of philosophical difficulties:

> We must not forget: even our more refined, more philosophical doubts have a foundation in instinct. E.g. that expressed in 'We can never know...'. Continuing accessibility to further arguments. We should find people to whom we could not teach this mentally inferior. *Still* incapable of forming a certain concept. (CV 73)

The fact that we use a word one way rather than another *as a matter of course* is of the essence of the use of language; but the same force in other circumstances may drive us into philosophical difficulties. Philosophical investigation is there to guide us to a more orderly perception:

> A philosophical question is similar to one about the constitution of a particular society.—And it would be as if a society came together without clearly written rules, but with a need for them; indeed also with an instinct according to which they observed //followed// certain rules at their meetings; but this is made difficult by the fact that nothing is clearly expressed *about this* and no arrangement is made which

clarifies //brings out clearly// the rules. Thus they in fact view one of them as president, but he doesn't sit at the head of the table and has no distinguishing marks, and that makes doing business difficult. Therefore we come along and create a clear order: we seat the president in a clearly identifiable spot, seat his secretary next to him at a little table of his own, and seat the other full members in two rows on both sides of the table, etc., etc. (BigT p. 173)

Approaching from the other direction, the fact of a certain instinctive reaction may even give grounds for questioning the propriety of a line of philosophical inquiry:

> Think of the uncertainty about whether animals, particularly lower animals, such as flies, feel pain.
>
> The uncertainty whether a fly feels pain is philosophical; but couldn't it also be instinctive? And how would that come out?
>
> Indeed, aren't we really uncertain in our behaviour towards animals? One doesn't know: Is he being cruel or not? (RPP2 659)
>
> For there *is* uncertainty of behaviour which doesn't stem from uncertainty in thought. (RPP2 660)

Ultimately our capacity to make headway in philosophy depends on our ambivalence towards our own instinctive relations to language:

> People are deeply embedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical confusions. And to free them from these *presupposes* pulling them out of the immensely manifold connections they are caught up in. One must so to speak regroup their entire language.—But this language came about //developed// as it did because people had—and have—the inclination to think in this way. Therefore pulling them out only works with those who live in an instinctive state of rebellion against //dissatisfaction *with*// language. Not with those who following all their instincts live within the herd that has created this language as its *proper* expression./ (BigT p. 185)

Any account of our form of life must also reserve a space for the responses giving rise to philosophical problems and our reactions to them.

In this chapter I have traversed the majority of the explicit references to instinctive or primitive behaviour in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Roughly speaking they divide between notions of the groundlessness of language use *per se* and the primitive reactions that determine the qualities of a language-game. However, in a very important sense these explicit references only represent the tip of the iceberg. In innumerable other contexts he describes, without using this explicit terminology, moves in language-games which belong to 'the given'. These are facts of human behaviour which are fundamental determinants of the language-game and not intended for further explanation. For example:

> "I have heard that he is coming; I have been waiting for him all day." That is a report on how I have spent the day.——In conversation I came to the conclusion that a

> particular event is to be expected, and I draw this conclusion in the words: "So now I must expect him to come". This may be called the first thought, the first act, of this expectation.——The exclamation "I'm longing to see him!" may be called an act of expecting. But I can utter the same words as the result of self-observation, and then they might mean: "So, after all that has happened, I am still longing to see him." The point is: what led up to these words? (PI 586)

And there are many more examples. Identifying 'the given' is not always so easy. Indeed one of the primary skills of the philosopher is to be able to recognise it when it presents itself. It is evident that Wittgenstein himself experienced great difficulty both in resisting the temptation to look outside the realm of 'the given' and even in knowing where its boundary lies:

> It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back. (OC 471)

Hence:

> Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc. etc.,—they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc. etc.
>
> Later, questions about the existence of things do of course arise. "Is there such a thing as a unicorn?" and so on. But such a question is possible only because as a rule no corresponding question presents itself. For how does one know how to set about satisfying oneself of the existence of unicorns? How did one learn the method for determining whether something exists or not? (OC 476)

> "So one must know that the objects whose names one teaches a child by an ostensive definition exist."—Why must one know they do? Isn't it enough that experience doesn't later show the opposite?
>
> For why should the language-game rest on some kind of knowledge? (OC 477)

4 ~ Conclusion

The sense in which language is grounded in instinct, and which I have described as 'the groundlessness of language in general', has been explained in this chapter principally by reference to, and in terms of, the 'blindness' of rule following. This approach is all right as far as it goes but, as I have also forewarned in the previous chapter, it is a perspective that has the limitation of presenting the use of language as essentially the exercise of a technique. This will not do as an account of what it is to *speak* a language and so will not do as an account of what it is to *possess* concepts. Hence it will also not yield a rounded presentation of the groundless nature of our grasp of concepts, if only because it does not show enough of *what* is grasped.—The model of rule-following does not take us far enough. The next chapter is devoted principally to rectifying this shortcoming.

Chapters 5 to 7 turn to the development of the other main aspect of the instinctive nature of language, namely its rôle in concept-formation and the sense in which language and its concepts may be regarded as an *extension* of our form of life. This investigation begins with an examination of some of the difficulties that other authors have found in this idea, and then goes on to look in more detail at some more specific examples: subjective concepts in Chapter 6, and the concepts of knowledge and certainty in Chapter 7. The latter also introduces another element and shows how the groundlessness of the use of language *per se* is itself an element in the formation of the concepts of knowledge and certainty.

The final chapter, from the perspectives developed in the previous chapters, returns us to an examination of the difficulties that we experience with our concepts in philosophy.

Chapter 4 ~ Concepts, Speaking and Persons.

1 ~ Introduction

I explained in Chapter 2 that Rhees detected in Wittgenstein's thinking an inclination (at times, at least) to think of the use of language – or *speaking* a language – as essentially the exercise of a technique. I argued there that such a tendency goes with the idea that in philosophy it may be sufficient for the purpose of giving an account of the grammar of a concept to describe – from an *external* point of view – its relations to other concepts. The riposte was that the elucidation of the grammar of a concept in philosophy trades on an understanding of the concept itself. This is because our difficulty arises ***within*** our understanding of the concept, so that what is required is that we see more clearly, explicitly and *internally*, the connections of sense between our concepts. This falls outside the realm of purely external observation of how various expressions are normally used in connection with one another.

In this chapter I intend to revisit Rhees' objection from a different point of view; indeed from the point of view that he himself develops most thoroughly. Rhees' thoughts on this have been followed up recently by Raimond Gaita,[68] and so I shall draw on both of these sources. The essence of Rhees' position is that the concept of a person and the concept of language – or of *speaking* a language – are mutually constitutive. We may therefore approach the one from the direction of the other: we may try to understand the nature of a person better by seeing how life is transformed and extended in the use of language; conversely, we may try to understand language better by seeing how it partakes of and extends the qualities that are definitive of ourselves as persons. It is upon the second of these alternatives that we shall focus for the present. Put into the language of grammatical elucidation, we need to see how far the concept of language is constituted in its relations to the concept of a person.

Rhees' principal tool for introducing this element into the discussion of the nature of language lies in the way he distinguishes between operating a system of signals and *having something to say.*—Only a person can say anything. Coming to have things to say is of the nature of the coming into being of ourselves as persons. So if we have not investigated

[68] Raimond Gaita, 'Language and Conversation: Wittgenstein's Builders', in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, ed. A. Philips Griffiths, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 101-115. (Gaita)

how speaking is a manifestation of person-hood, then we will have overlooked something that is fundamental to the nature of language.

We may begin by looking at how Rhees works his way towards this position starting from a consideration of Wittgenstein's discussions of language-games.

2 ~ Wittgenstein's Builders

In Chapter 3 I presented Wittgenstein's simple, builders' language-games at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* as essentially devices for breaking up some common assumptions about the how language works and how it relates to our mental life. Whether these language-games should be taken as the foundations of a general account of language is less certain. It is true that such an interpretation does seem to agree with some of Wittgenstein's more generally expressed views about language. It is also true that Rhees saw them in this light. But it is not my interest here to try to settle just how far Wittgenstein might have been aware of their limitations as models. The real value of Rhees' presentation of them is just that it leads on in a convenient way to the richer conception of the nature of language that he wishes to develop. Moreover, there is also no doubt that this richer conception is derived from nowhere other than Wittgenstein's own discussions. So it is fitting that we should try to advance his insights in this area by beginning with what he himself might well have regarded as 'eggshells from the old view'.[69]

Rhees holds that Wittgenstein should be regarded from the outset as wanting to give an account of what it is to *speak* a language.[70] He makes a start on this at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* by showing, *contra* Augustine, the variety of things we do with language and the variety of ways in which we connect it up amongst ourselves and with the world about us. He begins by imagining very simple language-games used by builders on a building site, the builders having no other language than the one they use on the site; and he insists that this might be the *whole* of their language. This is where Rhees' difficulties start; for if the language-games are to illustrate speaking, they must themselves be *bona fide* examples of speaking a language. Rhees' feeling is that they are not, and he argues that the language-games are so impoverished that what would make them

[69] CV p. 44.
[70] Rhees3 p. 82.

illustrative of speaking is no longer in view. What were supposed to be examples of language are nothing but a system of signals.[71]

Rhees develops this distinction between speaking and merely using a system of signals along two avenues, which he weaves closely together. The first, which he describes as his 'chief difficulty', is that there is no room for a distinction between sense and nonsense.[72] The second is that the games cannot show what it is to have 'something to say', or to recognise others as having things to say, in short, what it is to *converse*.[73] What Wittgenstein describes is just a routine: if the use of one of the signals is out of place, or if an unaccustomed signal is used, then this might cause confusion, but the confusion is not the confusion or uncertainty over the sense of a remark, it is simply confusion in the face of a departure from what is normally done.[74] This is not sufficient to attract the range of concepts that belong to treating an utterance as having or lacking sense. Neither does it add up to the individuals making sensible conversation. Without these they are not speaking and cannot be said to be using language.

That finding sense in a remark cannot be reduced to following the purely functional aspect of the use of a word is shown principally by drawing attention to the difference it makes that the 'words' are not used in just one situation but are employed elsewhere:

> The meaning they have within this game is not to be seen simply in what we do with them or how we react to them in this game......remarks could have no bearing on one another unless the expressions they used were used in other connexions as well. (Rhees3 p. 79).

Rhees is careful to avoid confusing the *meaning* that the words have in a given situation with the *function* they have there,—even in a language-game where they do also function in a practical way, or are a part of achieving some 'common enterprise'.[75] Unless the utterances have a use elsewhere they are not 'words' at all; it is not as a *word* that an utterance can have a function unless it has a *meaning* established in a different kind of context. Gaita concurs:

> We *do* things with words—we have *words* to do things with—only because we do more with them than achieve our purposes. (Gaita p.108)

[71] Ibid. pp. 76-77.
[72] Ibid. p. 77.
[73] Ibid. p. 81.
[74] Ibid. p. 77.
[75] Gaita p. 103 ff.

Distinguishing the sense or otherwise of what is said – or even trying to make sense *at all* – belongs to the life that is 'penetrated by speech'.[76] And the principal manifestation of a life being 'penetrated by speech', and so of words being used 'elsewhere', is seen in the way that words are used in *conversation*. Conversation may of course occur either within or independently of concrete situations. But the important point surely is that there is a conversational *dimension*, of which it is essential that beyond merely achieving our purposes we have 'something to say' to one another.—In language we articulate our thoughts and ideas, and an essential feature of *that* lies in the striving to make and to recognise sense and in 'the connectedness of what we say to one another'.[77] The growth of conversation is of a piece with learning 'what it makes sense to say'[78] and with looking for the sense in and trying to make sensible connections between remarks; it is in conversation that the distinction between sense and nonsense has its home.

It is essential to this account that the notions of having something to say and of distinguishing sense from nonsense are seen to go hand in hand with that of forming *concepts*. This also bears on what is meant by saying that language must be used 'elsewhere' than in purely purposive employments. For when we say that words are used 'elsewhere', this means not just that they have a greater quantity of use but that they have a use which is in important respects *independent* of such employments; and one way of expressing this independence is to say that this use expresses not *functions* but *concepts*. This is not to say that the concepts we have are not in the end answerable to the contexts in which they have their natural home; nor that it is not essential to language that words have practical consequences which may indeed be illustrated in a very elementary way by Wittgenstein's builders' language-games. Rather, it says that having a concept, as opposed to merely having a system of signals, lies in having the kind of relation to our utterances which we might call the 'articulation of ideas' which goes beyond the practical application in any given situation. Hence when we *do* bring words to a situation, they are brought in with an understanding of their *sense*, this having already been established in that other dimension of use. This other dimension is something that is in its nature developed *within* the conversational mode.

Understanding the central point here means recognising that there is a kind of understanding that belongs with the notions of conversation, sense, nonsense, 'having something to say', and so on, which is different in grammar to – and hence irreducible to

---

[76] Ibid. p. 103.
[77] Ibid. p. 103.
[78] Rhees3 p. 79.

– any notion of understanding that can be explained in terms of the grasp of functions alone. Once this is realised and accepted, the main point has been made. Giving a satisfying rendition of this difference, on the other hand, is – for reasons already given – elusive and necessarily highly circular. So some more effort in this direction may be warranted.

When the child learns to speak he is not just imitating what the adult is doing; he is learning to speak back at the adult. In taking *from* the adult he is feeding what we might call his own 'will to speak'. Watching a child learning to speak is watching the emergence of a person, not the development of a skilled activity. From the start he is trying to speak for himself; and his trying to tell us things and his trying to make sense of the things that are being said to him emerge spontaneously out of his efforts to relate to other speakers.[79] Rhees mentions the connection between language and thinking in his *Preface to the Blue and Brown Books*,[80] and it might make more vivid the general point being made here if we remind ourselves that the child is learning to *think* – to think about itself, to think about what is going on around it, to think about others and to tell others about these things. All of this belongs to the circumstances in which the child is trying to make sense of the world about it and to engage coherently with the constantly changing environment in which it finds itself. The child's learning to speak and its coming to find its place in the world are the same.—The use of language is expressive of and integral to being a thinking, willing subject.

In coming to have things to say, the whole of the child's orientation towards the people about him is under transformation. He is acquiring the attitude towards the adult which is not the attitude towards someone showing him how to get things done but is the attitude towards someone who is *telling* him things. And when the child himself speaks, he expects a response *in kind* from the adult;—he is treating the adult as someone who is listening to what he has to say. More generally, we may say he is acquiring an attitude towards himself, or a sense of himself, as someone to whom others can speak and expect a sensible reply and who can speak to others and expect the same.[81]

The way in which inter-personal attitudes illuminate 'having something to say' might be made clearer by considering an objection. The connection between trying to make sense and the notion that the use of language is an expression of the life of a person is

---

[79] Ibid. pp. 79 & 82.

[80] Rush Rhees, 'Preface' to BB, pp. v-xiv. (RheesBB)

[81] Rhees3 p. 79; Rush Rhees, 'Can there be a Private Language?', in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), p. 67.

characterised again by Gaita in terms of the way that the individual's 'humanity' shows in his relation to language. His way of expressing this point arises out of his criticisms of Normal Malcolm's attempts to show that, in spite of the impoverished nature of their 'language', Wittgenstein's builders *are* talking sense after all.[82] Without increasing their vocabulary, Malcolm attempts to circumvent the criticisms of Wittgenstein by painting a picture of the builders which shows them more as people with a life than as the 'marionettes' that Rhees judges them to be.[83] Gaita's response is to agree that injecting humanity into the situation is needed, but that this must manifest itself *in* their having things to say and in their trying to talk sense. Gaita concludes:

> He [Malcolm] gives some eloquent examples of their humanity, but he fails to connect their humanity to their speech: it remains external to it. Everything that displays their humanity fails to enter their supposed speech and vice versa. The chuckling, the head slapping and so on in Malcolm's example, do not alter the unrelievedly purposive character of the builder's utterances of 'Slab', 'Beam', etc. That is the deep lesson of Malcolm's failure. (Gaita p. 108)

Gaita then develops this thought by considering whether a machine might ever speak.—Unless a machine has a life like ours in which speech has a comparable place, then whatever they may do they are not *speaking*. In the course of the discussion he refers to Wittgenstein's remark: 'My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul'.[84] Wittgenstein introduces this in a discussion of how psychological concepts have a place in our lives. But it may be generalised, for one manifestation of the attitude towards a soul is the recognition of others as fellow speakers in the way that we engage with them *in* our speech, in our trying to understand them *in* what they have to say to us.

I started by saying that Rhees followed two closely woven themes. If we are using a genuine language and not merely a system of signals, then we *have things to say*. This has to do with that fact that the use of language is not just a tool which we become skilled in the use of, but is integral to our constitution as persons; having things to say is a primary expression of this. In the second place, it is essential to this that what we say has *sense*,—which is different from merely having a function. This goes with the fact that in language we form concepts and express thoughts and ideas. There is sense and meaning only when words run through our lives in every direction and in all kinds of

[82] Norman Malcolm, 'Language game (2)', in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, eds. D. Z. Phillips & P. Winch, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 35-44.
[83] Rhees3 p. 83.
[84] PI p. 178.

circumstances, when they are used in all kinds of connection with one another, and when this is at the service of 'having something to say'. Making sense is not merely a matter of determining what is allowed in the language or with 'the correct use of various expressions':[85]

> But 'what it makes sense to say' is not 'the sense that expressions have'. It has more to do with what it makes sense to answer or what it makes sense to ask, or what sense one remark may have in connection with another. (Rhees3 p. 80)

Recognising that a child is growing in its having things to say, and not just signalling its wishes, desires or intentions, goes with the observation that it is getting to be able to handle just such connection making between sensible remarks.[86] And the context for recognising this lies in seeing the way that the development of language goes with the development of the life of the child. Gaita sums it up: 'having something to say' is 'living a life and speaking out of it'.[87] When we have grasped the difference between this and what we observe in the efforts of the builders on Wittgenstein's building site, we will see, firstly, how 'our lives are penetrated by speech' and, secondly, how it is not speech unless it does penetrate our lives in this way. Only then do utterances have sense and are there relations of sense between utterances.

3 ~ Speaking and Knowledge of Grammar

Speaking a language is not the same as being in command of a technique, or of communicating by signals alone. Armed with a richer understanding of what this observation amounts to, we may now return to the question of how we make clear to ourselves in philosophy the grammars of our concepts.

Earlier I argued that the conception of language as a purely functional system of signals lends itself to the incoherent idea that the workings of language may be completely described from an external point of view – just like any other fact in the world. On the contrary, whereas the grammars of our expressions and language-games do have aspects which may be described externally, the understanding of the grammars of our concepts that we wish for in philosophy is one which takes for granted that the language-game and its concepts are already ***understood***. Therefore a different kind of relation is involved,—one which is not reducible to the external relation of observer to fact. Hence, I distinguished

[85] Rhees3 p. 80.
[86] Ibid. p. 80.
[87] Gaita p. 110-111.

between external and internal accounts of the grammars of our concepts and the expressions used to articulate them.

Now this 'different kind of relation' applies not only to the philosopher's relation to language, but to the speaker's relation to language and its concepts too. But here we must be careful not to suppose that all we have to do to complete the account, and to avoid the error of thinking that the use of language is just the operation of a technique, is to argue that language really is essentially a system of rules or propositions but one having a special place in our lives,—one that penetrates our lives and is operated 'from the midst', unlike any other skill. On this basis, the 'understanding' that the philosopher presupposes would simply be a knowledge of the linguistic rules 'from the inside' (i.e. the ability to apply them) to supplement to the knowledge of their external manifestations. Rather, we will see that it follows on from the previous discussions that different concepts stand in quite different relations to us as speakers according to how the grasp of them enters our speech and our lives. It will then follow naturally that if concepts belong to our understanding in different ways, then the treatment of them in philosophy should reflect those differences. This will apply most markedly to those concepts – and their congeners – that are directly to do with the use of language. I shall argue that the grasp of *their* grammars lies not so much in the grasp of the use of any words in particular but in *our whole relation to language.* Hence we will need to acknowledge a different conception of the knowledge of the grammar of a concept than we are used to in philosophy,—one that will amount to much more than an understanding of the rule governing the use of any one or set of expressions.

Again we may approach this by taking a step back, beginning with Rhees' treatment of it in his *Preface to the Blue and Brown Books*, where he traces right through to the *Investigations* the transitions in Wittgenstein's views of the nature of language and of what philosophical difficulties have to do with language.

Over the course of this period Wittgenstein's views on these topics underwent considerable development. And yet much of the motivation behind Rhees' attack on the examples of language-games in the *Investigations* comes from his feeling that they show that Wittgenstein has still not completely shaken off those earlier attitudes towards language, and hence towards the nature of philosophical problems themselves. Rhees' concern is with the continuing resurfacing of this remnant of the earlier view in the later work, and so for the sake of making the clearest contrast I shall focus on the most unequivocal expression of it which is to be found in the *Blue Book*.

In the *Blue Book* Wittgenstein has arrived at the idea of philosophical confusions as confusions of the grammars of particular expressions. These confusions may take different forms. For instance, the idea of the meaning of a word as a mental entity is an example of the confusion of looking for a 'thing' to correspond to a substantive, whilst the difficulties we feel about *time* may come from confusing the grammar of measuring time with that of measuring length. Words that give rise to special difficulties are often what Wittgenstein calls 'odd job' words, of which 'meaning' is again an example. These cause trouble because we do not recognise the irregular way in which they function but see a law in the way they are used.[88] Roughly speaking, then, the conception of grammatical confusion here is on the model of entanglement in the rules governing the moves within a game or technique.[89]

These are, of course, illustrations of philosophical difficulties that are confusions to do with language, but Rhees notes that when Wittgenstein asks what leads people to treat expressions in these ways his answer is 'the craving for generality'. This attitude manifests itself, for example, in 'the tendency to look for something in common to all the entities subsumed under a general term',[90] or in the way we are tempted to employ the methods of science in responding to philosophical questions.[91] And the point of Rhees' drawing attention to this is to suggest that Wittgenstein has not advanced beyond thinking of the root of philosophical difficulty as lying in an attitude that is not in itself 'specially connected with language'.[92]

The reason why Wittgenstein is not able to make this step, I would suggest, lies directly in the influence of the functional view of language and in the technical perspective on the grammars of expressions that is closely relate to it. For if language is conceived of as an operating system which we 'confront' – that is, as essentially an empirical object – then it is perhaps natural to suppose that confusions about these expressions originate in some general habit of thought rather than in something intrinsic to our relations to language, i.e. intrinsic to *how* our lives are 'penetrated' by it.

Now we do not have to deny for a moment that many philosophical problems have their origins with particular expressions, and that we can examine these troublesome expressions from the point of view of the techniques for using them – as Rhees himself

[88] BB pp. 43-4.
[89] Cf. PI 125.
[90] BB p. 17.
[91] BB p. 18.
[92] RheesBB p. xi.

does.[93] What we find problematic may often be satisfactorily exposed and disposed of in this way. But one consequence of observing the *difference* between the 'technique centred' and the 'person centred' conceptions of speaking is that we can no longer assume that the grammar of a concept can be reviewed merely by reference to the rules governing the *application* of the expressions corresponding to it. For this will depend on the relation between any such rules and those larger relations to language exhibited in the life of a person who can speak. A clearer view of what it is to speak a language will show us that lying behind such confusions with linguistic expressions is a confusion about language that is not grammatical confusion in the narrow sense[94] but is a confusion stemming from a rather more direct kind of misapprehension of what our relation to language is and of how it penetrates our lives. It is here that we do find a source for our perplexity that is 'specially connected with language'.

Rhees remarks that 'misunderstandings of the logic of language' – by which he does not just mean problems with the technique for using its expressions – express perplexity 'as to whether something can be said or not', and he goes on:

> It is a confusion or uncertainty connected with being able to speak, and so perhaps with learning to speak: a confusion in connexion with what it is that one was learning as one learned to speak: with what saying something is and what understanding is. This sort of confusion or uncertainty (which is not just a confusion of the grammars of particular expressions) has led men to the scepticism which runs in one way or another into all the big questions of philosophy. (Rhees3 p. 74)

This is spelled out again in *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*:

> If language really were a technique, then the problems of philosophy might seem to be confusions between different parts of the technique. And it is plain that it is not that. If it were, there would be no connexion between philosophy and scepticism. You should not understand what was meant by the notion of the distrust of understanding. And certainly we could not understand why philosophy should have been thought as important as it has; or why the problems of philosophy should have distressed people in the measure that they have. (Rhees1 p. 112)[95]

The difference between this kind of confusion and what he calls 'the confusion of the grammars of particular expressions' is one that may be observed especially in our relations to the concepts that are *to do with language and speaking*: the contexts in which we can be said to have these and related concepts, and how having these differs from having

[93] Rhees3 p. 80.

[94] I say 'not grammatical confusion in the narrow sense', since, as I shall argue, the confusion I am trying to give some account of may also, from certain points of view, be called 'grammatical confusion'.

[95] See also Rhees1, Chapter 13, 'Philosophy, life and language'.

others. So we need to focus our attention now on the nature of our possession of these concepts.

If a child can speak at all, there all kinds of observations we might make about him. Here we may recall some of the responses characteristic of being able to speak: we see that he recognises that he is being spoken to; we see that he is trying to tell us something; we see that he believes or is doubtful about something he is being told; we see that he knows that he is being told to do something; we see him express frustration at being misunderstood or with his inability to express himself clearly; we may see that he is not sure what *we* mean by saying something; or again, we may see his recognition that what someone says doesn't make sense. In each case we are thinking of various modes in the child's relations to language; but importantly we are not thinking *expressly* of his grasp of the technique for using any particular expressions.[96] Now although we are not thinking of his competence in the use of any such expressions, I shall argue that there does remain a sense in which, in talking of these relations to language, we are talking of something that is integral to the child's grasp of the concepts we are using to characterise those relations, namely the concepts of speaking, telling, believing, meaning, etc. In the child's very entry into sensible discourse, and in its ability to handle conversation, it shows that it is beginning to get hold of these concepts. Getting hold of them belongs to 'being able to speak'.

One may feel uneasy with the suggestion that the first steps in understanding these *concepts* is constituted in forming such relations and being able to handle language in these ways. But the sense in speaking in this way lies in the fact that their formation is not just part of the development of a competency but clearly belongs to the *understanding* of language taken as a whole.—It is integral to the 'making sense of the world' that is emerging in the child's coming to have things to say about it. There are also important continuities between the formation of these relations and a more typical notion of what having such concepts amounts to. Indeed I will argue that there is a priority here. Forming these concepts begins in the way that we make these distinctions as part of coming to be able to speak, and only shows itself secondarily as something articulated *in* speech – in their *explicit* application. For one can surely only begin to employ expressions such as 'speaking', 'meaning', etc., as an extension of circumstances where the kinds of relations to language that I have referred to are already in evidence. What I shall refer to, therefore, as our *primary* understanding of these concepts is presupposed.

---

[96] Rhees3 p. 82.

I should perhaps emphasise again here that I do not mean to diminish the part played in having these concepts that the various expressions like 'sense', 'nonsense', 'speaking', 'meaning', etc., are worked into conversation, and that many of the activities of correcting their use, which are shared with any other word or expression, will be present. I am arguing that what we learn when we acquire these concepts cannot be made intelligible from the point of view alone of a mastery of a technique for applying such expressions within a language-game.—In these respects having these concepts differs from, say, having the concepts 'game', or 'lemon', or 'sitting down' – to use Rhees' examples.[97] There is a different concept of understanding here, and I believe it is this that he has in mind when he says:

> We could say that someone knows the grammar of 'language', or knows what language is, if he has learned to speak. (Rhees2 p. 47)

This is where the analogy between explaining games and explaining language comes to an end. And it suggests that we may find the root of philosophical perplexity about language, and the like, as being to do with this primary understanding, to which 'confusions of the grammars of particular expressions' may be only secondary.

To develop this argument further, I should like to say a little more about the nature of this primary understanding of our concepts, firstly by looking more closely at an example, and then by relating this to the question of how the expressions corresponding to the concepts ('meaning', 'speaking', etc.) do in fact have meaning. The concepts that I wish to give special attention to here are *belief* and *time*.

4 ~ The Grammar of 'Belief'

A child learns to express beliefs as he learns to speak. In learning to talk in elementary ways about things in his life, and in learning to follow the things that are said to him, the child is beginning to express beliefs and to recognise others' expressions of belief. The expression of belief is a *mode* in the use of language that the child acquires spontaneously as he is learning to speak. We might say that the use of words to express beliefs is *primitive* to the use of language.—Clearly there could be no such thing as the child beginning by having belief explained to him; the child could only follow an explanation if he were already in some command of this way of using words. Neither could belief emerge

[97] Ibid. pp. 46 & 49.

directly out of training. No doubt there are functional relations between utterances and actions which are relevant to understanding what belief is. But, as I have argued, the child is not just learning to perform certain operations: learning to express beliefs belongs to the emergence of the child's having anything at all to *say*, and to seeing others as having things to say. It is in the context of these growing connections that it makes sense to say – and indeed I think we *would* say – that the child who is learning to express beliefs is coming to know or to understand what belief *is* and is beginning to form a concept of it in a way that we would *not* say that one of Wittgenstein's builders is coming to know what signalling is.

This will emerge more clearly if we look at the way that these surroundings lie behind the explicit application of the concept. For it is here that the continuity I spoke of earlier, between this understanding and understanding 'the grammar of particular expressions', becomes important.

It is certainly true, as I have said, that much of what we might call 'knowing the grammar of "belief"' might be understood in terms of knowing the techniques for applying the concept. It will lie, for example, in being able to make elementary checks of whether someone really does believe what they are saying, or in knowing the grounds for challenging and questioning beliefs, or in being able to say why a belief is unreasonable, and so on. Much of this might be taught – or certainly developed – by explanation. But learning to apply the concept in these ways depends on and is pervaded by the kinds of relations to language that I have been trying to illustrate.

This dependence is internal. For a start, any applications of the concept will depend on the things that are said being *understood*,[98] and that already means standing in a relation to them as to expressions of belief. In certain circumstances we may, of course, be unsure whether a proposition is being used to express a belief. These are the circumstances in which we may resort to criteria to make a decision. Moreover, because we may understand the proposition *before* we ask whether *as a matter of fact* it is being used to express a belief, this may suggest that the grammars of the concepts of proposition and belief are not shared but 'fit' one another – to use one of Wittgenstein's metaphors.[99] But it does not follow from the fact that we may often find ourselves in such circumstances, that we can understand propositions in general independently of what it is for them to express beliefs. For the circumstances in which we apply such criteria cannot be the circumstances in which the concepts 'proposition' and 'belief' are determined. For

[98] Ibid. p. 83.
[99] PI 136.

example, we cannot introduce belief into the life of the child, or convey to him what belief is, by introducing him firstly to propositions (and explaining their sense) and only later showing him how to use them to express beliefs, if only because unless that is grasped at the same time he will not have been introduced to propositions and in making 'utterances' he will not be saying anything.

What is central to recognising an utterance as an expression of belief is already achieved if we have understood what is said. It is therefore fundamental to our primary recognition of expressions of belief that we do so without making a *judgement* that 'here is a belief', or, in the primary instance of where we do make such a judgement, without the employment of criteria. Without the primacy of such recognition, the application of the concept would in any case be empty; or at least it would only be the concept of an external property of utterances, and therefore of an external or functional relation between utterances and actions. Hence it belongs to my grasp of the meaning of the word 'belief' that I can express beliefs when I speak and that I understand what I am being told when I am spoken to. This is why I say that the relation between the two is an internal one, and it justifies the claim that the relations to language that come directly with my ability to speak constitute part of my primary understanding of the concept of belief.

I believe that Wittgenstein is touching on a similar point when he remarks:

> One does not learn to obey a rule by first learning the use of the word "agreement".
>
> Rather, one learns the meaning of "agreement" by learning to follow a rule.
>
> If you want to understand what it means "to follow a rule", you have already to be able to follow a rule. (RFM p.405)

Being able to follow a rule here is not merely a condition without which you would not be able to learn that expression,—in the sense of needing to have an outward acquaintance with the thing to which the word applies. Nor is it meant in the trivial sense that learning any expression means being able to follow rules. Rather, 'already to be able to follow a rule' – having that relation to language – is itself partly constitutive of having the concept of a rule. That is why we learn the meaning of 'agreement' *by* learning to follow a rule.

Similar considerations apply, I would argue, to recognising that one is being spoken to; or being unsure what something means; or recognising that one has failed or succeeded in understanding something, etc. Again our primary understanding of the respective

concepts shows in the overall manner of our linguistic responses rather than in the employment of the corresponding expressions as such.

In conclusion, we may contrast this kind of understanding – which in an important sense still belongs to an understanding of the grammar of the concept – with what Rhees calls 'the grammars of particular expressions', which, roughly speaking, refers to anything that might be imparted by means of definition, training or demonstration, or through any account of the grammar of the concept that takes for granted our primary understanding of it.[100] Knowing the grammar of 'belief' – and related concepts – has a dimension that is significantly lacking in the case of 'games', for example, which arguably amounts to little more than knowing in what circumstances we call things games and the difference it makes to other things that are said and done that we call something a game.

5 ~ The Grammar of 'Time'

I have suggested that parallel to what is particular in the way we possess the concepts to do with language are differences in how the expressions corresponding to them have meaning.

The kind of relationship that holds between the ability to speak and the use of expressions like 'belief' or 'rule' carries with it that their meanings are related in a quite different way to the employments of language in connection with which we use them than is the meaning of 'game', for example, to the playing of games (and the language that goes with it). To illustrate this, Rhees contrasts the grammar of 'reading' – one of Wittgenstein's own examples[101] – with that of 'sitting down'. In the case of 'reading' we cannot point to examples of it and hope thereby to explain its meaning. He remarks:

> And it is true that we cannot point to what is really meant. But not because it is hidden from us. It is hard to give an account of 'reading', for instance, because its *meaning* lies in the language-game in which we use it. As one cannot say this about 'sitting down'. All the puzzling words we study here are words having to do with the grammar of 'language'. (Rhees2 p. 49)

Here I am going to assume that what Rhees calls 'lying in the language-game' would encompass the relations to the language-game that I have been describing in connection with belief, and would apply generally to the concepts to do with language that I have been discussing. However, the principle also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to those other kinds

[100] See Rhees2 pp. 48-49, for example.
[101] PI 156-171.

of concepts that I have referred to such as *cause*, *time* and psychological concepts. So we may examine the example that Rhees himself refers to: *time*.[102]

When a child is learning to express an intention, hope or expectation, or to anticipate an event; or if we see that it knows it has to wait for something to happen or for someone to do something; or if it is learning to recall and recount something that happened the day before, or is learning to tell the time; or if it is remembering it has to do something;—in all of these things, and many more, it is learning the various ways of expressing temporal relations and is on the way to forming a concept of time. This does not stop, of course, with these isolated situations; and if all that we describe is its engagement in such language-games conceived of as complete units in themselves, we will not have described its grasp of the concept of time proper. That would only come in the way the child showed itself capable of talking continuous sense expressing appreciation of past, future and present. For example, if the child's ability to make connections between different remarks in different contexts in respect of their temporal content were constantly breaking down, then I think we would say that this represented a fault in the child's grasp of the concept *time*. We might express the general point by saying that possession of the concept of time is manifested in the ability to pass freely between the various language-games in respect of their temporal content. Our grasp of the concept is pervasive of our speech, so pervasive in fact that it enters our speech just about every time we open our mouths.

Turning to the use of the *word* 'time', I show that I know the full import of its meaning in the way that I am able to use it in connection with the fact of my talking continuous sense in contexts where temporal conceptions are embedded. If you can talk sense in such circumstances then you can follow the sense that I talk and see whether I am able to use the word 'time' correctly in these connections. This, I think, is the only kind context in which we can talk in any comprehensive way of my having grasped what the word 'time' *means*, and so it follows that the word's meaningful use is responsible to the concept as it is thus grasped and expressed. It cannot be done merely by pointing to something or giving a rule or definition for the use of the word; none of these would be of any use unless the concept had already been grasped.

The expression of the concept *time* in general conversation is prior to the meaningful use of the expression 'time', just as those relations to language which constitute our primary understanding of the concepts generally to do with language are prior to our

[102] Rhees2 p. 49.

employment of the corresponding expressions. So it is only by connection with these manifestations of the concepts in our speech that we can speak of the expressions having meaning; and it is the office of these expressions to bring into the foreground, and to articulate, concepts which are already at work in our speech or in the way we handle language. The accountability of the use of the word 'time' to what is already established in our speech is, I think, reflected in Rhees' remark:

> It may never have struck me before that some form of language—say geometry—does or could belong to the 'meaning' of 'time'. (Which helps to show the sense of 'Don't look for the meaning, look at the use.') This is not like the uncertainty of borderline or doubtful cases—'Would you still call that a dwelling house?'. 'Would you still call that a fruit?'—where the answer may be: 'As you like.' (Rhees2 p. 49)

The meanings of the words 'fruit' and 'dwelling house' would be learnt by explanation of one sort or another. As far as the meanings of these expressions are concerned, they lie essentially in the way they are employed within language-games,—in the making of judgements or in our general talk about houses and fruits. Explanations can of course be reviewed, and any difficulties we get into with these concepts will not go deep. But in the case of *time* and similarly deeply rooted concepts, I have tried to show that the way *they* form part of our relations to reality is not in their origins as concepts that are applied in the making of judgements; for having them is *structural* to discourse. In the case of *time* we have a concept which belongs to the sense of much of what we say. In the cases of *belief* and *meaning*, or the other concepts to do with language, we are looking at something lying in our whole relation to language. In the cases of the *words* 'time', 'belief', 'meaning', etc., we are dealing, therefore, with expressions whose introduction into the language does not so much *determine* as *reflect* boundaries between concepts – boundaries that are taken for granted in the very course of speaking and which pervade our speech. Failure to adhere to these limits would mean, in the case of the concepts to do with language, a loss of grip on language; or, in the case of *time* or *cause*, a profound disturbance of our ability to talk sense and not merely an uncertainty or muddle in their specific application. If it did make sense to speak of moving these conceptual boundaries, then this would represent not merely a shift in the judgements we make, but wholesale changes in the way we speak, or wholesale changes in our relations to language.—Or rather, it would no longer be clear that we were speaking or making sense. It is therefore the very coherence of our lives as conceptual agents that supports the meaningful use of these expressions, not merely the adherence to a definition or explanation.

This brings us back to Rhees' original characterisation of 'misunderstandings of the logic of language' as:

> ....confusion or uncertainty connected with being able to speak, and so perhaps with learning to speak...[and]..(..not just a confusion of the grammars of particular expressions)... (Rhees3 p. 74)

The deep difficulty in philosophy is not just difficulty in the face of the complexity, the variety or the confusing appearance of the rules governing particular expressions, but a confusion or uncertainty that arises out of a failure to acknowledge the understanding that lies in our broader relations to language – in our *ability* to speak and converse. It is, as it were, perplexity *in the face of* being able to make sense. This is perhaps why Rhees is wary, or at least equivocal, about speaking of this misunderstanding as being misunderstanding of the *grammar* of a concept, since this might suggest something relatively trivial, i.e. 'confusions between different parts of the technique'.[103] On that interpretation we would not be able to understand scepticism if philosophers were interested only in the *grammars* of concepts. A similar sentiment is expressed by Rhees where he attacks the idea – sometimes attributed to Wittgenstein – that philosophical problems are no more than linguistic confusions:

> Such reflection may help us to understand how it is that language—thinking and speaking and the understanding that there is in life among men—has led men to wonder what things are. A start from ideas of 'linguistic confusions' may issue in philistinism; and generally has.
>
> ....
>
> If we look only at usages, we cannot understand how it is that language may express ideas.
>
> We cannot understand the central ideas of philosophy—such ideas as reality, truth, things, intelligibility, understanding—we cannot understand the rôle they play in language unless we try to understand what language is. We cannot understand how it is that puzzlement about them and puzzlement about language (about what 'saying something' is, for instance) are so run into one another that we can hardly distinguish them. So that scepticism regarding them is scepticism regarding the reality of discourse.[104]

I am in full agreement with Rhees' underlying thought here. If I do depart from him – as I have already been arguing – it is that I believe that it is still valid, and indeed valuable,

[103] Rhees1 p. 112.

[104] Rush Rhees, 'Art and Philosophy', in *Without Answers*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 134-135.

to characterise the root of philosophical problems as arising out of difficulties with the *grammars* of our concepts,—even in the cases which we might characterise as arising directly in connection with 'being able to speak' rather than with the use of particular expressions. For as Rhees himself is at pains to argue, having concepts at all belongs with the idea of having 'something to say', which *is* 'living a life an speaking out of it'. We should therefore *expect* the grasp of the grammars of the concepts which are most intimately connected with 'being able to speak' to be something very deeply seated in, and indeed *structural to*, our lives. So it seems to me that we should not abandon the notion of grammar in these cases but, if anything, expand it to include them. It does not trivialise 'scepticism regarding the reality of discourse' to express it as puzzlement over the grammar of 'discourse'.—They are the same. Likewise, the difficulty we experience in seeing clearly into the grammars of the concepts to do with language may equally be expressed as the feeling of uncertainty or discomfort in our relations to language,—and to ourselves and to the world.

Given that the primary understanding of these concepts is such a pervasive feature of our speech and our lives, one might wonder how it is that we are so easily distracted when we come to reflect on their grammars in philosophy. The origin cannot reside in confusing similarities in the outward manner of language-games, or in 'pictures' lying in surface grammar.—Such causes are the province of 'confusions of the grammars of particular expressions'. Neither can it be a failure to be struck by facts (on account of their great generality).—It has already been argued that the recovery of facts will only play a secondary rôle in the elucidation of the concepts that are at the bottom of philosophical difficulties. Rather, it has its root in the intimacy of our relations to these concepts, in the way that the very fabric of our lives, as persons who can speak, is constituted in these relations. These form part of our grasp of the concepts *without* explicit acknowledgement, for they are prior to the explicit acknowledgement of *anything*. Our understanding of them shows not in the way that we acknowledge these relations, but in the very fact that we can speak to one another. There is, therefore, no natural context for their acknowledgement, and so when we do turn our attention to them, we inevitably pass as a matter of course to those dimensions of their grammars which *are* handled explicitly,—dimensions in which we may indeed give definitions, explanations and demonstrations, and may employ criteria in their application. In this way our reflections on the concepts fail to attach to the circumstances in which they were determined, thus exposing ourselves to reconstructing them in ways that are almost bound to be distorted.

We may turn to an example provided by Wittgenstein to illustrate this last point:

> ....it looks as if the definition—a proposition is whatever can be true or false—determined what a proposition was by saying: what fits the concept 'true', or what the concept 'true' fits, is a proposition. So it is as if we had a concept of true and false, which we could use to determine what is or what is not a proposition. (PI 136)

In the apparent absence of any other way of showing our relations to the concepts *truth* and *proposition*, it may look as if the question 'Can this be true or false?', in providing the criterion for judging that 'here is a proposition', showed how the concept *proposition* might be determined. It would then be original to having the concept *proposition* that we are able to make such a judgement using this as a criterion: having a concept of truth would be prior to having the concept of a proposition. This falsifies the relation between the concepts *truth* and *proposition*. Now as Wittgenstein remarks:

> ....a child might be taught to distinguish between propositions and other expressions by being told "Ask yourself if you can say 'is true' after it. If these words fit, it's a proposition." (PI 137)

In other words, we can perfectly well imagine circumstances in which we might apply 'is true' as a criterion, and no doubt this does form at least a part of having a concept of it.—In the surface handling of these concepts we treat them as pieces that 'fit' one another. This is fine. But these are not the circumstances in which the concept is determined, for clearly the child could only follow this instruction if he already distinguished propositions – both in their truth and in their falsity – in his own speech or in responding to the speech of others. In other words, in the sense in which I have described, the child will already have the concepts *truth* and *proposition*.

Wittgenstein rectifies this false relation by saying:

> And what a proposition is is in one sense determined by the rules of sentence formation....and in another sense by the use of the sign in the language-game. And the use of the words "true" and "false" may be among the constituent parts of this game; and if so it *belongs* to our concept 'proposition' but does not '*fit*' it. (PI 136)

And of course nothing short of a rounded exposition of what speaking a language is – which must include how language belongs to our engagement with the world and with the people with whom we share it – will do to illustrate what the use of the propositional sign is and of what the words 'true' and 'false' mean.

Such an exposition will not try to explain what speaking is (or what belief is, or what truth is) from top to bottom; rather, it will bring what *can* be made explicit in the grammars of the concepts – or in the techniques for using them – into contact with the

understanding of the concept that lies embedded in our relations to language. An important part of giving presence to this understanding will be to describe the circumstances in which these relations exist – some attempt at which I have made. But they will not be the descriptions of the life with language that we require if they do not at the same time engage with those relations in which that understanding lies,—otherwise they would remain an external account. As Rhees remarks:

> Suppose I describe what the two men are doing while they are building, as Wittgenstein does in the *Investigations* (pp. 3 and 5). If this does illustrate speaking for you, then you must not only understand what they are doing, but you must understand what they say. My description must show that they speak a language which each of them understands, and which you also understand, if the illustration is to help you. (Rhees3 p. 72)

The description can only show this to the extent that we already recognise them as persons who are speaking – that we already stand in that relation to them – and that means that our understanding of the concepts of a person and of language are already up and running and determining our perception of the illustration.

What Wittgenstein's example shows is how a preoccupation with what *can* be made easily explicit in how the words 'true' and 'proposition' are employed, e.g. in the kinds of thing we might say to a child, can conceal from us the deeper connections between these concepts. And it is just this sort of dislocation that is at the root of the problems of truth, language and scepticism

7 ~ Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to move on from the idea of the use of language as the operation of signs according to a rule to a richer conception of *speaking* as a manifestation of the life of *person*,—these concepts being mutually constitutive. In the previous chapter, I gave an account of how one manifestation of the instinctive nature of language use is captured in Wittgenstein's remark that 'I obey the rule blindly',[105] i.e. that the application of linguistic rules are ultimately *groundless*. This account has to be to be qualified in the light of the transition towards the richer conception of the nature of language use. For what that brings to light is that, with regard to the possession of certain of our concepts that are especially to do with language, the roots of the understanding of these concepts is lies not so much in the application of the rule for the use of the corresponding

[105] PI 219.

expressions ('belief', 'meaning', 'time', etc.) as in more pervasive features of our relations to language,—of our relations to *language as a whole*. Attention to these features also brings in its wake a notion of *understanding* that is perhaps not so comfortable when thinking merely in terms of getting the hang of the application of a technique. And yet I do not think that this requires us to abandon the principal insight of language as grounded in instinct. The underlying principle is preserved, for 'living a life and speaking out of it' no more presupposes a rational process at a more elementary level – or even at a transcendental level – than rule-governed behaviour does, and so it remains 'blind' and instinctive in this sense. When Wittgenstein remarked 'What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—forms of life',[106] 'the given' is also an expression of the groundlessness of the form of life,—which is the form of life of a person having things to say.

In the next chapter I shall begin to examine the relation between instinctive behaviour, conceptual content and concept-formation.

[106] PI p. 226.

Chapter 5 ~ Language as Arising out of Instinctive Behaviour

1 ~ Introduction

Wittgenstein's remarks on instinctive behaviour and its relation to concept-formation have received much critical attention, and so in developing this discussion I will pay special attention to these critical voices and to what I believe to be significant misunderstandings of Wittgenstein's standpoint. I shall direct myself primarily towards recent comment by Elizabeth Wolgast,[107] who raises most of the difficulties generally experienced with these remarks. Much of what I have to say will be in agreement with positions put forward by Rush Rhees;[108] however he too has expressed anxiety about certain of Wittgenstein's remarks, and so this will also need to be addressed.

The remarks in question have given rise to problems not just as a the result of their paucity – which has allowed varied interpretation – but specifically because they invite interpretation as advancing a *theory* of the genesis of our concepts from instinctive forms of behaviour. And of course, this is problematic for Wittgenstein's avowed philosophical method just because 'we may not advance any kind of theory'.[109] I have been at pains to emphasise that, for Wittgenstein, to speak of the *instinctive* nature of language is essentially a *grammatical insight*: speaking may be pre-meditated on any particular occasion but we cannot conceive of speaking *as such* as something pre-meditated – thus establishing the link between the concepts of speaking and of instinctive behaviour. The problem with his remarks on instinctive behaviour and concept-formation is that their grammatical nature is not always as obvious as one might wish. It is this which has allowed Wolgast, amongst others, a platform from which to claim that Wittgenstein makes assertions about concept-formation that are both speculative and not entirely intelligible.

2 ~ Wolgast's Interpretation of Wittgenstein

The remarks that trouble Wolgast are those where Wittgenstein speaks of 'primitive reactions' as if they gave direct rise to our language-games and the concepts embedded in

[107]Elizabeth Wolgast, 'Primitive Reactions', *Philosophical Investigations*, 17:4, October 1994, pp. 587-603. (Wolgast2)
[108] Rush Rhees, 'Language as emerging from instinctive behaviour', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:1, January 1997, pp. 1-14. (Rhees4)
[109] PI 109.

them. Moreover, she observes that we do not find Wittgenstein talking in this way in the *Philosophical Investigations* (except in a limited way, which I shall refer to later) but only in scattered remarks elsewhere – which were apparently not intended for publication.[110] This fuels her feeling that this idea is really spurious to his central insights and should be dispensed with.[111] Her analysis of Wittgenstein's position, as it emerges in these remarks, is roughly as follows:

Wittgenstein's suggestion is that our concepts are *generated* from pre-linguistic forms of behaviour. Typical examples of him in this mood are the following:

> The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop.
> Language—I want to say—is a refinement. "In the beginning was the deed". (C&E p. 395, see also CV p. 31)

> But what is the word 'primitive' meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought. (Z 541)

Wittgenstein's most developed example of this process is to be found in his treatment of the concept of *causality* in his notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness'. Here he speaks at length of how the concept *cause* might have emerged out of instinctive behaviour. His idea is that the language-game is generated from our spontaneous reactions to events impinging upon us. He illustrates this by reference to reactions such as the response to receiving a blow,[112] or feeling the pull on a string.[113] Language 'draws on' such reactions for its concept of cause;[114] they are the foundations on which the concept is grounded.[115] This is not merely a conjecture as to how our concepts might have arisen out of certain forms of behaviour, but is something upon which the very *possibility* of forming such concepts depends. As she says:

> We could not have the concept of cause if we did not react as we do, and the same applies to other concepts. (Wolgast2 p. 591).

Wolgast clearly takes Wittgenstein – against the better judgement to be found in the *Investigations* – to be espousing a *foundationalist* account of language;—not, perhaps, in the traditional sense of wanting to provide a rational justification for our concepts, but in the

---

[110] I say 'apparently' for it is now known that Wittgenstein willed his literary editors to publish his writings 'as they think fit', which means that we are not in a position to dismiss any of his extant remarks (see Rush Rhees, 'On Editing Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 19:1, January 1996, pp. 56-57).
[111] Wolgast2 pp. 588, 601 & 603.
[112] C&E pp. 409-410.
[113] Ibid. pp. 416-417.
[114] Wolgast2 p. 591.
[115] Ibid. pp. 601-602.

sense of there being at least some kind of necessary pathway of derivation from primitive behavioural reactions to the concepts as they come to be embedded in language. The thrust of her argument against this 'thesis' is that what is presented as a philosophical account of concept-formation is at best only speculation about historical facts of which we know nothing; at worst it is incoherent.[116]

The heart of her anxiety lies in her concern over the apparently *ambiguous* nature of the primitive reactions in question. In her discussion of the example of *cause*, she remarks:

> In the situation described, let us agree that I'm angry and look for the one who hit me. But is this a reaction to the blow, to cause of the blow, to the pain, or the anger? How can one determine which? Once such questions are raised, it becomes clear that the reaction itself is ambiguous. If, for instance, someone inarticulate or an animal were to react in similar circumstances, we would have trouble distinguishing one from another. (Wolgast2 p. 592)

Her conclusion is:

> The crucial difficulty with the account is....the ambiguity that surrounds the question *what* language game they ground. Does pulling back from a hot object give rise to the concept of cause, of fear, of caution? What would show us *which* of them originates with it? (Wolgast2 p. 597)

A more precise understanding of the significance of this ambiguity may be obtained by examining the instance in which Wolgast *is* prepared to accede to Wittgenstein. She accepts his claim that, without its characteristic expressions, the language-game with 'pain' would lose its point.[117] I also assume that, as far as the concept-founding mechanism is concerned, she would approve Wittgenstein's suggestion that the teaching of the concept is effected through the *replacement* of pain-behaviour by the use of the word.[118] By attaching the word 'pain' to natural expressions of pain, the child learns both new pain behaviour *and* the concept, for the word belongs to the language it is learning. All this is possible because of the clearly unambiguous nature of expressions of pain, so that the use of the word can, in an important sense, be identical with the reaction. To cry out and to use the word 'pain' are *the same* to the extent that they are both driven in the same measure by one's being in pain; the difference being that 'pain' also belongs to a language, so that its use may also be a move in the game. On the principle that the *ontogeny* of the child's formation of the concept repeats the *phylogeny* of the concept, we may imagine that the origin of the concept pain lay in some process by which 'pain' came

[116] Ibid. p. 591.
[117] Ibid. p. 593.
[118] PI 244; Wolgast2 p. 600.

to replace pain behaviour.—By such a process of replacement we *cannot but* have formed the concept.

By contrast, if the reaction is ambiguous it cannot be identical with any one of its possible interpretations. For if a form of words were to enter the language just by replacing the reaction, the resultant language-game would be obliged to embody all of the possible interpretations all together, as it were.[119] The alternative concepts that seem to be anticipated in the reaction could then only be separated out from one another by their being further determined in some *other* way. But of course this is to destroy the whole point of invoking primitive reactions in the first place. Hence, an ambiguous reaction cannot of itself be the foundation for, or explain, the genesis of any one of the possible language-games. If the language-game is imagined to emerge ineluctably out of a primitive reaction, then the ambiguous nature of the reaction shows that it cannot.

Wolgast concludes that the case of pain is exceptional; ambiguity amongst primitive reactions is the rule. Therefore any attempt to model a general account of concept-formation upon them will be incoherent.[120] This is a conclusion with which I can agree. What I refute is that Wittgenstein held, or that his remarks imply, any such theory of concept-formation,—or indeed any theory *at all.*

3 ~ The Ambiguity of Primitive Reactions

In order to begin to clear a path out of Wolgast's difficulties, we may begin by restating her account of the ambiguity of primitive reactions in a more perspicuous form.

One circumstance in which we might say that a piece of behaviour is ambiguous is where we recognise that, for a proper interpretation, the behaviour requires to be placed in a larger context. For example, we could easily imagine a situation where we are unclear whether a crouching cat is resting or hunting; and we could equally easily imagine what would settle this. The ambiguity arises here because, in an important sense, we just do not see enough of the action; it is solved by observing the larger course of action to which the episode we observe belongs.

It is important to note here that it is not merely a contingent fact that our interpretation requires viewing the behaviour in the larger context. Resting and hunting are concepts of a *course of action.* To this extent the concepts determine what is to *count* as seeing enough of

[119] Wolgast2 p. 592, bottom of page.
[120] Ibid. p. 599.

the action for the purpose of making such a judgement. So the problem of interpretation arises because the perspective demands *conceptually* that we see more of the behaviour than in fact we do see. In such cases, we might say that the ambiguity is not an *intrinsic* property of the phenomenon we are observing; rather, it is a feature arising out of a conflict between the context we are offered and the larger context demanded by the concepts we wish to apply.[121]

The ambiguity that Wolgast has in mind, however, is of a different kind. In her argument the reactions appear to be *intrinsically* ambiguous. This is because we appear to be able to ask whether, for example, the child's reaction is to the *pain*, the *blow*, or the *cause*, even though the larger context which would settle the issue, i.e. language-games within which the separate concepts might be expressed, does not exist. I repeat her remark:

> But is this a reaction to the blow, to cause of the blow, to the pain, or the anger? Once such questions are raised, it becomes clear that the reaction itself is ambiguous. If, for instance, someone inarticulate or an animal were to react in similar circumstances, **we would have trouble distinguishing one from the other**. (Wolgast2 p. 592) (my emphasis)

But this surely is to understate the difficulty – unless Wolgast is simply being ironic – for the lack of the larger context makes the attempt to make the distinction *meaningless*, not just troublesome. What we are dealing with here is the kind of difficulty that arises when we try to force primitive behaviour into categories for which – in the lives of such creatures – the context does not yet exist; where to describe the creature in those terms at all is already to *presuppose* an appropriate linguistic capacity. Unlike the case of the cat, it is not that we are not in a position to know whether the reaction is to the blow or to the cause; rather, making such a distinction makes no sense.

The underlying logic of Wolgast's criticism, therefore, is not merely that, in an ordinary sense, the primitive reactions are ambiguous and so admit of a variety of interpretations; it is rather that there is no question of an 'interpretation' until we provide precisely the linguistic context which they are supposed to explain; we *then* find that the same reaction might just as easily be at the root of a variety of such contexts. This logical circle shows us that primitive reactions cannot ground concepts: the genesis of such concepts cannot

[121] Wolgast does refer to one example that seems to be of this type, namely a suggestion by Cockburn that a baby has fundamentally different reactions to humans than to objects. Her concerns about the apparent ambiguity of a baby's reactions seem to me to stem from her only being willing to consider the narrowest time-slice from the baby's reactions. (Wolgast2 p. 595)

be explained merely in terms of the dressing up of primitive reactions in 'words'. On this principle, I am in agreement.

4 ~ Primitive Linguistic Reactions

A rather different matter, which should also be cleared up straight away, is what I believe to be a substantial misunderstanding by Wolgast of Wittgenstein's intentions in his notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness'. Wolgast takes it for granted that when Wittgenstein spoke of primitive reactions and the like he was always speaking of *pre-linguistic* behaviour. Leaving aside for the moment what Wittgenstein might have had in mind when he *did* speak of pre-linguistic reactions – which is a matter that I shall deal with in due course – it is highly questionable whether he intended the examples he gave in these notes to be understood in this way. Even a cursory examination should show that he was imagining reactions that, in an important sense, *already belong* to language-games.

Wittgenstein wants to distinguish the cases where we 'recognise a cause immediately' from the ones where we recognise a cause as a result of 'repeated experiments'.[122] Regarding the first of these, he describes various situations in which we 'react to a cause',—for example, when we react to a blow, or to a voice in the cinema, or to someone pulling at the other end of a string. Now to be sure, he speaks of these reactions as *instinctive*, but there is nothing to suggest that they are being thought of as anything other than belonging to an 'up and running' language-game. What he is trying to do, clearly enough I would have thought, is to clarify one particular form of the language-game in which the concept *cause* enters and to dispel some myths that surround it. Specifically, he is attacking Russell's attempt to interpret this instinctive use as a kind of *intuition*. Wittgenstein is saying that what we have in such instances is not some kind of direct insight into a causal relation, but just an instinctive reaction: in certain circumstances we unhesitatingly speak in causal language. This is a direct reaction to events which does not demand explanation in terms of an intuition, that is, in terms of some subjective state accompanying the use of the expression.

[122] C&E p. 409.

The examples he gives, therefore, are clearly intended to be elementary forms of the language-game,[123] *not* 'pre-linguistic' reactions which must lead ineluctably to a language-game of a particular logical structure. In another context, as I have indicated, Wittgenstein does indeed speak of the 'pre-linguistic' prototype of 'a way of thinking',[124] but in the present notes he explicitly speaks of the prototype of a language-game as the most elementary form in which the game is played:

> The simple form (and that is the prototype) of the cause-effect game is determining the cause, not doubting. (C&E p. 397)

There is every reason for supposing, therefore, that this is how we should take the examples he cites in these notes. Indeed in another very important remark he states:

> 'The basic form of the game can't include doubt.' What we are doing here above all is to *imagine* a basic form: a possibility, indeed a *very important* possibility. (We very often confuse what is an important possibility with historical reality.) (C&E p. 377)

This tells us that Wittgenstein conceives of what he is doing as an investigation into the *logical* structure of our language-games, *not* natural history, i.e. not an explanation of the origin of the language-game.

Let us see how this interpretation fits the following passage, and then consider Wolgast's reaction to it:

> Certainly there is in such cases a genuine experience which can be called 'experience of the cause'. But not because it infallibly shows us the cause; rather because *one* root of the cause-effect language-game is to be found here, in our looking out for a cause.
>
> *We react to the cause.*
>
> Calling something 'the cause' is like pointing and saying: '*He's* to blame!'
>
> We instinctively get rid of the cause if we don't want the effect. We instinctively look from what has been hit to what has hit it. (I am assuming that we do this.)
>
> Now suppose I were to say that when we speak of cause and effect we always have in mind a comparison with impact; that this is the prototype of cause and effect? Would this mean that we had *recognised* impact as a cause? Imagine a language in which people always said 'impact' instead of 'cause'. (C&E p. 373)

Wittgenstein is thinking of simple situations in which we react instinctively to being hit, etc., by using expressions such as 'He's to blame'. In other words he is describing an

---

[123] Wittgenstein uses the expression *basic forms.* We might equally adopt Hertzberg's description of them as *independent reactions.* Hertzberg gives a fuller account of the logical status of primitive linguistic reactions within our language-games (Hertzberg p. 30). I shall be returning to a discussion of Hertzberg's position in the next chapter.

[124] Z 541.

elementary language-game,—the kind of *prototype* language-game (in the sense described above) out of which the more complicated forms might develop. Even where he speaks of a reaction being at the 'root' of the language-game, we may interpret the reaction as a linguistic one. Using an expression like '*He's* to blame!' is a direct reaction that *itself* expresses the concept cause. We do not have to suppose that the possibility of using such a phrase with this meaning depends upon a *prior* conception of causality,—one derived from intuition or repeated experiment. Similarly in the case of 'impact'. We do not have to posit a further step: an act of recognising the impact as a 'cause' (i.e. by an act of intuition). The concept of a cause is already manifest *in* such elementary, instinctive uses of language;—they are primary expressions of it. Having the concept of cause is comprised, partly at least, in being able to employ such expressions in these ways – and other ways too, of course, such as when making repeated experiments. Wittgenstein's discussion belongs to his attack upon the idea that having concepts depends on having some kind of internal representation accessed by intuition; he is not theorising about the origin of the language-game.

This interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks seems to me to be fairly obvious, which makes Wolgast's reaction to Wittgenstein's first remark at best puzzling:

> Wittgenstein says, 'Calling something the cause is like pointing and saying: "He's to blame!"' And one wants to say, yes, but that doesn't say *what* the reaction concerns, the blow, its cause, the pain or something else. The point isn't trivial for Wittgenstein. If the cause of the blow isn't distinct from the blow or the pain, the reaction one has isn't clearly ground for the concept of 'cause,' but might be the ground for 'wondering what happened', or even 'pain'. Or nothing. (Wolgast2 p. 592)

But Wittgenstein does not refer to a *non-vocal* reaction that *grounds* the concept, he describes simple linguistic reactions as being elementary to the language-game and giving it its character.

Things also go wrong where she seems to think that Wittgenstein has lapsed momentarily into an empiricist theory of concept-formation when he remarks:[125]

> Certainly there is in such cases a genuine experience which can be called 'experience of the cause'. But not because it infallibly shows us the cause; rather because *one* root of the cause-effect language-game is to be found here, in our looking out for a cause. (C&E p. 373)

She points out, correctly, that an empiricist account of concept-formation is at odds with the whole tenor of the *Philosophical Investigations*; but again, in the present context

---

[125] Wolgast2 p. 593.

there is no reason for thinking that Wittgenstein has lapsed. In Part II of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein discusses 'continuous aspect' perception: we perceive the world under the aspect of the concepts we have.[126] The point about such experiences is that they *go together* with the playing of language-games;—they do not precede them. Hence it belongs to the playing of the language-games deploying causal concepts that we perceive 'causes' – and especially so where our most direct linguistic reactions to reality are concerned (i.e. where they are most closely linked to overt behaviour). If we treat Wittgenstein as speaking about basic forms of language-games rather than pre-linguistic reactions, then it is entirely consistent that he should also speak of the experiences that accompany them without our needing to suppose that he is making an empiricist assumption.

The principal message of Wittgenstein's notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness' is that one point of articulation of the language-game of causality – and hence of the *concept* of causality – is a spontaneous or independent reaction occurring in the context of our daily routines, which does not have to be explained at a more fundamental level by a further intellectual process of intuition. These behaviours neither give rise *to* nor are made intelligible *by* the concepts but belong to the circumstances in which the language-game has the sense that it does have. Their primitiveness therefore speaks of the *structure* of the language-game, not its origins.

One of the achievements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy lies in its breaking down the picture of the relation of language and thought to reality as 'a view from the boundary'. Rather, language has sense, and thought is *of* the world, in the multifarious ways that words move *in concert* with human activity and social intercourse. Language is of 'the midst'. Talk of primitive reactions, by drawing attention to the integrity of certain linguistic reactions and forms of activity within the language-games, belongs to saying just this.

Wolgast's use of these notes to try to show Wittgenstein as struggling to give an account of concept-formation in terms of *pre*-linguistic behaviour is therefore misguided. Wittgenstein does speak elsewhere of *pre*-linguistic prototypes of language-games – as I have noted previously. So if we are to comment on what he might have had in mind in these other contexts, we must divorce any such treatment from the way he speaks in the notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness'.[127]

---

[126] See especially PI p. 194; and for a full discussion see S. Mulhall, *On Being in the World*, (London: Routledge, 1993).
[127] Though of course, not only in these notes.

Wittgenstein did occasionally speak of language-games as 'extensions' of *pre/non*-linguistic primitive behaviour. The following remarks are perhaps the most emphatic:

> But what is the word 'primitive' meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought. (Z 541)

> Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour.) (Instinct) (Z 545)

These and other similar remarks may superficially be construed in ways that are consistent with Wolgast's interpretation. Certainly the remarks appear to say something different from what he says in the notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', and at the very least he *appears* to allow primitive behaviour a rôle in concept-formation that does not show up in those notes.[128] However it seems to me that one can give plausible, intelligible and illuminating treatments of the notion of *pre*-linguistic behaviour, and of the idea of language-games as *extensions* of primitive behaviour – in certain cases at least, which still need not draw us into unwarranted *a priori* speculation about the origins of our concepts or into foundationalism. Indeed, in a remark from the *Philosophical Investigations* (which I think has been overlooked in this debate), Wittgenstein both expresses the idea of language-games as extensions of non-linguistic behaviour and explicitly rejects a foundationalist interpretation of the relation:

> For think of the sensations produced by physically shuddering: the words "it makes me shiver" are themselves such a shuddering reaction; and if I hear and feel them as I utter them, this belongs among the rest of those sensations. Now why should the wordless shudder be the ground of the verbal one? (PI p. 174)

---

[128] The second remark does appear to speak inconsistently in as much as 'being sure that someone is in pain' and 'doubting whether he is' do not obviously qualify as *pre*-linguistic behaviour, so that when he speaks of the language-game as an *extension* of primitive behaviour, a more consistent sense would have emerged if he had said that the *rest* of the language-game is an extension of primitive *linguistic* behaviour. On the other hand, one may still wish to retain the continuity with the first remark and explain away the inconsistency as merely an unfortunate choice of example. Rhees favours the former interpretation; however in the course of his argument he does not quote 'our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation', which is precisely that part of Wittgenstein's remark that favours the alternative interpretation. Rhees does not comment at all on Wittgenstein's use of the term '*pre-linguistic*' – the significance of which I shall discuss later in this chapter. I am less nervous than Rhees in adopting Wittgenstein's terminology and with speaking of language an *extension* of primitive behaviour, because I do not think that these ways of speaking necessarily imply a theory of concept formation. (Rhees4)

Clarifying the sense in which some language-games can be described as extensions of primitive, pre-linguistic behaviour is important to commanding a clear view of them. No doubt one has to be careful to express the point in a way that avoids foundationalism, but it remains important that this way of looking at the matter be preserved.

Central to this issue is achieving a proper conception of the relation between our use of words and the rest of our lives. Happily, this takes us straight to the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wittgenstein defines a language-game as 'language and the actions into which it is woven'.[129] Part of what he is trying to do with this notion of a language-game is to wean us off the idea of language as an autonomous activity whose essentials lie apart from the way that it is woven into our everyday lives and into our actions. Such apartness is visible, for example, in mentalistic accounts of concepts such as *meaning*. On the contrary, it is in the way in which language goes together with our active lives (and taking into account the points made in the previous chapter on the nature of speaking) that our intelligent engagement with our environment is constituted and which identifies us as thinking, speaking, conceiving things. It is the engagement taken as a whole that shows what it is to speak and to have concepts.—This is our starting point.

There is a variety of contexts in philosophy in which we speak of the dependence of language on behaviour. We may have in mind the way that the use of language depends upon constancy and agreement amongst our verbal and perceptual responses and reactions. These form what have been called the 'framework conditions' which make language use possible. Or, we may be thinking of the way in which certain activities form the *context* for a language-game, and so belong to the provision of its sense. However the kind of relation that I have presently in mind is where the use of language is bound up rather more intimately with the natures of the activities themselves. This obtains most obviously where the language-games, in the way in which they become part of our lives, are *constitutive* of ourselves as persons.—I am thinking here, for example, of hoping, intending, believing, knowing, etc. This could be expressed by saying that the *concepts* of hoping, intending, etc., are concepts of *aspects* of our form of life[130] into which language use is woven in a characteristic way. Moreover, true accounts of these aspects – and hence of the concepts – will be accounts of both language use *and* non-linguistic features (actions),—and of the relations between the two. With these thoughts in mind I shall

[129] PI 7.

[130] The use of the phrase *form of life* is problematic in Wittgenstein since it is not closely defined – see Chapter 3 for a definition. To recap, I use the phrase to refer either to the form of life as a whole or to an *aspect* of that form of life – an aspect which will comprise behaviour (or a dimension of behaviour) *and* language.

refer to hoping, intending, etc., as *phenomena*, in order to emphasise that they are *gross* features of human life and not aspects of our lives whose reality resides only in the verbal arena.

Consider the example of *greeting*. Verbal expressions of greeting are embedded in the patterns of interaction between people. These patterns of behaviour are not merely the staging for what is otherwise a purely *linguistic* exchange. To say that two people are greeting one another adds up to more than can be explained simply in terms of the use of a form of words in a given context and their further *linguistic* consequences. For if, when people encountered one another, the verbal exchanges were not a part of patterns of behaviour expressing acknowledgement of one sort or another, I do not think we would be inclined to call this greeting in the sense in which we normally mean it. So the concept is of a form of life comprising linguistic expressions *and* – independently, as it were – other patterns of behaviour. This is the *phenomenon* of greeting. Hence, that what I say is a *greeting* is partly a function of how it hangs together with larger features of the ways in which we are disposed towards one another.—Language use *and* a certain way of life are *internal* to our concept of greeting.

Now it is true that, on the one hand, language is the *medium* within which concepts are articulated. But my main concern here is to draw special attention to the rôle that the use of language has as a *component* of these phenomena of human life. This distinction is crucial to what I have to say. Put rather more formally we may distinguish between:

1) The use of language to express or articulate the concepts of hoping, greeting, intending, etc. Here the criterion for *possessing* the concept would lie, for example, in the ability to *apply* the concepts in judgements, or to talk about the phenomena during conversation; and,

2) The use of language as a component in the *expression* of hope, greeting, intending, etc. Here the use of language belongs to the way in which the phenomenon is *manifested*. To emphasise this contrast, we may note that where language does enter into the manifestation of the phenomenon it may not actually involve the direct articulation of the concept of the phenomenon at all. For example, we could easily imagine utterances expressing hope in which the *concept* of hope is not articulated; for instance, someone is sitting impatiently waiting for a train to leave saying 'come on! come on!'. He certainly hopes that the train will leave very soon, and this shows in what he says.

This relates to the distinction, developed in Chapter 2, between the expression of a concept *within* a language-game and the concept *of* the language-game. We are now

enlarging our perspective on the latter, and moving from the concept of the language-game to the concept of the phenomenon *within which* the language-game is a component.

Similar considerations apply, I believe, to the other phenomena (or aspects of our form of life) listed above. In the following section we shall examine in more depth another example of a language-game in which this distinction may apply: *intention.* My reason for this choice is that the phenomenon of intention has a significant, indeed an *essentially*, pre-linguistic dimension. It is also interesting because it is 'ambiguous' in Wolgast's sense; for whilst being pervasive of human activity, intention not uniquely expressed by any one reaction. It is therefore a genuine instance of a primitive feature of human life of the kind that one *might* suppose could generate a concept in the way that Wolgast finds objectionable. For just this reason it is also well suited to elucidating Wittgenstein's notion of language-games as *extensions* of primitive behaviour, whilst observing this to be neither theory laden nor attracting the problem of ambiguity.

6 ~ The Language-game of Expressing Intention as an Extension of Primitive Behaviour

Intentionality is a phenomenon of human life. It belongs amongst our concepts of a *course of action*; it is part of our concept of an *agent.* For these reasons it is rooted in an elementary way in our concept of action, and so it relates to our lives in a rather more fundamental way than do concepts relating specifically to ourselves as speakers. At the same time it is linked to speaking because of the way that speaking is related to action through the formulation and expression of intentions. So we might say that, for a speaker, intentionality is comprised both through there *being* courses of action *and* in the way that such courses of action may be expressed in language.

It is important to keep these two aspects apart and not to subordinate the notion of a course of action to the relation between expressions of intention and actions in accordance with those expressions. One mode of intentionality is where a course of action is initiated by pre-meditation. Here one is certainly tempted to say that the action's being intentional lies in its being in accord with the expressed intention; that its being an intended act consists in its standing in an internal relation to the linguistic expression. But pre-meditation cannot be sufficient to an account of intentionality in general, since it takes for granted the notion of a course of action. Moreover, the fact that the notion of a course of action has a dimension that is intelligible *independently* of the relation between actions and verbal expressions of intention is manifest in the observation that the

concept of intentionality clearly applies more widely than to premeditated actions. We may even speak of *natural* expressions of intention in dumb animals. As Wittgenstein remarks:

> What is the natural expression of intention?—Look at a cat when it stalks a bird; or a beast when it wants to escape. (PI 647)

So the notion of *being on a course of action*, and therefore of intentionality, cannot be reduced to the relations between actions and verbal expressions of intention. Moreover, if there is an order of priority, then it is surely the other way around: natural or 'primitive' intentionality is in an important sense a *pre-requisite* for the language-game of expressing intentions. This belongs with what I meant by saying that pre-meditation takes for granted the notion of a course of action. I shall try to explain this in more detail.

The notion of a course of action is quite fundamental to our concept of a person;—more fundamental, it may be argued, than that of *speaking* and therefore of the verbal expression of intention. The reason for this ought to be obvious: speaking *presupposes* acting, whilst acting does not presuppose speaking (although undoubtedly certain kinds of action do). In the first place, speaking itself is behaviour and the use of words is intentional, so that anything done *in* language presupposes acting. Secondly, language is a form of behaviour whose nature lies in the way it is woven into other such forms: what makes anything *language* is at least partly a function of its relations to other forms of coherent behaviour (i.e. courses of action). The possibility of speaking depends upon a coherent life. Intentionality belongs to this coherence; and the life of a child that is learning to speak is pervaded by intentional acts. The child learns to speak and it learns to formulate intentions, but it would be nonsense to say that acting intentionally *as such* is learned.[131] For if the child can be said to be learning anything at all, then it is *already* engaged in intentional acts (in the primitive sense).

So, intention *qua* being on a course of action is more elementary to the concept of intention, i.e. to the phenomenon of intentionality, than is the expression of intention in words.—An individual can only express intentions if he can *already act*. The concept of expressing intention in words presupposes and *contains* the concept of intention in the primitive sense. We might also express this by saying that, in its primitive form, intention is *pre*-linguistic: it is a *pre-requisite* for being able to participate in language generally and in the language-game of expressing intentions in particular.

---

[131] I do not think that in a new-born child the progression from incoherent movement to increasingly coherent behaviour could be described as *learning* in the sense in which language is learned.

In this respect intention differs from greeting. Here too we may conceive of a primitive/animal form of greeting without speech – there are plenty examples on the animal world that we might wish to call greeting. However – and this is the important point – there would be *no* conceptual difficulty in imagining there being no characteristic primitive behaviour expressing greeting *prior* to the formation of the language-game. By contrast, what is interesting about intention – just because it is so fundamental to human life – is that the verbal expression of intention is inconceivable except in so far as it is embedded in a life pervaded by intentionality in the more primitive sense. It is in these contexts that it is philosophically illuminating to speak of the use of language as an *extension* of primitive behaviour; for it is a grammatical remark on the concept of the human form of life.

Consider how the language-game of expressing intentions might be 'grafted onto' the life of an infant. For example, we might imagine a child getting up to leave the room and being asked what he is doing. He answers, 'I am going outside'. Perhaps the adult will encourage him to say this by *asking* him if he is going outside. Or, we might imagine a child being taught to express intentions retrospectively. For example, he might be asked whether or not he *meant* to act in the way he did; or he may be encouraged to *say* what he intended to do. Alternatively we might imagine situations where a child is being taught to formulate intentions: an adult asks 'what are you doing today?', and so on. Obviously these are gross caricatures of the process of learning; the important point, however, is that we can imagine the child engaging in various forms of behaviour and the adult encouraging him to respond with appropriate verbal expressions of intention. The child is either being encouraged to say things expressing the intent of contemporaneous courses of action, or he is being prodded into using language to initiate a course of action.

Now, it is important to note that, in imagining this grafting of language onto the life of the child, we do not have to imagine that a *reaction* – i.e. a primitive expression of intention – is being *replaced* by a verbal expression. Rather, in the right context, the expressions are woven into the fabric of the life of the child, either by encouragement or on the child's own initiative. Neither does the *criterion* of the child's having learned to use the expressions correctly lie in him being seen to have successfully 'replaced' anything.— It lies in his being able to go on to use the expression appropriately in future contexts, both in connection with his own actions and in the way that the expressions are used in connection with other things that he says.

Similarly, when the child is learning to use the expression, there is of course no guarantee that he will take it in the way intended by the adult. This may be explained partly by the vagaries of the process of learning generally, but also by the 'ambiguity' (in the sense explained earlier) of the life of the pre-linguistic child. In these same circumstances the child might be learning to express wants or hopes or any number of other uses of language. But this does not mean that it is wrong to speak of the expressions as being 'grafted' onto the natural behaviour/reactions. Again, we do not have to interpret this in a literal-minded way as substituting a verbal expression for a specific reaction. If the child takes the expression 'wrongly' then the adult carries on until the child starts to use it correctly. Certainly the child is learning *new* reactions which cannot be reduced to pre-linguistic ones; but the important point is that these new reactions derive much of their character (their rôle) from their relations to pre-existing ones. This is what it *means* to say that the language-game is grafted onto the reactions of the infant. They bring the child into new relations to his own actions; they bring the child into new relations to himself as an agent. The adult is there to 'guide' this new dimension of expression into a life that already exists; and the new expressions take their place amongst the pre-linguistic modes of behaviour.

All this adds up to *one* sense in which we may say that the language-game of expressing intention is an *extension* to the life of the pre-linguistic child, or that the pre-linguistic behaviour of the child forms the '*base*' for, or is '*at the bottom of*', the language-game – to use Wittgenstein's phrases. It adds a further dimension of intentionality to its life: it introduces new modes of intending. This conception of language as extending primitive behaviour conforms to what seems to me to be the most natural interpretation of Wittgenstein's own remark from *Zettel*, which I repeat:

> Being sure that someone is in pain, doubting whether he is, and so on, are so many natural, instinctive kinds of behaviour towards other human beings, and our language is merely an auxiliary to, and further extension of, this relation. Our language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour.) (Instinct) (Z 545)

I draw attention to the way that Wittgenstein speaks of the language-game as an extension of our *relations* to other people, emphasising that the language-game is *itself* behaviour. This shows that he is not thinking of a mechanism of concept-formation, but of how the rôle of the language-game in our lives comes from the way it is seated amongst 'natural' forms of behaviour – forms which, at the very least, we are not *obliged*

to conceive of as being 'the result of thought',[132] or which, in cases like intention, *cannot* be so conceived.

7 ~ Rhees on Behaviour as the 'Prototype of a Way of Thinking'

I have mentioned Rhees' misgivings about some of Wittgenstein's remarks on these topics. These I shall now examine in more detail. The doubts are expressed in two letters to Norman Malcolm in response to Malcolm's essay 'Wittgenstein: The relation of language to instinctive behaviour', in which Malcolm expresses enthusiasm for the interpretation of Wittgenstein as wishing to explain the genesis of concepts directly out of primitive behaviour.[133]

Rhees is as keen as I have been to deny that Wittgenstein was promulgating such a theory. Indeed he expounds his own version of Wolgast's argument against the theory on the grounds of the *ambiguity* of primitive reactions,[134] though this time the argument is identified as originating from *within* Wittgenstein's own writings – one more reason for thinking that Wittgenstein did not adopt the theory himself. Most of the first letter[135] is devoted to examining the rôle of primitive reactions – linguistic or otherwise – *within* language-games. He argues persuasively that when Wittgenstein spoke of primitive reactions he generally had in mind the kind of primitive linguistic reactions described in the notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness',—this being in accord with my own interpretation of these notes. However, Rhees is less keen on the notion of language-games as extensions of primitive behaviour, or on talk of 'pre-linguistic' behaviour; so much so, in fact, that he does not mention at all Wittgenstein's use of the latter phrase in his discussion of *Zettel* 541. This is surprising given that this is the phrase that is most strongly suggestive of a theory of concept-formation from roots outside language, and so *ought* to call for special comment. My feeling is that Rhees is intent on steering away from these ways of speaking because he can only see in them the tendency towards a 'theory'. Let us trace the course of his argument.

Rhees is clearly uneasy about *Zettel* 541 as a whole. He begins by warning against speaking of behaviour as a 'prototype of a way of thinking' ('a way of thinking' is not

---

[132] Z 541.

[133] Norman Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein: The relation of language to instinctive behaviour', *Philosophical Investigations*, 5:1, January 1982, pp. 3-22. (Malcolm1)

[134] Rhees4 p. 7.

[135] I shall concentrate here on the first of these letters which is most directly concerned with the topics in this chapter. The topics dealt with in the second letter will be treated in Chapter 7.

equivalent here to a *concept* – as will emerge). He argues that a form of behaviour is only a prototype of a way of thinking when seen as *already* having a place within the language-game; hence it would not be a prototype in an animal since there is no further issue.[136] I think he has in mind here that in the animal the equivalent behaviour is not 'a way of thinking' of a prototypical kind, whereas in a person it *belongs with* our ways of thinking. Thus, what would be regarded as 'mere behaviour' in an animal is treated as *a component of* the articulate expression of thought in a person. Rhees expresses this by speaking of such behaviour as 'something akin to a gesture', to emphasise its belonging to the field of *meaning*.[137]

What Rhees is trying to do here, or so it appears to me, is to treat the primitive gestural behaviour – for which we may find analogues in the instinctive responses of animals – as having similar status to the prototype *language-games*, i.e. as instinctive reactions giving character to the language-games. But I think the comparison can only be taken so far. I agree that such behaviour is not the same thing in the life of a person as its equivalent is in the life of an animal, just because it *does* stand in a relation to the use of language in the person in a way that it does not in the animal. That makes it more like language,—more akin to a gesture. But there remains an important difference between prototype language-games and such behaviour even within the language-game just because the prototype language-games *can* stand on their own (or can be conceived of as standing on their own) as primitive forms of language.—That is why it makes sense to call them *prototypes*. But this will not work with primitive behaviour of no intrinsic linguistic content. *Outside* the context of language, the behaviour is not articulate and is not a 'gesture'; *inside* language its being a 'gesture' *depends* on its relations to ways of speaking and so cannot be conceived of as a prototype for them. The behaviour may be 'primitive' to the language-game – but that is different. From this perspective, then, it is not obvious why we should want to call primitive behaviour of this type a prototype of a way of thinking at all. So let us try another tack.

Rhees' interpretation of 'the prototype of a way of thinking' conflicts with other phrases in *Zettel* 541 and with his own treatment of them. Firstly, *that* Wittgenstein has in mind something coming *before* language shows in the fact that 'a prototype of a way of thinking' is clearly intended to be understood in the light of the remark 'that this sort of

[136] Rhees4 p. 2.
[137] Ibid. p. 2.

behaviour is *pre-linguistic*. Matters get more confused in Rhees' conclusion. Criticising Wittgenstein's use of another phrase in *Zettel* 541, he says:

> ...and we should not say "daß ein Sprachspiel *auf* ihr beruht" ("that a language-game is based *on* it"): you wouldn't know what was meant by that. (Rhees4 p. 2)

Here he *does* seem bothered that the phrase is suggestive of a theory of concept-formation, and yet it is surely intended by Wittgenstein to be understood in the same way as 'a prototype of a way of thinking'. My feeling is that Rhees is over anxious to make Wittgenstein's talk of 'prototypes' in this remark consistent with the way he uses it elsewhere to refer to primitive *linguistic* reactions (primitive *to* language-games). This goes with the fact that he insists that Wittgenstein's use of the phrase, '[o]ur language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour' must refer to an extension of an existing language-game, in spite of the fact the Wittgenstein has just spoken of this behaviour as *pre-linguistic*.[138] But he cannot cover up the loose ends. I think we can make more consistent sense of *Zettel* 541 along the lines I have been developing earlier in this chapter. Let me begin with a fresh example.

I think one can safely assert that *running* is, as a matter of fact, a natural, primitive behaviour for humans. We might then suppose a wide variety of sports or games to be *based on* this behaviour. I am not treating the primitive reaction here as itself a game, but it is an activity *around which* games may be formed, so we may say that they are 'based on it' in that sense. This would not be to presume that the game of football, for example, was *generated* out of the primitive reaction; it does not mean that that instinctive behaviour *must* lead to a certain game – any number of different games might grow up around it in a spontaneous and unpredictable way. Furthermore, we even might say – and again without suggesting any kind of inevitability – that the primitive reaction partly *determines* the character of the game,—in the sense in which it does *not* determine anything in the game of chess, for example. In other words, running *lends itself* to the formation of some games and not others but does not of itself take any responsibility for generating any of them; no game could be predicted just from the primitive behaviour. This seems to me to be a perfectly natural sense in which we might speak of a game being *based on* primitive behaviour.

Now in this particular example we would probably not wish to speak of the primitive reaction as the *prototype* for the game, since running about is not in itself a game. If one thing is a prototype for another then it ought at least be something of the same or similar

[138] Ibid. pp. 2-3.

kind – of which games and merely running about clearly are not. If, on the other hand, the primitive behaviour did show elements of being 'game-like', then we might be more inclined to speak of it as a prototype. For example, if it were a natural instinct for young children to kick things about between themselves (comparable with a dog's instinct to retrieve, or the game-like behaviour that young animals often show), then we would be more inclined to call this behaviour the prototype of the game of football (here we might also say that the game is *based on* the reaction in a rather more substantial sense). What we are looking for in a prototype, then, is primitive behaviour that merits description, to at least *some* degree, in terms characteristic of games proper.

Turning our thoughts again to language, we might say that this is precisely the point in the argument that creates the most difficulty: the gulf in *kind* between primitive behaviour and language is just too great. But in fact this depends very much on the *dimension* in which we are looking for the connection. We certainly cannot bridge it by looking for an analogue in primitive behaviour to the articulation of *concepts*.—So much is agreed. But as I have argued earlier in this chapter, language and primitive behaviour show connections in kind in quite another dimension, namely in the *rôle* that they have in our lives. And I would suggest that it is this that Wittgenstein has in mind when speaking of a 'prototype of a *way* of thinking'.—He does not speak of primitive behaviour as the prototype articulation of a *concept*.

This interpretation is suggested, though not developed, by Winch in his own comments on Malcolm's essay:

> If we look at the crying, etc. of a small child as the prototype of the adult's use of pain language, we are seeing it – the crying – from the vantage point of our mastery of pain language.[139]

Elsewhere, he makes the same point more explicitly with reference to PI 244 – again responding to Malcolm:

> Words are said to be substituted for the original, natural expression of *sensation.* The reaction is a reaction to *being hurt.* What the child is taught is new *pain-behaviour*; i.e. this replaces an earlier form of *pain behaviour.*[140]

---

[139] Peter Winch, 'Norman Malcolm, *Wittgensteinian Themes Essays 1978-1989*', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:1, January 1997, p. 61.

[140] Peter Winch, 'Discussion of Malcolm's Essay', in: Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. P. Winch, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 123. (Winch)

And then with reference to Wittgenstein's notes 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness':

> And here too the primitive reactions with which Wittgenstein compares our language-game are themselves described in terms taken from that language-game; they are seen from the point of view of that language-game. They are 'reactions *towards a cause*'.[141]

Rhees himself makes a remark that is suggestive of this. Commenting on Wittgenstein's use of the phrase 'a way of thinking', he cites as a possible example someone saying 'I can't help thinking about the man we saw on the street. I wonder if they were able to help him'.[142] The example illustrates that 'a way of thinking' is not just 'concepts put together in a certain order', as it were, but has to do with the way in which what we say is a *response* to the events around us. In what he says, the man shows how he is preoccupied about an event, and it is the *preoccupation* that characterises the *way* of thinking. Now this, and here I may depart from Rhees, bears comparison with an adult animal's preoccupation with its injured offspring, for example. To say that the behaviour of the animal is the prototype of 'a way of thinking' (in *us*, of course, not in the animal) would have sense not because the behaviour is the prototype for *saying these words* – it is not a prototype for *language* – but because of the way that *both* are expressions of certain kind of preoccupation. The way in which the animal responds on a purely behavioural level is (or could be) the prototype for the *kind* of response that *we* express in language. And of course the two expressions of preoccupation are not merely analogous: what makes what the man *says* an expression of preoccupation is determined in large part by the way that the use of words belongs with the kind of behaviour shared with the animal.—It is an *extension* of primitive preoccupation. We might express the point grammatically by saying that it belongs to the grammar of 'preoccupation' that it may be expressed either in natural forms of behaviour or in language.

We may apply these thoughts again to my principal example: *intention.* For we may say that the use of language to express intentions is 'a way of thinking'. Primitive intentionality and primitive expressions of intention have lent themselves to the formation of the language-game of expressing intentions: it is based on them; it has grown up around them. We might also say that primitive intentionality partly *determines* the character of the language-game, just because if the language-game were not woven into primitive intentionality it would just not be the language-game of expressing *intentions.*—The concept of intention constrains what would *count* as a language-game of

---

[141] Ibid. p. 123.
[142] Rhees4 p. 2.

expressing intentions. And so we may speak of 'natural' expressions of intention as the prototypes for verbal expressions, not because they are verbal expressions 'in the making' but because they are part of the phenomenon around which the language-game of expressing intentions has grown up and within which the language-game has its rôle. The natural and verbal expressions are both expressions of intention,—and in that sense are things of the same kind. It belongs to the grammar of 'intention' that it may have both natural and linguistic expressions, of which the former are more elementary.

8 ~ Returning to Wolgast

Rhees is worried about certain ways of speaking about language because he sees in them, and often rightly so, a tendency towards theorising on how language and concepts generated themselves out of pre-linguistic behaviour. The fact he sees no other possibilities in these ways of speaking may stem from an inclination to speak only from a perspective ***within*** the language-games. This allows him to illustrate how such behaviour has a fundamental but non-generative rôle to play in the game, but without him having to make the observation that the language-games may also be regarded as forming part of the larger phenomena of human life. As a result, these larger connections between linguistic and primitive dimensions of our forms of life go unrecognised. Wolgast's failure to acknowledge these same connections is rooted in a similarly too narrow focus on what language does for us.

The immediate cause of the shortcoming in her account – which I have already hinted at – lies, I suspect, in her confusion of the different conceptions of the 'use' of language referred to earlier, i.e. 1) to articulate concepts, and 2) as *part of* the phenomena of hoping intending, etc. Because she does not recognise this second conception, she takes it for granted that whatever is at stake when we inquire into the relation of *language-games* to pre-linguistic behaviour always amounts to the same issue of how our *concepts* are rooted in pre-linguistic behaviour, i.e. concept-formation. Hence she allows herself no room for manoeuvre to entertain the kind of alternative I have been expounding. The ease with which she makes the transition from language-game to concept, and then to concept-formation, is clearly visible. For example, commenting on *Zettel* 541:

> But what is the word "primitive" meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based ***on it***, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought.

She says:

> 'Language is a refinement' and not the original form of expression, which is action (C&E p. 395). **Thus the concepts of language begin in 'behaviour that is pre-linguistic'** (*Zettel* 541) and in situations where doubt and verification are not applicable. (Wolgast2 p. 600) (my emphasis)

Similarly:

> *Acting* with certainty is **the original of the concept of certainty, the language game of certainty** (Wolgast2 p. 599).... The crucial difficulty with the account is....the ambiguity that surrounds the question *what* language game they ground. Does pulling back from a hot object **give rise to the concept of cause, of fear, of caution? What would show us *which* of them originates with it?** (Wolgast2 p. 597) (my emphases)

And:

> ...I want to explore the way he proposed that primitive reactions could account for concepts....(Wolgast2. p. 588)

Wolgast seems to start from the idea that it is the *concepts* – or their possession – that are imagined to be extensions of primitive behaviour. This leads naturally to the picture of primitive behaviour as if it were in some sense already the *expression* of an idea, where the 'original of the concept' is already embedded or represented in some way in the primitive behaviour. The invitation to a theory of concept-formation is now irresistible, for if we then imagine attaching words to these primitive expressions, or *replacing* the primitive expression with words, this *cannot but* lead to the *concept* being represented in words.

Wolgast argued correctly that this model cannot work, if only because the behaviour or reaction cannot be uniquely related to any one concept and so cannot take responsibility for generating it. But what she has destroyed is a myth of the genesis of language that is of her own creation, not Wittgenstein's. And as far as the actual origin of language is concerned (either of linguistic *behaviour* or the concepts embedded in it), there is nothing in my account that is alien to Wittgenstein's own remark on these origins,—a remark quoted approvingly by Wolgast but from which she wrongly thinks him departing:

> You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).
> It is there – like our life. (OC 559)

The source of Wolgast's assumption – that what is at issue is the relation between *concepts* and behaviour – may be traced to her own view of language. My criticism of Wolgast has been founded principally upon grammatical observations on the relations between language and action, both in respect of Wittgenstein's definition of a language-

game as 'language and the actions into which it is woven' and in respect of the notion that certain phenomena of human life, such as *intention*, comprise both language *and* non-linguistic behavioural components. Language is a *component* of these phenomena. It is significant that these considerations play virtually no part in Wolgast's discussion. The reason for this appears to be that, although she does acknowledge at one point 'the change that language makes in their lives',[143] she seems inclined to view language rather as an independent addition to our repertoire of behaviours;—*independent* in the sense that its character does not come especially from the way that it is woven into the rest of our lives: we have non-vocal behaviour, and then, in parallel to that, we have vocal behaviour.

This conception is evident in her account of language as something developing out of spontaneous vocalisations:

> The reactions I mean are the spontaneous vocalisings of humans – the babbling sounds infants make long before learning to utter words. Such vocal noise-making truly *is* one source of language, and together with the ability to mimic sounds, it is a crucial requirement of mastering a language. (Wolgast2 p. 597-8)

> The instinct to vocalise shows language itself as a kind of doing, a noise-making that later connects with making stylised designs on paper. Seen in this way, we have no purchase on the thought that language is separate from activity: it *is* activity, even a whole family of activities – greeting, expressing feelings, reporting, telling stories, joking, many more. (Wolgast2 p. 601)

> Speech belongs to humans in the way that mimicking sounds belongs to parrots, it grows spontaneously out of the creatures we are; and that is all one need say of language's basis and explanation. One does not need to ground particular concepts in particular kinds of reactions. (Wolgast2 p. 601)

So using language is an activity – one amongst a variety of activities. It is the activity of producing vocalisations. It is vocal *as distinct from* non-vocal behaviour. Vocal behaviour has a character of its own – as do the babbling of the child, or making 'stylised designs on paper', or the mimicry of parrots. It is *within* this activity that we have all that we need to 'explain' language. In other words what we seem to have is a new version of the view of language that Wittgenstein was trying to get away from, namely the view of language as a kind of autonomous activity whose nature can be grasped without bothering to look at how the sense of what we say has to do with the way that language is woven into our actions;—that what we *say* is a *constituent* of our actions.

As I have noted, Wolgast does indeed speak of 'the change that language makes in their lives',—which does suggest a connection with other activities. But the lack of emphasis that this is given leads one to suppose that such connections are to be conceived of only

---

[143] Wolgast2 p. 601.

as a *consequence* of using language (the changes that *follow from* our grasp of concepts), not something to which reference must be made if we are to understand what it is to use language at all. Against this I would argue, as I believe Wittgenstein would, that 'vocalising' is only *language* in the way it *is* woven into other activities. Thus it is legitimate to inquire about these connections; and it is as part of *this* inquiry that the notion of language as an extension of primitive, non-linguistic modes of behaviour has its place.

Weighed down with her conception of language, it is not difficult to see how it leads Wolgast to the interpretation of Wittgenstein as holding that *concepts* are extensions of primitive behaviour. For Wolgast a sufficient account of language is an account of how concepts are embedded in it, of how we articulate concepts in it;—language only as the servant of the intellect, one might say. This makes it difficult to see how language is a part of the *phenomena* of intending, hoping, believing, knowing, greeting, etc. Hence any account of the use of language in terms of its relations to, or dependence on, pre-linguistic behaviour will almost inevitably be construed as an attempt to explain the origin of its *concepts* in primitive behaviour.[144]

Wolgast cites as an example of Wittgenstein's leaning towards 'foundationalism', the following: 'I want to say: it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in steady ways of living, regular ways of acting'.[145] But in the case of remarks such as these, we should surely begin not by assuming that Wittgenstein is engaged in a transcendental speculation – i.e. from some supposed vantage point outside normal discourse – but by assuming that this is a grammatical remark, and then asking oneself *how* it is a grammatical remark. In this case, the remark is saying that the concept of language is the concept of something in the life of a creature whose life is made up of regular ways of acting which do not themselves depend on linguistic activity.—It is a remark connecting the grammar of 'language' with the grammar of 'acting'. We should not be stopped in this interpretation just because his statement has the outward form of a factual speculation, since it is a commonplace for grammatical remarks to take on the clothing of empirical propositions.[146] Indeed, Wittgenstein himself takes pains to remind us of just this point. For example, in *Zettel* (as quoted earlier), after a series of remarks which outwardly are descriptions of how a child might learn to doubt, he remarks:

---

[144] Wolgast may well be right that the spontaneous babbling of infants is as a matter of fact 'one source of language'.—Certainly this is how an adult treats them. This is not a point of contention.
[145] C&E p. 397.
[146] This was discussed in Chapter 2. It is just natural to articulate grammatical relations in factual language. This is harmless as long as it is recognised.

> Am I doing child psychology?—I am making a connexion between the concept of teaching and the concept of meaning. (Z 412)

I began the chapter by referring to the conflict Wolgast felt between the *Philosophical Investigations* and the remarks on primitive reactions scattered elsewhere. I have argued that the schism is not real but is the product of a limited conception of the framework within which the philosopher studies language,—one that fails to recognise that the rôle of language in our lives is itself something of which we have a conception, and hence is a legitimate object for grammatical investigation in its own right.

9 ~ 'Having Something to Say' – Again

Returning to Gaita's 'having something say' is 'living a life and speaking out of it', it will be part of an understanding of this to see how coming to have things to say may also be regarded as an extension of our life from its pre-linguistic form;—how the growth of a person's having things to say is a constitutive extension of the *self*. For this to be a substantial claim, grammatical connections will have to be shown between the notion of having something to say and what is manifest in the life of a pre-linguistic child. There will have to be an analogue to 'having something to say' in the life of the pre-linguistic child, just as there are natural expressions of intention to complement the expression of intention in language.

We may note first of all that what we are looking for here is not so much prototype *utterance*, but the prototype of 'having something to say'. These are different. For we saw in the previous chapter that 'having something to say' is not to be understood merely as exercising one's command over the techniques for using words; rather it is seen in the way that speaking is an essential manifestation of person-hood.—Otherwise it is not 'living a life and speaking out of it'.

We need to recognise how the child's understanding of what is going about him (and within him) shows in the way that he engages with and *addresses* the people around him. Part of our understanding of what it is to 'have something to say' will be through the ways in which the child's primitive understanding of its environment – the coherence in its life – emerges in how it addresses itself to other people. I do not think it is difficult to imagine the circumstances in which we might say of a pre-linguistic child – or of a dog, even – that he is 'trying to tell us something'. This is the prototype for 'having something

to say'; and of course these are the very kinds circumstances in which we will be expecting the child's first use of words to emerge.

For another slant on this we can return again to the example of *belief*. In this chapter I have explained how the use of language can be regarded as part of the *phenomenon* of belief. It will be remembered that I also used this example in the previous chapter to illustrate how the possession of a concept may not lie solely in the ability to *apply* it, since the ability to *express* beliefs in language is itself integral to having the concept of it. Taking these together we may say that the *phenomenon* of belief – belief *itself* – enters into the possession of the concept of it. This means that the growth of the person's grasp of the *concept* of belief may be regarded as an aspect of the way that the self is extended in the development of speech. Here, the formation of the concept can be seen to be more closely entwined with the notion of 'language as an extension of primitive behaviour' – thought still not in any foundationalist sense – than the more general case where our understanding of a concept lies rather more squarely upon what we grasp when we grasp its *application*.

We are a long way now from the simplistic conception of the relation between language and instinctive behaviour modelled just on the blindness of the application of a rule. But in saying that we must look at the having of things to say and the possession of the concepts to do with the use of language as manifestations of our humanity, we have not departed from the fundamental principle. For these too are conceptions at the bottom of which is 'the given',—the bedrock of human activity which 'is not reasonable (or unreasonable)' but is 'there – like our life'.[147]

7 ~ Conclusion

My main task in this chapter has been to distinguish more clearly the different senses in which the character of a language-game may be determined in the way that instinctive, i.e. ungrounded, modes of behaviour contribute to it. On the one hand, we may speak of the primitiveness of certain linguistic reactions *within* language-games, these being determinants of the grammars of the concepts embedded in them. On the other hand, however, we may speak of instinctive, pre-linguistic modes of behaviour as the framework out of which linguistic modes of behaviour emerge;—the grammatical nature of this observation lying in the fact that our conception of the language-game *includes* the

[147] OC 559.

concept of the pre-linguistic behavioural context, or – to broaden the context – where the linguistic mode of expression is conceived of as a component of a larger dimension of our form of life which includes pre-linguistic, instinctive behaviour.

We also looked at the situation that arises especially with concepts to do with language, where the fundamental element in the grasp of the concept lies not just with specific uses of words, but in the relation to language as a whole,—this relation including pre-linguistic elements. Thus, in the example of belief, the grasp of the concept *belief* is dependent on and interwoven with our capacity to engage in that whole mode in the use of language, the nature of which is *itself* determined in the way it is a part of the larger phenomenon of belief within our form of life. This illustrates another principle, namely that our grasp of certain specific concepts cannot be understood merely in terms of operating with signs, *not* just in the sense (expounded in the previous chapter) that it also has to do with 'having something to say', but in the sense that our grasp of these concepts is a function of the way that the very constitution of our person-hood is extended in the emergence of these language-games – extended out of our instinctive modes of life, *not* out of some prior mode of reasoning.

In the following two chapters I shall develop this latter dimension with further examples, firstly by looking at how the fact of our being subjects of experience enters into the formation and possession of subjective, or psychological, concepts, and then, in Chapter 7, by examining how the roots of the concepts of knowledge and certainty are to be found in *action.*

Chapter 6 ~ Subjective Concepts and the Extension of Subjectivity

1 ~ Introduction

If we want to judge whether a child has the concept of colour, *beyond* the ability merely to make correct judgements, we will look firstly at the way that the concept is woven into the child's use of language as a whole: at its ability to talk sense with the concepts and to distinguish sense and nonsense in the way the concept is used in conversation generally. We would also look at the way that the child shows appreciation of the *subjective* qualities of coloured objects: the way it makes comparisons with other colours, expresses likes and dislikes, reacts to harmony and disharmony between colours, etc. We would also look at the way that the child reacts to *other people's* judgements about, and reactions to, colours. These all belong to the child's possession of the concept of colour, and they show whether the child has got hold of the grammar of 'colour'. But what they also show is that the child's having a concept of colour involves not just linguistic competence but engages with its subjective relations and responses to coloured objects. I believe that similar considerations will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to any concepts in which subjective reactions such as these play a part, including, for example, our reactions to the pain and suffering of others. It is the rôle that the individual's subjectivity plays in the possession of psychological concepts that I wish to discuss in this chapter.

It has become a commonplace for critics of Wittgenstein, in the light of his preoccupation with the operational use of language, to complain that he ignores what has often been called 'the subjective character of experience' and, moreover, that in his 'private language argument'[148] he attempts to *eliminate* the relevance of subjective experience to the formation of concepts by a reduction of psychological states to external behaviour. He was aware of this criticism himself:

> Back to 'neglecting'! It seems that I neglect life. But not life physiologically understood but life as consciousness. And consciousness not physiologically understood, or understood from the outside, but consciousness as the very essence of experience, the appearance of the world, the world. (NFL p. 255)

[148] PI 243-315.

Wittgenstein seems to deny the reality of subjective experience because the essential feature of his private language argument is precisely that meaning cannot be (i.e. it makes no sense to speak of it being) determined by reference to our own subjective states. It is then concluded that the supposed subjective quality of experience must fall outside the linguistic equation, and any reference to it that cannot be analysed into outward behaviour (or, in other philosophies, into 'physical states' such as brain states) may therefore be dismissed as 'metaphysical'. This conclusion has been felt distasteful within the philosophical community because, historically, one reason for of the demand for a philosophy of mind has been precisely in order to accommodate the evident reality of the subjective qualities of experience. It is the nature of these qualities that we most wish to understand, and so the struggle in philosophy has been to overcome the difficulties of finding a place for them, not to agree to their elimination.

The first response to this conclusion must be to say that the private language argument is, in any case, being misused if it is used to sanction such a reduction; for it is concerned only to refute certain conceptions of *how* words refer to subjective states,[149] not to deny *that* they refer to them – still less to deny them absolutely or to deny their qualities. Certainly the argument has a bearing on our understanding of the dimensions within which subjective qualities exist – their *grammar* – but that is all. And once the confused conceptions have been dealt with, the remainder of the grammar of subjective concepts stands intact and awaits elucidation. It is here that we will find the accommodation we seek.

We may start by asking how Wittgenstein's 'neglect' becomes an issue at all. From what point of view, or in what circumstances, does it *matter* that the subjective reality of our subjective states is being ignored? The answer surely is that our preoccupation with subjective states is not something that arises only as a problem in the 'abstract' but is prompted by *introspection*; in other words, it is something arising as a *reaction* to our own subjective experience. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising, indeed it is understandable, that the subject's reaction to his own subjectivity should strike him as a reaction to a 'something', the essential nature of which is independent of its outward expression – and indeed as only accidentally connected with it. After all, if the concepts of subjectivity really are not reducible to concepts of external behaviour, then it *follows* that the experience we have of ourselves under the aspect of those concepts will be an experience of the mind as independent of its outward conditions.—A consciousness of itself as a

---

[149] See, for example, Winch pp. 122-123.

detached entity is perfectly intelligible in this light. This experience is captured in a remark by Wittgenstein:

> It seems that I can *trace* my identity, quite independent of the identity of my body. And the idea is suggested that I trace the identity of something dwelling in a body, the identity of my mind. (NFL p. 270)

So it is the reality which we attribute *as subjects* to our subjective experience that we find puzzling and which we wish to do justice to. For this reason, I believe that the root of the problem really lies with our understanding of the general nature of subjectivity, of which the more direct question of how words referring to subjective qualities get their meaning should be treated as only a facet. This approach to the philosophy of mind through the general concept of subjectivity is not novel. It was introduced into the philosophical debate in recent times in a most striking way by Thomas Nagel in his controversial paper 'What is it like to be a bat',[150] which has continued to provoke comment and consternation. It has been argued by Patricia Hanna,[151] for example, that Nagel's conception of subjectivity remains vulnerable to the private language argument. This has been disputed by Mounce,[152] who argues that Nagel is rightly defensive of the irreducibility of subjectivity to objective concepts. For myself, I am not convinced that Nagel is innocent of the confusions that Hanna finds in his paper. However, my sympathies are with the understanding of subjectivity as Mounce develops it, and I am in agreement with his criticisms of accounts of mental concepts typified by Hanna and others such as Hacker[153] – especially on the issue of the *application* of mental concepts, and on the use of *criteria*. Both of these issues will be pursued.

In developing an understanding of subjectivity, we will examine some aspects of the private language argument as they apply here; we will look at some of the difficulties inherent in Nagel's notion that 'there is something that it is like to be a bat'; and we will also examine some of the confusions surrounding the rôle of criteria in the deployment of concepts in general and mental concepts in particular. More generally, we will develop a critique of some of the ways that *objectivity* has been invoked as a condition of the use of language. This will lead to the core of this investigation, which will concentrate on the relation between subjectivity and primitive linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, an

---

[150] Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 83, 1974, pp. 435-450. (Nagel)
[151] Patricia Hanna, 'Must Thinking Bats be Conscious?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:4, October 1990, pp. 350-356, (Hanna); see also Patricia Hanna, 'If You Can't Talk About It, You Can't Talk About It – A response to H O Mounce', *Philosophical Investigations*, 15:2, April 1992, pp. 185-190.
[152] H. O. Mounce, 'On Nagel and Consciousness', *Philosophical Investigations*, 15:2, April 1992, pp. 178-184. (Mounce1)
[153] P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). (Hacker2)

aspect of which will be the conception of the language-games of subjectivity as *extensions* of our lives as subjects. Finally we will examine how this bears on our relations to these concepts *within* philosophical investigation, which will be treated in ways I have already employed with the concepts *belief* and *time.*

Before continuing, I should add a *caveat* regarding the use of the term 'subjectivity' and related terms. Unless otherwise stated, 'subjectivity' should not be taken in these discussions to refer to subjective *judgements* as to how things *appear*; rather it refers to the properties of the subject *qua* subject. For example, 'I am in pain' is a manifestation of the subject, *not* a judgement as to how things seem to the subject. Where I do speak of subjective judgements, this *should* be taken to refer to judgements as to how things appear.

2 ~ The Objectification of Subjective Experience

The change in philosophical perspective – which I have argued for earlier – from the conception of language as a view of the world 'from the boundary' to being a view of the world 'from the midst' is the same transition that we require in order to judge properly the place in our lives of the concepts of subjective phenomena. The 'view from the boundary' may be expressed in the idea that concepts are, as it were, 'intelligible in themselves', i.e. as carrying a sense that is determined transcendentally to the circumstances of the language-game in which they are employed (and in which we would otherwise say they *were* determined). At the heart of this conception has been the tendency to *objectify* the subject's own subjective relation to his experiences and perceptions. We might call this the objectification of the subject *qua* subject. The most characteristic expression of this tendency is to be seen in the notion of *private ostensive definition.* The essence of private ostensive definition is the idea that there is a mode of judgement whose terms are defined wholly subjectively, i.e. in terms of how things *appear*, but which nevertheless yields judgements that are, for all that, *objective.* Hence one may seem to be able to lay down a rule for 'naming' a sensation subjectively and then go on to make sensible uses of the word which are objectively guaranteed *even though this guarantee is wholly dependent on a subjective judgement that one is using it in the same way as in the original ostensive definition.* Even within the confines of purely subjective judgement making, then, the subject is presented as standing in a kind of 'Archimedean vantage point' upon his own experiences. The whole of the egocentric, empiricist epistemology is based on this

conception. The private language argument is designed to show that this is not an intelligible position. Let us outline the argument.

It has been pointed out that 'the' private language argument is not *one* but a complex of arguments.[154] For present purposes we may consider it as having two principal struts. The first is that in defining a word 'privately', i.e. subjectively, all one can ever obtain is the *impression* that one is following a rule, and so, for all that, one is *not* following a rule. It can make no sense to speak of a language founded on subjective judgement, for the only connection between the private ostensive definition and the subsequent use is the further subjective judgement that it is being used in the same way.—In other words, the subjective judgement that the word is being used 'in the same way' is *internal* to the subsequent use. The second is that any act of naming must take for granted a technique (convention) within which there is such a thing as *naming*.—There must be both a *rule* and a linguistic *rôle*.[155] Both of these are important to Wittgenstein and are, in any case, strongly connected; for in an obvious sense we cannot get so far as to make judgements at all (subjective or otherwise) if there is no linguistic framework for them, and it cannot make sense to speak of such a framework being established within the confines of purely subjective circumstances. The over-arching principle, then, is the demand for *objective* circumstances, since only then can the judgement that a person has learnt a rule, or grasped a concept, make any sense. The conclusion of the private language argument is that the necessary investment of objectivity into the language-games expressing subjective states must be by means of their outward manifestations, not in their purely introspective modes. Expressed grammatically, the concept of a language-game is the concept something rooted objective circumstances and that this holds also for the concepts embedded in it.

At this point it may be helpful to remind ourselves of a distinction made in Chapter 2. Amongst our concepts are the concepts of the language-games in which other concepts are expressed. My principle example was *intention*: we have the concept of the linguistic expression of intention, and we also have the concept of intention *per se*. Hence we may distinguish between the elucidation of a given concept and the elucidation of the concept of the language-game of which that concept is a component. In the latter case, the

---

[154] For example see David G. Stern, 'A new exposition of the "private language argument": Wittgenstein's "Notes for the 'Philosophical Lecture'", *Philosophical Investigations*, 17:3, July 1994, pp. 552-565.

[155] I have already argued that speaking a language must amount to more than operating a rule in the exercise of a particular function. But that does not mean that such operational features are not necessary components of speaking. So it remains legitimate to criticise conceptions of language that conflict with these conditions.

concept of the language-game is the concept of the circumstances in which a person may be said to have the concept. And belonging to these circumstances will, of course, be features relevant to the judgement that the person is following a rule. One root of the demand for objectivity, therefore, arises out of the grammar of the concept *language-game*, and it is in supplying the facts that surround the language-game, and which are essential to it, that this demand is satisfied.

Now there will be cases where, when describing the circumstances of the language-game, our description will contain facts that function as criteria for the application of the concepts embedded in it. For example, if I am to give an account of the language-game of investigating symptoms and attributing diseases, I may include a description of, say, the symptoms of measles and hence the criteria for employing the concept *measles*. In this kind of case the description of the circumstances which justify the application of the concept of the disease does not take for granted the concept itself: we can understand the description of the symptoms without assuming that we already have an understanding of the concept *measles*. In this instance, then, we easily satisfy the need for the circumstances of the language-game to be seen to be objective.—The objectivity of the account lies straightforwardly in the ability to give an account of a set of factual circumstances. In other situations, however, the objectivity of the language-game may not be quite so easily located.

I am thinking particularly of the situation where the employment of the concepts embedded within the language-game may also be essential to the description of the circumstances of the language-game. For example, a description of the circumstances in which colour concepts are employed will take for granted an *understanding* of the colour concepts. In this situation there will be no such thing as an independent description of the criteria for applying the concepts, since there are no criteria for the application of colour concepts. So although the concepts enter into the description of the circumstances of the language-game, no further facts are adduced in support of *them* (just because they have no criteria); hence the description as such is circular and so may be said not to have established the objectivity of the language-game. But this does not mean that there is no demonstrable objectivity in the circumstances of the language-game. For in this kind of case the objectivity of the language-game lies just in the agreement in linguistic reactions amongst participants, not in any agreement over the facts that the language-game is based on. Hence the demonstration of its objectivity will rest on a *recognition* of this agreement. We may also note – as I have argued in Chapter 2 – that the determination of concepts

through (shared) practice is more fundamental than by reference to facts, hence the agreement in reactions is at the bottom of the objectivity of *all* language-games, including those where facts do enter into the determination of concepts.

Now the important point here, for our present purposes at least, is that the objectivity lies in the *agreement* rather than in the *kind* of reaction. There is therefore nothing to exclude subjective reactions from amongst those that can go to determine concepts,—as long as they are *shared*. This is why there is no essential conflict between the demand for objectivity and the possibility, as we shall see, that the grasp of the concepts embedded within the language-game may, in an important sense, be an expression or outgrowth of our lives as *subjects*,—the limiting factor here being that the subjective component may not function as a ground or justification for the concept. Nevertheless, the *kind* of subjective reaction will also be a determining feature of the grammar or sense of the concept of which it is a component.

The main thrust of the private language argument, then, was to make a case against a particular and pervasive conception of how words refer to subjective states. The positive account of how these words refer *begins* with the argument that what is required is an established technique or practice forming the substratum of the practice of speaking, this being an *outward* manifestation of our form of life. But a full account of the establishment of mental concepts will need to demonstrate the rôle of the subjective dimension of our form of life as a determinant of these referential relations. I shall return to this later in the chapter. Firstly, however, we need to re-establish confidence in the very notion of subjectivity, which the confused responses to the private language argument have tended to undermine.

3 ~ Nagel's Impasse

The destructive effect of the private language argument on private ostensive definition – and hence on empiricism and egocentric subjective epistemologies generally – was taken in many quarters to be a denial that the formation of the concepts of subjective experience can itself incorporate subjective phenomena in their determination. Moreover, it was commonly felt that Wittgenstein must be *some* sort of behaviourist since this seemed to follow directly from the argument that the rules for the use of mental concepts must be laid down in the objective circumstances of outward human behaviour and

transparent to any independent objective observer.[156] As I have intimated, it was hardly a step at all – or so it seemed – from this condition to the belief that whatever mental words *mean* must be exhausted in the objective behavioural phenomena constituting those circumstances. The bland defences that it just is written into the language-game that there is a difference between pain-behaviour *with* and *without* pain, or that 'pain' simply does not *mean* 'behaviour', but without at the same time giving a full account of *how* that difference is supposed to be constituted, seemed just to avoid the issue and were not on their own very reassuring.

An attempt to break out of this impasse, which simultaneously claimed to acknowledge the force of the private language argument,[157] was made by Nagel. By observing that wherever we recognise an animal as being *conscious* 'there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something that it is like *for* the organism',[158] he returned the notion of the subjective character of experience to centre stage, and in a way that could not easily be denied since it seemed to be a genuine grammatical insight apparently making no direct appeal to private ostensive definition. In the case of the animal, the question of private ostensive definition just does not arise at all; in human beings the language-game of expressing subjective states and what they are like is, after all, *a language-game that is played* and evidently not reducible to any other language-game. Unfortunately, Nagel's attempt to use this formulation to defend the irreducibility of subjectivity is, in my view, a failure. As we shall see, he simply does not distance himself sufficiently from, indeed he *shares*, the underlying assumption of the physicalist reductionists. His view is also a view 'from the boundary'.

Nagel objects to those who would wish to make an *essential* translation of the subjective mode into an objective mode of discourse about physical states, i.e. a translation that effectively eliminates or analyses away subjective concepts as a distinct class. His own aim, however, is not so much to deny the possibility of a physicalist theory but just to demand that such a theory must do justice to subjectivity by recognising it as retaining some distinctive characteristic of its own. However, in order to make subjectivity compatible with physicalism, an account of subjectivity is required which involves at least some kind of objective re-presentation of the subjective – otherwise it will not be possible to marry it to the objectivity of a physicalist theory. Nagel believes that we are

---

[156] The limitation to this view, of course, is that observation of the external transparency of a rule is not necessarily sufficient to the grasp of the concept. This has already been discussed and will be further developed later.
[157] Nagel p. 441.
[158] Ibid. p. 436.

not yet in a position to do this, nor is it clear how it might be achieved; hence we are not ready to embrace a physicalist account.[159] In his concluding remarks, however, he does come up with one possibility: he speculates upon the idea of an 'objective phenomenology', that is, a system of universally intelligible concepts for describing 'what it is like' to have any given subjective experience, even to those to whom the experience is profoundly alien. He concedes that this language might not be able to convey *everything*, but unfortunately he does not say what remaining kinds of thing might continue to be objectively inexpressible – or how we should treat that fact.[160]

Regardless of what other merit we might find in his attempt to defend the subjective, the fact that he entertains the possibility of such a phenomenology at all shows, I believe, that he is not in the end prepared to let go of the idea that the individual's relations to the qualities of his own subjective states can still be modelled on a grasp of *facts* (as to 'what it is like') that is *independent* of the individual's mode of life as manifested in his outward being. This must be the correct interpretation of his view otherwise the intelligibility of the phenomenology would be relative to the mode of life, in which case it could not transcend the differences between modes of life. This does not make Nagel strictly a reductionist, in as much as it does not reduce subjective concepts into concepts of some *other* kind of object; but it is difficult to see how it can avoid being just another objectivist reconstruction of subjectivity and a re-emergence of the inner 'Archimedean vantage point' against which the private language argument is directed.

The objectivist reconstruction of subjective concepts (i.e. that knowledge of 'what it is like' is knowledge of a fact) is a pervasive and insidious influence, and so it will be helpful to trace how it is wound into Nagel's analysis. This will help identify the critical points that will need to be made to defend the integrity of the concepts of subjectivity. Nagel founds his account on a factual *belief* that animals, as well as humans, have experiences: we are 'of the opinion'[161] that they have experiences. In a footnote discussing the attribution of experiences to robots, he remarks:

> Perhaps anything complex enough to behave like a person would have experiences. But that, if true, is a fact which cannot be discovered merely by analyzing the concept of experience. (Nagel footnote p. 436)

[159] Ibid. pp. 446-448.
[160] Ibid. pp. 449-450.
[161] cf. PI p. 178.

And then:

> I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, and there is no more doubt that they have experience than that mice or pigeons or whales have experience. (Nagel p. 438)

It is very important that Nagel's account *qua* philosophical account *begins* with the attribution of subjectivity to other creatures (if creatures they be) as a factual matter which does not raise conceptual problems.—This already implies that the exercise of mental concepts is not *primary* but is essentially[162] *secondary* to other modes of discourse which *begin* by considering whether something is the case or not. In other words, his conception of the language-games in which subjective concepts are articulated is that they belong to those that, in the relevant respects, are founded on fact, not practice. This predetermines the form of his account by presenting as the central issue how we accommodate this fact of subjective experience, and it diverts attention from the real issues which are: 1) the *form* of our understanding of creatures as fellow subjects, and 2) the *nature* of the acknowledgement that the experience of alien creatures may fall outside our understanding. This shortcoming in his account emerges in the way he treats what is the central example in his paper: the understanding of the subjective lives of creatures of a form of life fundamentally different from our own: bats.

Having stated that bats have experiences, Nagel argues that, given the well-known peculiarities in the way that they perceive their environment, the experience that bats have of the world must be radically alien from ours. His conclusion on the nature of a bat's experience is expressed by saying that 'there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine';[163] and since this is in the nature of a supposition, it leads to 1) the conclusion 'the we cannot *know* what it is like to be a bat',[164] and 2) the idea that since the bat certainly does have experiences 'this implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts'.[165]

The first of these – that we cannot know what their experience is like – is notoriously difficult to fix. This difficulty is mainly due to a tendency to fluctuate between two quite different interpretations: on the one hand, we may be dealing with the platitudinous observation[166] that since we do not share their mode of experience, we are not in any

---

[162] I say "essentially" here, since there is no doubt that in particular instances we will attribute experiences on the basis of evidence.
[163] Nagel p. 438.
[164] Ibid. footnote p. 442.
[165] Ibid. p. 441.
[166] See Mouncel pp. 178 & 182.

position to follow any introspective reports that emerge out of it,—we just do not share their form of life. Alternatively, we may understand the phrase on the model of the claim that one can never really know how another person sees colours – an interpretation which delivers us once more into the hands of the private language argument.

Turning to the second conclusion, the idea that the experiences of alien creatures may be beyond our comprehension evidently belongs with the more frequently discussed question of how we may fail to understand the beliefs and concepts of a radically alien society.[167] Certainly the two questions share the essential feature that the way to mutual understanding is barred as a result of the incommensurability of aspects of our lives. The present case,. however, introduces a new element insofar as it relates the incommensurability specifically to their mode of natural perception and not so much to their social structures and systems of belief – which are the usual examples discussed.[168]

I think it would be true to say that when faced with a radically alien society it would not be the most natural way of expressing what we fail to comprehend in them by saying that there are *facts* available to them to which we have no access. I think that would be regarded as secondary to the essential difference, which would be a difference in the *way* that they construct the world, as evidenced in their behaviour and concepts. It would be more natural to say that they stand in a different kind of relation to the world (and to themselves) and that we are excluded from this relation. No doubt there will be instances where we *would* wish to say that here is a people who have a knowledge of the world which is unavailable to us; certainly there are any number of facts that are inaccessible to me – in physics, for example – because I simply do not have the concepts (think of a child learning a language also).—But in all these latter sorts of cases, it is statements about the *world* that we do not understand.

Now from one point of view the understanding of bats *is* of the latter kind. And in fact in an important sense we *do* understand bats' relations to the world: they perceive the world using a perceptual system employing echo-location. Moreover, the facts of what they perceive will also be intelligible to us,—for example that they can detect or 'observe' the position of a flying insect in complete darkness. But of course these are not what Nagel has in mind when he speaks of facts about the subjective qualities of a bat's

[167] Winch has extended this same philosophical principle even to failures of understanding *within* our society. See P. Winch, 'Can we understand ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:3, July 1997, pp. 193-204.
[168] See, for example, P. Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in *Ethics and Action*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1972), pp. 8-49.

experience that are beyond our ken,[169] which are facts that would distinguish the qualities of a subjective realm. The supposed realm of facts here surely belongs to that species of 'knowing what it is like' that Wittgenstein criticised in the *Philosophical Investigations* as part of his private language argument:

> "I know how the colour green looks to *me*"—surely that makes sense!—Certainly: what use of the proposition are you thinking of? (PI 278)
>
> Imagine someone saying: "But I know how tall I am!" and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it. (PI 279)

It seems clear, then, that trying to give an account of the nature of subjective qualities as a realm of subjectively graspable facts of experience is going to lead us into difficulties. We must therefore follow a different path.

Nagel passes as a matter of course from the notion that 'there is something that it is like to be a bat' to talk of *knowledge* of what it is like. But these are not coextensive. The original purpose, in the context of the philosophical debate, of the statement that 'there is something that it is like to be a bat' was, as I have indicated, to emphasise that '[t]he subject too is real' [170] – where 'real' means that the concept of a subject is irreducible. Moreover, in addition to reminding us of the reality of the subject, it also reminds us that it is essential to consciousness that it has a *form* which is expressed outwardly in different ways. But when we speak in the way that Nagel does of *knowledge* of what it is like to be a bat, i.e. knowledge of *fact*, then the first of the above formulations – i.e. that 'there is something that it is like to be a bat' – has been narrowed down and its more fundamental aspect overlooked. For the fundamental form of our experience is yielded up by means of *concepts* (or modes of behaviour) which are not themselves comprised of any subjective knowledge of fact. In other words, the essential 'there is something that it is like to be a bat' is expressed in the way we differentiate experiences by means of concepts, *not* by individuating facts (and in the analogous case of animals, it is expressed in the *form* of their behaviour). And so if we do still wish to speak of 'knowledge' in this context then this has to be interpreted in terms of the understanding of the form of our experience that lies in our ability to use the concepts that we have acquired. Here we should recall a point made in Chapter 2, that it is not just in the grasp of facts that we grasp what the world is like, but in the formation of our concepts. So we should not insist that every

---

[169] Nagel might have cited a case where we came across a creature whose relations to the world just baffled us, where we had no obvious insight at all into the nature of its perceptual relations to the world. Here too, in the face of almost complete incomprehension, it would seem spurious to emphasise the issue of what facts we do or do not know as against the issue of the sheer unintelligibility of their form of life.
[170] Mouncel p. 178.

subjective difference that we are aware of must correspond to describable differences between states of affairs.

The distinction between differences in concept and differences in fact may be a confusing one to apply when reflecting on the nature of experience. It is no doubt very natural, when reacting to differences in the subjective qualities of colours, sounds, etc., to feel that here are differences which *ought* to be describable. In such a situation I am trying to interpret the concept rooted in practice as one rooted in fact, which I am then puzzled to find I cannot put into words. But if the difference is one of concept rather than fact, then it *is* put into words just in the way the difference shows in how the different concepts are deployed.—It shows in judgement pure and simple, not in articulated differences between facts.

It may be worth reflecting here that if we are to form subjective concepts *at all*, then it would be the oddest thing if when making judgements (e.g. 'this green is not the same as that') we did not also report that this green *looks different* from that one, etc., or have other subjective responses to colours such as attraction, dislike, and so on. But now as soon as we begin to use phrases such as 'these look different' we have introduced all that we need in order to introduce the concept of subjective qualities. It is a confusion to hold that below the threshold of what is captured in our concepts is a realm of fact that is not expressible.

What is most lacking, then, in Nagel's account is any acknowledgement that the root of the incommensurability between alien experiences or perceptions lies in the form and practice of the modes of life and accompanying concepts. The preoccupation with unknowable facts obscures these elements.

4 ~ The Subjective and the Objective Modes and 'What it is Like to be a....'

My intention now is to look more closely at the mechanics of how subjective concepts operate and are seated in our lives. To this end we might begin by developing a more sympathetic view of 'knowledge of what an experience is like'.

Nagel's use of 'there is something that it is like to be a bat' was seized upon and criticised by Norman Malcolm,[171] who took it to be just another proposition resting on a belief in private ostensive definition. I have argued that it is probably right to find Nagel

[171] Norman Malcolm, 'Consciousness and Causality', in: D. M. Armstrong & Norman Malcolm, *Consciousness and Causality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 45-66. (Malcolm2)

guilty of this fallacy; but I believe that there is a narrowness in Malcolm's view that causes him to overlook other important contexts in which we *may* intelligibly speak of 'knowing what it is like' to have a particular experience.

The essence of Malcolm's position is that if we do wish to speak in this way, then it can only legitimately mean 1) that we can, in an ordinary way, describe what the experience is like (he cites the case of the experience of being a lorry driver,[172] where we may refer to the various individual experiences that go to make up the composite experience of being a lorry driver), or 2), in the more fundamental case of knowing 'what it is like to *see*',[173] that we have 'the ability that a sighted adult has of making visual discriminations, reports and judgements'.[174] Generally we may say that in Malcolm's estimation the meaning of 'knowing what it is like to have an experience' is coextensive with the ability to describe what we see or with the ability to make perceptual judgements. This approach is popular amongst those believing that they are defending a Wittgensteinian position. Thus we find Hacker concluding as follows:

> We are no doubt tempted to say that such a person does not know what pain is *like*. But what is it to know what pain is like? Does the yelping dog whose paw has been trodden on know what pain is like? No, for whatever 'knowing what pain is like' means, it does not mean the same as 'being in pain'. Is it to have 'knowledge of certain kinds of experience'? But what does that mean? If I have toothache, do I *have knowledge* of a toothache? Am I *acquainted* with toothache? Do I *know* nausea or cramp? These are slightly curious, quasi-poetic expressions. They are either philosophical nonsense, or they signify no more than having had the sensation. One can indeed say 'I have known fear' or 'I am acquainted with grief', but this simply means that I have been afraid and have grieved. So too for knowing toothache or being acquainted with headache. What then do I know when I know what pain is like? Either I can say or display what it is like, or it is ineffable. But if it is ineffable, then knowing what pain is like amounts to no more than to *have* or to *have had* a pain. But then the thesis that one can possess the concept of pain only if one knows what pain is like merely reiterates that someone who has mastered the use of 'pain' but has never had a pain does not know what the word 'pain' means, which is absurd. The criteria for possession of a concept, for mastery of the use of a word, consists in one's correctly using and explaining an expression, not in one's medical history.[175]

My concern with these approaches is that they stop with the criticisms that I have already made of Nagel and do not allow for how we react to and reflect on our experiences, nor for how these responses ramify our lives. These are *also* constitutive of our concepts of experience; they are components in the determination of the concepts of

---

[172] Malcolm2 p. 46.
[173] Ibid. p. 53.
[174] Ibid. p. 54.
[175] P. M. S. Hacker, *Appearance and Reality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 146-7.

subjective quality and knowledge of their qualities,—and they are not reducible to the formulae offered by Malcolm and Hacker.

At the most elementary level, the concept of subjective *quality* is determined in the distinction we make between the judgement that an object is such and such a colour and the judgement as to *how* the colour strikes us. These two modes of judgement betoken different conceptual relations to objects, and so there really ought to be no objection to characterising the latter as a relation to a subjective quality. The only condition that we must insist on is that this kind of response *determines* the concept,—such that it would make no sense to say that the response depended on some *prior* appreciation of subjective quality, i.e. on a judgement originating under some other regime, namely private ostensive definition. The responses are therefore *primitive* to the determination of the concept of subjective quality.

The notion of subjective quality is perhaps most evident when we make comparisons between the appearances of colours, sound, textures, etc. These comparisons may often be expressed using colour words themselves: 'This is pinker than that'; or by using other terms which also have a literal use in the language-game: 'This is brighter than that'. But there is also another very characteristic use of language that often comes into play here: the 'secondary' uses of words, such as 'The sound of this clarinet is *brighter* than that'. These uses are figurative, but in an important sense they are not metaphorical:

> The secondary sense is not a 'metaphorical' sense. If I say "For me the vowel *e* is yellow" I do not mean: 'yellow' in a metaphorical sense,—for I could not express what I want to say in any other way than by means of the idea 'yellow'. (PI p. 216)

These uses of words are the product of a need to find a means of expressing a subjective quality, a need that can only be satisfied by taking, without justification, a word from an alien context. Moreover, since they have no justification their entry into discourse is also primitive. And just because they are primitive we may say that they *determine* a concept of description and thereby a concept of subjective quality also. Furthermore, whereas these secondary uses depend on a primary use, in an important sense they are subjective;—they are not governed by any rules in the way they are projected into the new context. Hence they can only be understood as *qualitative* responses to our subjective states, and they acquire currency within the language-game just because they are shared amongst language users.

There are other dimensions within which the subjective qualities of experience may emerge. For example, a person might have seen other people receive electric shocks and

observed their reactions but never experienced a shock themselves. On receiving one for the first time, we might imagine their surprise: 'I didn't know it would be like that!'—perhaps they had expected it to be more like touching something hot, or like a muscular spasm, or hitting the 'funny bone' in their elbow (perhaps it is a bit like that!). So 'knowledge of what it is like' may be an expression of expectation and may lead to the conclusion that we had never experienced the like before. Again it should be emphasised that this notion of what the experience is like is not intended as an *explanation* of the expectation – which would return us again to the private language argument – rather, that we have expectations of such sorts is part of what determines a concept of subjective quality.

We may also find more complex examples. It is a commonplace for people who have experienced profound depression, for instance, to insist that unless others have experienced it themselves they cannot really know what it is like because it is not really comparable with anything in ordinary life. They will have been struck by the fact that it was not like anything *they* had known, nor could it have been anticipated from their own previous experience. Perhaps they will have tried to convey it to others, but realised the futility of it. 'Knowing what it is like' in this sort of case goes beyond being merely a sense of the uniqueness of a sensation, for it goes together with a multitude of other changes in the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the sufferer and is pervasive of his life. It is in these sorts of circumstances that the sufferer becomes aware that another does *not know* what it is like to experience depression; and the point of speaking in this way is to draw attention to the fact, not just that the other has not had the experience, but that, in his behaviour and in what he says, he shows that he does not *understand* the experience. The sufferer finds himself at a distance from the comprehension of others.

This case differs, I think, from both kinds of case cited earlier, i.e. of not being able to understand a foreign culture and of not 'knowing what it is like to be a bat'. On the one hand, it is not like failing to understand the alien culture if that *just* means not being able to follow the ideas and beliefs of the culture (it might mean more than that). And it is not like the case of the bat; it is not just the lack of a shared system of perception. Rather, it is an inability to understand a pervasive quality of their state of mind having to do with the failure to make connections of thought and feeling,—of not being able to understand how the sufferer might be driven to certain thoughts and actions, for example. Two people who share the experience will understand one another in the things they have to *say*, in being able to follow each other in the connections of thought and feeling, in the

way that their beliefs undergo changes, and in their responses to the problems of life. 'He knows what it is like' says that he has an understanding that has evidently grown naturally out of his own personal experience.

In all these sorts of contexts, it is natural to want to characterise the responses in terms of the appreciation of, or indeed the *knowledge of*, the subjective qualities of the experiences. By contrast, it would, I suppose, be possible to imagine a people who made all the perceptual judgements of the kind that Malcolm and Hacker refer to, but who did not compare their experiences and who lacked the widely ramified kinds of responses of the kind I have been describing. Here I think we *would* have the right to say that there is no room in the lives of such people for any notion of the subjective quality of experience, for they lack subjective responses to their own experiences. But these are not the kind of people we are dealing with, and would hardly be recognisable as human beings.

The kind of understanding that I have described in these last paragraphs may be described as *inter-subjective* understanding. It is realised in the way that people are able to compare experiences and share their understanding, and it provides a genuine context for speaking of a *knowledge* of what the subjective state is like. It is in the nature of inter-subjective understanding, then, that it arises out of the way that people engage with one another and *not* from purely external observations of the other. This brings us to the difficult question of the rôle of criteria in the application of mental concepts.

5 ~ Concepts and the Application of Criteria

An understanding of the rôle of criteria in the possession and application of a concept is central to an understanding of its grammar. It is a matter which is also directly related to a question which we have already dealt with at length, namely the extent to which a concept is constituted through definitions referring to facts rather than in the establishment of a practice. So it will be illuminating to approach the question of criteria with this distinction in mind.

In the decades immediately following the publication of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, it was commonplace to allot criteria a central rôle in Wittgenstein's account of the employment of concepts. We may follow P. M. S. Hacker in *Insight and Illusion* as exemplifying this trend. Hacker states the position quite unequivocally:

> Criteria, then, can be seen as those conditions which non-inductively justify the assertion of a sentence and in terms of which the sense of the sentence is to be accounted for. (Hacker2 p. 283)

And then:

> In the *Investigations* he [Wittgenstein] suggests that the criteria for 'p' are the circumstances which would justify one in saying that *p* (e.g. *PI*, §182). His numerous investigations into specific psychological and dispositional terms employ the concept of a criterion extensively in precisely this sense. (Hacker2 p. 288)

We find a similar sentiment expressed by Hanna:

> Concepts require criteria of application; and if a concept is to be applied to others, one must be able to say from an objective standpoint whether these criteria are satisfied. If this cannot be done, there is no justification for such an application. To persist in doing so puts one in the position of claiming to give a "subjective" justification, which as Wittgenstein notes (PI, I: 265), is no justification at all. (Hanna p. 352)

Firstly we may note that – according to Hacker's first remark at any rate – the criteria for applying a concept are the determinants of the meaning of the concept in as much as they determine the sense of the sentences containing them. This does not mean that there is a simple equation between the presence of the criterion and the fact of the thing for which it is a criterion; for, as Hacker points out elsewhere, in any given circumstance the relation between the criteria present (or absent) and the fact asserted (or denied) is not one of *entailment* (Hacker2 p. 289). For example, a person may show pain behaviour but not be in pain; that is, he may be pretending. This has the virtuous consequence, within the criterial account of mental concepts, of enabling behaviourism to be avoided – at least on the formal level – for it will be a part of the grammar of mental concepts that *in particular circumstances* the absence of the state of mind will not follow from the absence of criteria (and *vice versa*), showing that it cannot be identical with its outward expression.

Secondly, criteria are identified as the circumstances *justifying* the application of a concept. Identifying these circumstances is an operational part of the application; they are not just facts which may be referred to retrospectively or by a third party in explanation of the application of the concept:

> Learning language involves learning to recognise (but not necessarily to describe) the circumstances justifying the use of an expression. Thereby one acquires tacit intuitive knowledge of the criterial rules justifying the employment of the expression. Thus one test for whether '*p*' is a criterion for '*q*' is whether one could come to understand '*q*' without grasping that the truth of '*p*' justifies one in asserting '*q*'. (Hacker2 p. 292)

According to Hacker and Hanna, then, the application of a concept is based on the observation of facts – either as stated explicitly or recognised as such – that justify its application. No doubt there are very many situations in which the application of concepts will operate in more or less the way that Hacker describes – I have already argued that facts are often integrated into concepts – but such an account, as I have also intimated previously, will not do as a *general* account of the use of concepts. Whether the criteria are applied implicitly or explicitly, in either case it is supposed by Hacker that the criterion must be *conceptualised*. But this can only mean that the application of the criterion is itself a conceptual act which must *itself* be based on criteria, and so on *ad infinitum*.[176] Clearly there is something wrong here.

First of all, we should not be fooled by this notion of the 'tacit' application of criteria, which is ambiguous. When we apply a criterion explicitly, the recognition of the criterial circumstances will obviously not involve the application of the concept for which those circumstances are the criterion – which would obviously be circular. For example, if the criterion for a disease is a rash of a certain sort, then the description of the rash cannot depend on employing the concept of the disease for which it is a criterion. Now in the case where the criterion is applied *explicitly*, any circularity of this sort ought to be obvious enough. But in the situation where the criterial concepts are only applied *tacitly*, it may not be so easy to distinguish the genuine case from the circular one.

A genuine case of tacit application, for example, would be where an experienced ornithologist is able to identify a bird by its 'jizz', whilst the justification for the identification would demand a specific account of identifying plumage features. On the other hand, 'This is red' may, to the unwary, also be taken to be a judgement based on a tacit criterion. A typical formulation may be that we perceive the *essence* of the colour, which is used as the criterion that *this* is red; or perhaps it is believed that the judgement is, as it were, the criterion for itself.[177] In these sorts of cases, the temptation will be to assume that wherever it is not evident that a criterion has been explicitly applied, then sure enough there will have been an implicit application. But this is surely an empty conception. We may certainly agree that whenever a criterion *is* applied, the criterial circumstances are conceptualised (logically) prior to the application and, moreover, that this remains the case whether the criterion is applied explicitly or implicitly (it will always be possible to *produce* criteria). But in order to prevent the infinite regress, we will need to

---

176 Mouncel p. 184.
177 cf. Ibid. p. 182.

acknowledge that, at bedrock, criteria are *not* applied at all, and that in these cases conceptualisation *begins* with the judgement itself.

The alternative to Hacker's and Hanna's account of criteria will begin, therefore, by acknowledging that many concepts are, to a greater or lesser degree, founded on facts and that to this extent their application does involve identifying these facts (implicitly or explicitly) and employing them as criteria. But it will also have to acknowledge that a general account of the application of concepts must recognise that ultimately it is not founded on the recognition of facts but in the exercise of linguistic practices that are not criterion based.[178] This applies both to the *application* of concepts and also to their *determination*. In other words, to the extent that the exercise of a concept is rooted in a practice and not founded on facts, the sense of the concept cannot, *contra* Hacker, be accounted for by reference to such facts. This is essentially the same point that I argued for in Chapter 2, that the establishment of practices is in the end more fundamental to the constitution of concepts than the embodiment of facts. Hence, where the exercise of a concept is not by the application of a criterion, its exercise will be rooted in a primitive reaction. In what follows I shall try to show how this principle operates in the case of the third person employment of mental concepts.

The extent to which, and the *mode* in which, individual concepts may embody facts is highly variable. An important part of the elucidation of mental concepts that follows in the next section will therefore comprise an examination of the balance between the factual and practical components of these concepts, and the way that these are interwoven. Developing out of this will be an examination of the *nature* of the practice of mental concepts. This is not straightforward for, as was noted in earlier chapters and in the above remarks on depression, understanding a concept is not merely a matter of being able to operate a sign correctly for a particular purpose; rather, the concept that is expressed through a given practice is a function of the way that the practice is related to, or is a component of, our form of life; and so the whole character of that form of life will also have to be taken into account. This is the point of view from which it can be illuminating to look at how the possession of the concept may be regarded as an *extension* of our form of life.

---

178 Ibid. p. 184.

In his *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 2*, Wittgenstein felt that there was something wrong with trying to give an account of a mental concept merely by describing the circumstances which are the direct context for judging that a person is in a given mental state:

> I am trying to describe the laws or rules of evidence for empirical sentences: does one really characterise what is meant by the mental in this way?
>
> The characteristic sign of the mental seems to be that one has to guess at it in someone else using external cues and is only *acquainted* with it from one's own case.
> But when closer reflection causes this view to go up in smoke, then what turns out is not that the inner is something outer, but that "outer" and "inner" now no longer count as properties of evidence. "Inner evidence" means nothing, and therefore neither does "outer evidence".
>
> But indeed there is 'evidence for the inner' and 'evidence for the outer'.
>
> "But all I ever perceive is the *outer*." If that makes sense, it must determine a concept. But why should I not say I perceive his doubts? (*He* cannot perceive them.)
>
> Indeed, often I can describe his inner, as I perceive it, but not his outer.
>
> ....
>
> *No* evidence teaches us the psychological utterance. (Last2 pp. 61-63)

Wittgenstein is suggesting here – in the first and last remarks at least – that mental concepts are not rooted in the facts that might count as evidence for a mental state in a particular instance. Moreover, treating observed external cues as evidence for the inner is not in any case central to our encounter with the mental lives of others. These views seem to be an advance upon the view he expressed in the *Philosophical Investigations* and which is summarised by his dictum: 'An "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria',[179] which appears to be a slogan for the 'evidential' account and which, I think it is fair to say, has determined the most commonly held interpretation of Wittgenstein on this matter.[180]

Now in the light of this, consider the following picture of the language-game of *pain*. Mental concepts are amongst those – in their third person applications, at least – which

---

[179] PI 580.

[180] This remark is often taken to be evidence of Wittgenstein's commitment to a theory of the meaning of psychological concepts based on criteria. But I am not so sure that the remark should be treated in this way in any case. "Inner process" is in scare quotes, which suggests that he might have meant just that if we *are* to think in terms of an inner process then we are committed to a notion of outward criteria, not that he approves of construing the relation between the 'inner' and the 'outer' in this way.

are determined to a large extent by facts, the observation of which therefore count as criteria for their application. Hence, our judgement that a person is in pain is based on our observations of his pain-behaviour, the typical manifestations of which we could of course describe. These third person attributions evidently differ from first person avowals which are not based on criteria. It is therefore the latter and not the former which constitute the instinctive root of the language-game, and it does so in this way: 'the verbal expression of pain replaces crying....'.[181] Hence, 'I am in pain' is a primitive reaction within the language-game; indeed its utterance is itself one of the facts that, in the third person context, would be taken as a criterion for the judgement 'He is in pain'. 'I am in pain' also supplies the subjective component of the language-game; for it is both a cornerstone of the language-game and is recognised as a direct expression of the individual's subjective state. First person utterances may, moreover, be taken as central to the idea that whereas the language-game of attributing pain to others is based on 'outward criteria' mental concepts are nevertheless not equivalent in *meaning* to the outward facts of behaviour. For the fact that manifestations of the subjective state are incorporated into the language-game, 1) by the concept being articulated *by means of* non-criterion based first person utterances, whilst 2) it clearly belonging to the grammar of the concept that it does not express a state only existing whilst being expressed, is evidently connected with the concept having a component which is not reducible to outward facts. This ties in with Hacker's observation that the relation between the fact of the criterion and the fact of the pain is not one of entailment;[182] for the fact that the concept has roots in both the objective circumstances and the subjective response shows that the reality of the phenomenon of pain is not exhausted in what is revealed of it by any one root. The presence of criterionless first person judgements reinforces the inequality between being in pain and the outward manifestations of pain, for the first person expression of pain is an *articulation* of the concept in its own right – and without reference to or describing behaviour.

This, roughly speaking, is how the Wittgensteinian position has often been presented and there is much that is correct about it. But such a simple dichotomy between the inward and the outward components of the determinants of the concept of pain is false. We will shortly try to correct this picture by examining Hertzberg's account[183] of the inter-relations between the primitive reactions which characterise the language-game. But

[181] PI 244.
[182] Hacker2 p. 289.
[183] Hertzberg pp. 24-39.

we might begin by drawing attention to a closely related situation where the establishment of facts *does* play an important rôle in forming judgements. It will be important not to confuse this with the main issue at hand.

If I am concerned to see that a child is learning to use 'pain' properly – both in expressing its own pain, and also when applied to other people – then I am not thereby exercising the concept *pain* but, once again, the concept of the *language-game* of expressing pain and of recognising pain in others. The latter concept is partly constituted in being able to recognise an array of facts, such as that the child only uses the word where the person of whom it speaks has given expression to pain in appropriate circumstances, or where the child itself is expressing its pain in appropriate circumstances. These facts belong to the criteria for saying that the child is using the word correctly. If the child is not able to react appropriately we would be justified in saying that he has not got the concept *pain*. This judgement will have been one based on the facts of the matter. But whereas there are criteria that a concept has been correctly applied, it does not follow that there are criteria for *its* application, just because the concept *of* a language-game is a different concept from the concepts *within* the language-game.[184] There are criteria that a child has correctly applied 'red', i.e. that the child calls red things 'red' and not other things, but it does not follow that the child employs a criterion in making his judgement.[185] Further, when we judge that the child has made the correct judgements, either that another is in pain or that this thing is red, the determination of those facts is dependent on *our* judgement that the third person is actually in pain or that this is red. In other words, we have to have made the same judgement that we are attributing to the child. And this means that the determination of those facts is itself subordinate to our *own* judgements, which I shall argue are criterionless. It is in order to show that the determination of the sense of these judgements is not fundamentally by means of agreement on *criteria* that we need to examine the rôle of primitive reactions in determining the character of the language-games.

Hertzberg's account begins with the observation – as developed in Chapter 5 – that within a language-game certain responses are *independent*. That is, they are not dependent on any other judgement and are therefore primitive to the language-game. His account has the additional virtue that its perception of the foundations of the language-game does not identify only first person expressions of pain as primitive but extends this to include

[184] See section 2 above.

[185] It also does not follow, of course, that the judgement that the child is employing the term correctly is based wholly on criteria.

reactions to third persons; indeed he goes even further in identifying as primitive the recognition of responses of sympathy (or repulsion, or indifference) *between* third parties. This immediately releases us from the picture of the language-game as a simple dichotomy between, on the one hand, modes of judgement which are criterionless (first person expressions) and, on the other, modes of judgement based on fact (third person attributions). This is just because third person reactions, being primitive, must also be criterionless.

The logical basis of this extension is that if the recognition of expressions of pain as such was not essentially primitive, then it would have to take the form of a hypothesis that the behaviour we observe was caused by the mental event.[186] This causal model would require that the concept of pain be established independently of the concept of what constitutes its expression; and for this, it would be necessary to turn to the well-known argument by analogy from one's own case. But this is an argument without credibility,[187] since it is in any case dependent on the discredited notion of private ostensive definition. Now we *may* justify a *particular* judgement, i.e. that here we have an expression of pain, by comparing it with behaviour independently recognised as expressive of pain. But if this is not to lead to an infinite regress, expressions of pain must at some point be recognisable without recourse to such further justification.[188] Hertzberg is arguing, then, that not only are first person expressions of pain primitive, the recognition of behaviour as an expression of pain is also primitive. This primitiveness is manifested not just in the recognition of others' expressions of pain, but in the whole circle of mutual understanding. For example, it would be a primitive reaction for a person to see someone's response to a third person as a reaction to their distress. He concludes:

> In such cases, then, it is not as if I brought the pieces together and concluded that the situation is one revolving around someone's pain. Rather, I see the situation under the aspect of pain, and this way of seeing it, as it were, brings the pieces together in this particular way. (Hertzberg p. 33)

This seeing of the situation 'under the aspect of pain' indicates that our recognition of the nature of the particular responses is founded on something that we bring *to* the situation and within which we view it, namely an overall conception of the person as a conscious, sensitive agent. It is a way of looking at our fellow humans, not just a

---

[186] Hertzberg p. 32.
[187] Ibid. footnote 11 p. 39.
[188] Ibid. p. 32.

readiness to make certain judgements from which to draw certain conclusions. This is the 'attitude towards a soul', the nature of which we must now explore.

7 ~ Inter-subjectivity: the 'Attitude towards a Soul'

Hertzberg is careful to avoid the conclusion that the demonstration of the *independence* of the primitive reactions within the language-game is *all* that is required in order to give an account of what is primitive to the possession of the concept *pain* (and of mental concepts in general).[189] For no judgement that is defined in observational terms, even if it is primitive to a language-game, amounts to an application of the concept *pain* (or mental concept) unless it is at the same time a manifestation of the 'attitude towards a soul', which is also primitive to the language-game.

Wittgenstein states that we are not of the *opinion* but are of the *attitude* towards others as having souls.[190] This is part of an elucidation of the concept of the inter-subjective responses between human beings, and it says that this relation is essentially an attitudinal one *within which* judgements are made. Opinions lie too shallowly in our lives to characterise the essential nature of the recognition between souls, which is a pervasive feature of the relations between persons. The attitude provides a framework for, and gives sense, to opinions; it is not itself founded on opinion. Only a soul can be in pain, and unless I see him as a soul I am not judging that he is in pain. Behaviour, no doubt, is usually the immediate context for the *judgement* or *belief* that the other is suffering; but the possibility of such a belief depends on it being, at the same time, an expression of this attitude,—which is not an attitude towards the behaviour as such. Let us examine this distinction between attitude and opinion as it applies here. For the moment we may consider a different example.

The attitude towards a soul embraces not just the possibility of a *suffering* soul but conscious life in general. For example, imagine that I am helping someone in a building task. In the course of the work we will employ visual signs and signals of all kinds, e.g. holding up a tool inquiringly or pointing. I will be watching out to see if he is watching *me* – to see that we are working in co-ordination, perhaps, or to check that we are working safely, etc. – and, of course, we will be talking freely about the things that are open to the view of us both. So it is written into everything I do that the other *can see*; and the same

---

[189] Ibid. p. 33.
[190] PI p. 178.

goes for him. My whole orientation towards him – and his orientation towards me – is appropriate to two persons living in a shared visual space. This orientation is not founded on the general *belief* that people can see. The mutual interaction within the visual space is the 'given' *within which* the language-games of seeing are established and their sense determined. Hence I may wonder whether he has seen this or not, or I may notice that he doesn't see so well. But these judgements depend on my living a form of life in which my recognition of sighted-ness is an implicit and pervasive feature of my behavioural and linguistic relations with people, such that the *judgement* of the recognition of sighted-ness is secondary. The 'given' is the inter-subjective[191] mode of life; inter-subjectivity is the attitude. If the attitude were not given, then the application of the concept of seeing to third persons would have to be *rooted* in learned judgements based on observation; but in that case they would not be inter-subjective. The inter-subjective mode is irreducible; it cannot be derived from observation without running into the confusion of treating the determination of mental concepts as *essentially* founded on external criteria (as analysed in the previous section). If I say: 'He's seen me, I must leave', I make this judgement on the basis, for example, that I see him look up and register my presence and start towards me. But when I say he has seen me, I do not mean the string of observations about his movements, nor that I now have certain expectations of his next moves. The sense of what I say depends on my having a concept *seeing* which provides the framework through which I observe his behaviour; and my having the concept *seeing* has in its foundations my attitude towards persons insofar as it shows in my daily uncalculated interactions with them.

Turning again to 'pain', I recognise expressions of pain and expressions of sympathy; and so in what I say and do I show that I *believe* that he is in pain, or that he cares about others in pain. But my understanding of the nature of the state that he is in – and hence my grasp of the sense of what I am saying in making that judgement – is dependent on it being a part of my attitude towards him. For we judge that the person has the concept in the way that its entry into his judgements and his conversation goes together with his attitude, which is characteristic of our form of life. One mode in which the attitude towards a soul shows itself, for example, is in the expression of sympathy: 'it is a primitive reaction to tend to treat the part that hurts when someone else is in pain'.[192] Indeed sympathy is woven in innumerable ways into the patterns of interaction between people. Again, the sympathetic attitude is not directed towards the *behaviour*; it is an

---

[191] Mouncel p. 182.
[192] Z 541.

attitude towards the suffering *person.* We may certainly say that the belief that the person is in pain occasions the sympathy.—It is part of our concept of pain that it is a proper object for sympathy. But that is not because we have determined the nature of pain first and have then formed a concept of sympathy to 'fit' it. For the recognition of pain as warranting sympathy (or shock or revulsion for that matter) is part of our understanding of its nature. The concepts *pain* and *sympathy* are internally related: the grasp of the concept *sympathy* belongs to the grasp of the concept *pain.* And since sympathy is itself a manifestation of the attitude towards a soul, our grasp of the concept pain is partly a function of that attitude. Wittgenstein remarks:

> How am I filled with pity *for this man*? How does it come out what the object of my pity is? (Pity, one may say, is a form of conviction that someone else is in pain.) (PI 287)

Sympathy is not, of course, the only manifestation of this attitude providing a context for the determination of the concept *pain.* As in the case of *seeing*, the grammar of 'pain' is an element in that larger structure: the grammar of 'consciousness'. Pain is a *mode* of consciousness. Only if my relation to the sufferer is part of a comprehensive relation to others as conscious beings am I in a position to recognise his behaviour as an expression of pain.[193] It would be senseless to attribute pain to a creature which exhibited no other manifestations of consciousness. This general recognition of consciousness must be a pervasive feature of my engagement with him. Hence all the different kinds of responses – in virtue of all the different modes in which conscious life is expressed – form the substrate of our recognition of a person as being in pain. It lies, for example, in the way I point to the cause of the pain, or in the way I shout a warning, or in the way I rub or protect the painful place, or in the way I inquire about his pain: what it is like, whether it is becoming intolerable, and so on. Our understanding of 'pain' is rooted in the attitude towards a soul, which is a primitive feature of our form of life.

8 ~ Inter-subjective Concepts as an Extension of Primitive Inter-subjectivity

The attitude towards a soul is a pervasive feature of our form of life having both conceptual and non-conceptual components, i.e. it manifests itself both in what we have to say and in natural behaviour. We may also identify the inter-subjective attitude in *purely* non-linguistic modes in the more primitive arena of the behaviour of animals – though

[193] See Z 532 ff.

we may not wish to call this the attitude towards a *soul*, since that usually also connotes features which, just because of their conceptual nature, are lacking in animals. Thus, when an animal calls out to another, or strikes out, or makes a gesture, or when it engages in play with another, the behaviour is the behaviour towards a another hearing, feeling, seeing, i.e. *conscious*, creature. I emphasise again that this is not to suggest that animals have even a primitive *conception* of the mental life of other animals; rather, it is an *aspect* of animal interactions that we can conceive of them as relations between subjects and not only as relations of a subject to an object. It is a feature of their forms of life that their relations to other sentient creatures is different in kind to their relations to inanimate objects – even mobile ones – and there is no obvious reason why we should not characterise this as an *inter-subjective* relation. The point I wish to make is just this, that *inter-subjectivity* is not essentially a relation between persons possessing concepts, it may also occur on the purely non-linguistic, behavioural level,[194] as in the case of animals (and of course in pre-linguistic children too).

The question now arises whether this behavioural level may be demonstrated to be *logically* more primitive than inter-subjectivity on the conceptual level. Returning to the human form of life, the concept of inter-subjectivity is the concept of an aspect of that form of life that may manifest itself either linguistically or behaviourally. We may argue, then, that it is another of those concepts – like *intention* – where there is the potential to view the linguistic form as an *extension* of the natural form. The interesting question, then, is whether there is an *essential* priority in the transition from the natural to the conceptual components; for if there is, then this adds greater philosophical significance to the proposition that the conceptual mode is an extension of the natural.

There are instances in the life of the human subject when it does seem clear, even in the most direct expressions of subjective states, that there is a conceptual mode at work which has no behavioural analogue. Thus, the 'secondary' use of language to describe subjective qualities – which I have already touched on briefly – have no obvious non-linguistic counterpart. But I think that this must be exceptional. By contrast, it is surely impossible to conceive of a child learning the language-games of seeing and hearing, for example, except in circumstances where the child and the adult share a visual and aural space, this sharing being manifested through pervasive features of their natural modes of interpersonal behaviour. We may argue along similar lines with the concept *pain*: we may not conceive of the child as learning the concept except where it is fully engaged inter-

[194] It might be worth emphasising here that when we speak of *behaviour* we are already *not* speaking of merely physical movement. The concept of behaviour already takes for granted mental concepts.

subjectively with the adult right across the shared aspects of their lives: crying for help, being soothed, etc. As I argued in the previous section, the inter-subjective attitude is the *context* for the formation of concepts.

Now in a great number of contexts, the employment of a concept may *itself* be viewed as the exercise of an attitude in its own right, rather than the exercise of a *judgement*. And no doubt in many cases this attitude will *not* have been anticipated in any pre-conceptual behaviour. This surely applies in the case of the moral attitude (that is, the treatment of others and oneself as moral agents[195]) where, in order to avoid falling into naturalism, we must surely say that what is characteristic in the moral attitude must arise *spontaneously* with the grasp of the concepts. The moral attitude, being primitive to the language-game, therefore has no analogue in non-conceptual primitive behaviour. With this kind of example in mind, there may be a temptation to speculate that the inter-subjective attitude *in general* might have come into being simultaneously with the formation of mental concepts. However, where we are concerned with the most basic features of our form of life, I do not think that the genesis of inter-subjective conceptual attitudes is conceivable except as a function of a child's dispositions as a whole: we judge the child to have mastered the inter-subjective use of language in the context of his larger modes of interpersonal engagement with his fellows. It is the latter which determine our concept of inter-subjectivity at the most fundamental level.

We should remind ourselves again here of the context for this kind of questioning. We are elucidating not so much the concepts of mental life[196] but the concept of the interrelations between subjects, of which the language-games with mental concepts form a part. In my discussion of intention in Chapter 5, my aim was to show that the language-game of expressing intentions is, in a quite fundamental sense, an extension of natural intentionality. This meant that the concept of the language-game of expressing intentions takes for granted the concept of the natural expression of intention. Now of course the recognition of intention in others – which is the same as the recognition of other persons as *agents* – is also a form of inter-subjective understanding: a mode of the attitude towards a soul. Otherwise, it would be reducible to the mere anticipation of physical movements. The recognition of agency is written into the whole way that the child relates to the adult.

---

[195] One may ask what makes the difference between the moral *attitude* and moral *judgements*. I think this is shown in the fact that the attitude is manifested in ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are woven together and pervade our lives. This differs from a mere system of judgements. The point then is that these ways of thinking, feeling and acting are expressed through moral concepts which are not reducible to concepts of any natural phenomena.

[196] And again, we are *not* asking whether the *concept* as such is an extension of primitive behaviour.

For example, it would make little sense to speak of the child as being, through its engagement with the lives of adults, in the process of learning to *speak* unless we already conceived of the child as recognising the intentionality of the adults' behaviour towards him.

In conclusion, the recognition of expressions of subjective states is primitive to our language-games. Moreover, when we make the judgement that this person is in pain, we are already seeing him through the perspective of the attitude towards a soul. This form of judgement adds up to more than the exercise of a verbal technique based on the recognition of a particular phenomenal circumstance. Rather, we are bringing to bear a concept whose sense derives from circumstances part of which are constituted by the inter-subjective attitude that is fundamental to our form of life and which is extended in the development of the language-game. When we *say* that the language-game is inter-subjective, this is an expression of our conception of the relations between persons *as* persons, certain essential features of this language-game being autonomous of the language-games of describing outward manifestations of behaviour.

9 ~ Philosophical Investigation in the Subjective Mode

Finally, we may examine how these considerations bear on our relations to these concepts *within* philosophical investigation. Because the possession of mental concepts is not simply a matter of technique but has to do with the way that the concept is seated in the attitude towards a soul, our relation to the concept is complex – following similar patterns to *intention* and *belief*, as discussed in Chapter 4. In the case of *belief* we saw that the possession of the concept was a part of our whole relation to language; whilst in the case of *intention*, we saw that it was partly a function of the rôle of language-games as *expressions* of intention. We will also have to bring similar such background settings to light when considering the concepts of subjective states. In these cases, however, there is an additional element that may appear puzzling at first sight.

I have said that a distinctive feature of mental concepts is that our understanding of them engages with the subjective states of which – in certain modes of their use, at least – they are an expression. To conceive of someone as being in possession of them is to conceive of certain uses of language as integrated into the subjective mode of the form of life. The possession of any concept is an aspect of the form of life of which it partakes. However, if the subjective mode belongs to the *understanding* of the concept, then it looks

as though the improved understanding of the concept that we look for in philosophy will itself partake of this subjective mode. *Prima facie* this is an uncomfortable position for the philosopher, since it seems to clash with the need for objectivity.

Now there is one apparently obvious solution to this, which I might illustrate by referring again to the 'secondary' use of language to express the quality of a subjective experience. As Wittgenstein points out, secondary uses of language have their source just in what we are *inclined* to say.—It just seems right that *these* words fit *this* experience, and no further justification can be given (or rather, to the extent that further justification can be given, the use is not secondary). Understanding what is said by someone who uses linguistic expressions in this way depends on our *sharing* the reaction; there is no other guide. Now it is essential to such uses of language that there is also a primary use, and that the shared understanding of this primary use is integral to the phenomenon of secondary uses, i.e. it would make no sense to speak of understanding the secondary use if the understanding of the primary use is not also shared.[197] Moreover, primary uses of words are governed by *rules* to the extent that there are, at the very least, right and wrong ways of using them. Nevertheless we cannot say that the secondary uses of language *as such* are governed in the same way by rules, except insofar as they have to be recognisable as secondary use of language. Hence, an account of the grammar of a secondary expression will tell us what *kind* of expression it is, but it will not in itself lead to any further insight into what it means to say, for example, that '[t]uesday is *lean*'.[198] From the point of view of elucidating the grammar of these sorts of expressions, then, it surely does not matter that the subjective aspect of the understanding does not enter into the elucidation, since what we are concerned with is just the *kinds* of propositions that they are. We are not concerned to improve our insight into the particular sense that the uses express, but only into the kind of sense that they have. Applying this to the philosophical understanding of mental concepts, we might feel inclined to employ the same principle: we can eliminate what is grasped on the subjective level, for we only wish to see more clearly the *kind* of concepts that they are, and this can be determined by looking at how their uses bear on the uses of other expressions in given concrete circumstances. But I think a closer examination we show that the cases are not really parallel.

I argued in Chapter 2 that in philosophy we may find accounts of concepts which amount to no more than delineating what propositions are allowed, what connections are

---

[197] PI p. 216.
[198] Ibid. p. 216.

allowed between concepts, which concepts are most closely related to one another, and so on. This is, as it were, a purely formal conception of philosophy. I also argued that this is not an adequate conception, given the nature of philosophical problems, for these arise in response to a puzzlement emerging from *within* our understanding of a concept. Hence the elucidation we require in response to this puzzlement will be one that draws on our understanding of the concept and which should deepen our reflective understanding of it. The disturbing product of the foregoing discussion is that it now looks as if the philosophical understanding of mental concepts depends on what is subjective in our understanding of them, which therefore seems to undermine the objectivity demanded by philosophy.

That this appears to present a difficulty arises, I suspect, because of an inclination to interpret this as harking back to the idea of an understanding depending on subjective *judgement.* But, as I argued in Section 1 of this chapter, this is not the notion of subjectivity that is relevant in this situation; for to say that the language-games with 'pain' depend on their being bound up with both my expressions of pain and my inter-subjective responses to other persons is just to say that *together* they belong to the 'given'. Ultimately, all use of language is without ground, without *justification.* The subjective mode just is a given dimension of our form of life, and is one of the channels through which we 'follow a rule blindly'. Its being part of the way in which language has a rôle in our lives does not imply the founding of language on subjective judgements.

That the demand for objectivity is not compromised by the fact that our understanding of certain concepts lies in the subjective mode may perhaps be illustrated by considering the circumstances under which we judge that a child has a grasp of such concepts. If we are to give a complete account of the circumstances in which we determine the correctness of a child's employment of a mental concept, we too must understand the concept in all the senses that we wish to ascribe to the child. This is reflected in the concrete situation; for observing that a child has got hold of a concept will involve understanding what the child is *saying* – which of course emerges out of our *conversation* with the child. Hence, if establishing that the child has the concept is a factual matter, and if the grasp of the relevant concepts is bound up with the subjective mode of our lives, then we just have to accept that our recognition of the fact that the child understands the concept is partly a function of our own lives as subjects. If having the concepts *at all* involves our subjective relations to things, then our recognition of the facts that show that the child has the concept must engage with this understanding also. The same will

apply at the philosophical level, where reminding ourselves of these same facts will be integral to the elucidation of the language-games in which mental concepts are embedded.

There is nothing especially paradoxical, then, in claiming that the understanding that is required when elucidating the grammars of mental concepts is one that engages with the subjective mode. For if it did not, then the philosophical investigation could not deepen our understanding of the concepts.

10 ~ Conclusion

In this chapter, my intention has been to explore the situation where the seating of a concept, or class of concepts, in our lives is inextricably bound up with the exercise of a fundamental aspect of our form of life, namely with our lives as subjects of experience. This subjectivity enters into the possession of these concepts not just in the case of the subjective linguistic reactions which are amongst the primitive components of language-games, since it also is observed in the way that the language-games are an expression of subjective and inter-subjective dispositions and attitudes, and may also be seen as extensions of the pre-linguistic forms of these dispositions and attitudes. Our understanding of these subjective/psychological concepts partakes of the subjective states of which their deployment is an expression. The possession of any concept only obtains where a person can *speak*, and speaking is 'living a life and speaking out of it'. But living a life is partly a function of our lives as subjects. Hence we are only speaking if there is at least a dimension of our use words that is a function of our lives as subjects. And this applies equally to the reflective understanding of these concepts that we seek in philosophy.

In the next chapter I shall explore these principles as they apply in the analogous cases of the concepts of knowledge, certainty and belief.

Chapter 7 ~ Knowledge, Doubt and Action

1 ~ Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the rôle of certain modes of behaviour in the formation of concepts. This is perhaps most easily understood where we conceive of a language-game as an *extension* of a mode of behaviour; the linguistic expression of intention, for example, being conceived of as an extension of natural intentionality and its expression. In this chapter I shall be examining some further examples, but from a point of view that raises questions about the foundations of language and the problems of knowledge and scepticism that have not hitherto been discussed in this thesis. The focal point will be Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and some recent comment on it.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein is preoccupied, amongst other issues, with the status of a range of propositions seeming to express certainties lying in the foundations of our language-games and in our behaviour, and with the relationships between these propositions, discourse generally, and action. Some authors have found tendencies in these remarks that conflict with his observations on the nature of language as expressed elsewhere in his writings – most especially in the *Philosophical Investigations* – and have found him failing to lay scepticism to rest. Others regard this set of notes as his most sustained treatment of language as rooted in instinctive behaviour, indeed as *extending* his earlier discussions. The tension between these two points of view has given rise to a complex discussion, which I shall make some effort to unravel in this chapter. My interest here will be mainly with the question of the foundations of language-games rather that with scepticism as such.

2 ~ Language as a System of Propositions

In his discussion paper 'Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Propositions', Jonathan Levett[199] claims that there are strands of thought in Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language that tend to undermine his equation of meaning and use. According to Levett, Wittgenstein is committed to '..a general view of language "...as a system of

[199] Jonathan Levett, 'Discussion: Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Propositions', *Philosophical Investigations*, 16:2, April 1993, pp. 154-162. (Levett)

propositions'"[200] and to 'an ontology of propositions, i.e. entities existing independently from any sentential expression they might receive in a language-game'.[201] This, he claims, shows itself especially in the notion of 'hinge propositions' as it is used in *On Certainty*.

Levett's interpretation of Wittgenstein has two principal components. First and foremost is his elaboration of the view he attributes to Wittgenstein that there are certain fundamental propositions that 'stand fast for me,'[202] that these propositions lie in the foundations of our language-games, and indeed that our daily discourse has some kind of logical dependence upon them. These propositions are usually referred to as 'hinge propositions'. Although Wittgenstein only uses the phrase 'hinge proposition' three times to refer to these propositions,[203] it is a convenient phrase which has entered general use, and so I shall follow this convention.[204] Levett is unequivocal about the nature and importance of their rôle:

> Their standing fast in certain contexts is essential to the possibility of discourse. (Levett p.162)

From here Levett argues as follows: Wittgenstein observes that hinge propositions do not express self-evident truths,[205] and in that sense they do not and *cannot* form the cornerstones of a hierarchical system of propositions erected upon them. Rather, their foundational status is recognised in particular contexts where their immovability can be seen in the way in which the propositions of everyday life revolve about them.[206] Perhaps we could express this by saying that they are *assumptions* of our everyday discourse which arise simultaneously with it and do not precede it. This has been referred to as a *holistic* conception of the relations between these propositions,—i.e. as giving each other mutual support.[207] Moreover, it remains a conception of language as a *system* of propositions in as much as the reality of propositions is to be understood principally in terms of the way

---

[200] Ibid. p.158.
[201] Ibid. p.154.
[202] OC 152.
[203] OC 341, 343 & 655.
[204] It is sometimes argued that the phrase 'hinge proposition' is only used by Wittgenstein to refer to a specific class of propositions that stand fast, namely the *weltanschauung* propositions that I identify in Section 3 following. However, I do not believe that the substance of my arguments is affected if it is used to refer to all 'stand fast' propositions. Moreover, it is also used in this way by the commentators I shall be concerned with and certainly belongs with the issues that are in contention.
[205] This point is made by Levett specifically to contradict a position adopted towards Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* by John Cook. See J. W. Cook, 'The Metaphysics of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*', *Philosophical Investigations*, 8:2, April 1985, pp. 81-119. Cook's paper was the stimulus for much of the discussion of *On Certainty* referred to in this chapter, however, I do not intend specifically to examine Cook's analysis of Wittgenstein's position.
[206] Levett pp. 158-159.
[207] See, for example, OC 225.

they form a network with other propositions,—hinge propositions having a special rôle in underpinning this system and maintaining the integrity of the whole. I shall expand upon this observation later.

A most important feature of these propositions is that they are not formulated in everyday speech, for it follows from their status that they cannot themselves be the objects of knowledge or doubt; rather, they are the hinges upon which knowledge and doubt turn. In spite of the necessity of their remaining unspoken, however, Levett argues that they express truths that clearly must be grasped, and indeed grasped in propositional form, for only then can they fulfil their '...peculiar *logical* role in the system of our empirical propositions',[208] i.e. as hinges upon which beliefs pivot. It follows from this that since these propositions cannot be given sensible linguistic expression, Wittgenstein is committed to an ontology of such propositions as essentially 'abstract' entities.[209] Furthermore, because they have no actual use in those contexts, their meaning (though, of course, not their *truth*) must therefore be given independently of use and context.[210] It is here that we are meant to see the deeper conflict between *On Certainty* and the equation of meaning and use that we find in the *Philosophical Investigations.*

Levett's second main contention concerns Wittgenstein's conception of the rôle of instinctive behaviour in relation to the linguistic expression of knowledge and belief. He contrasts his own account with a position put forward by D. J. Orr,[211] who, he claims, takes Wittgenstein to hold that the grasp of these fundamental truths may be *non-propositional*, taking purely behavioural form.[212] According to Levett, what Wittgenstein actually had in mind was not that primitive behaviour itself expresses belief in these fundamental truths – this is the point of contact with the first component of his argument – for if these fundamental beliefs have any logical rôle in supporting our everyday beliefs, then they must themselves have a logical structure, which behaviour *qua* behaviour does not. As Levett remarks: '..only beliefs with some propositional content can have any logical relation to other beliefs',[213] whilst primitive/pre-linguistic behaviour is prior to the rational state. Apparently Orr has misinterpreted Wittgenstein's remarks about primitive, pre-linguistic behaviour[214] in as much as she confuses 'our attitude

[208] OC 136; Levett p. 160.
[209] Levett p. 161.
[210] Ibid. pp. 156-160.
[211] Deborah Jane Orr, 'Did Wittgenstein Have a Theory of Hinge Propositions?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 12:2, April 1989, 134-153. (Orr)
[212] Levett pp. 159-60.
[213] Ibid. p. 160.
[214] Zettel 540 & 541; OC 359 & 475.

towards these truths, and the nature of these truths themselves'.[215] The rôle that Wittgenstein does offer for instinct, by contrast, lies in the form of an *attitude* of belief towards these fundamental propositions. This certainly manifests itself in what we *do*, but behaviour is significant only in so far as it expresses our instinctive *acceptance* of hinge propositions: in what we instinctively do we show our certainty of the truths expressed by hinge propositions.[216] It is this that Orr apparently muddles up with the idea that instinctive behaviour *in itself* can express a truth grasped 'non-propositionally',—which is a confusion.[217] This is Levett's position.

Wittgenstein, at times at least, evidently did acknowledge the intelligibility of the propositions that 'stand fast' for us,—though other remarks contradict this. He also spoke of hinge propositions as belonging to 'the system of our empirical propositions' [218] – though this is an ambiguous phrase, as we shall see later. And so these remarks can fairly readily be made to lend support to Levett's analysis of Wittgenstein's position. Certainly he appears to be sailing dangerously close to such a conception. Nevertheless, whereas Wittgenstein may indeed have been equivocal in his treatment of these propositions, over all Levett's is not an adequate response either to Wittgenstein's remarks on the status of these propositions, or to his conception of the relation between behaviour and linguistic expressions of knowledge, belief and certainty. Indeed I shall argue that the stress Levett places on the idea that Wittgenstein held a view of language as a system of propositions is rooted in his *own* inclination to view language as such a system. It is this prejudice in particular that prevents a proper understanding of the relations between the concepts of language, belief and instinctive behaviour.

3 ~ Meaning and Use, and the Varieties of Hinge Propositions

The idea that hinge propositions, as a class, have no direct use in language-games is simply that in normal discourse the circumstances will not arise where these propositions

---

[215] Levett p.159.

[216] Levett acknowledges that to speak of 'attitudes of belief or certainty' towards hinge propositions cannot be the right phrase since this would involve a *claim* about the proposition that would itself have to be propositional (Levett p.160). However I take it that Levett would agree that the way in which we are disposed towards, or handle, hinge propositions bears comparison with the way in which we are disposed towards, or handle, contingent propositions *in which we believe.* This is how the notion of 'believing attitudes' towards such propositions should be understood. It is part of the general malady in Levett's thinking that whenever we speak of an attitude, it must be something expressed by means of propositions.

[217] Ibid. p.159-160.

[218] See OC 136, for example.

have any employment. Except in quite unusual situations,[219] one will not have occasion to say 'I know this is a hand' or 'The earth has existed for millions of years'. We may then deny the intelligibility of these propositions just on the grounds that, since their utterance has no proper context, they can have no meaning. The problem that then arises for Wittgenstein is that if he allows that nevertheless they *are* intelligible as propositions, even if no additional context can be supplied, then it follows that there exists a class of propositions that have meaning but no use. This evidently is in conflict with the view of meaning worked out in the *Philosophical Investigations.*

On the intelligibility of hinge propositions, Wittgenstein does appear to be equivocal. For example, the following remarks suggest that hinge propositions *are* intelligible – and as straightforward statements of fact:

> I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry. (OC 151)
>
> I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility. (OC 152)

> That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn. (OC 341)

Evidently there would be no sense in saying that a proposition 'stands fast for us' if it lacked intelligibility. Yet, at other times he is just as confident that such propositions have no sense:

> My difficulty can also be shewn like this: I am sitting talking to a friend. Suddenly I say: "I knew all along that you were so-and-so." Is that really just a superfluous, though true, remark?
>
> I feel as if these words were like "Good morning" said to someone in the middle of a conversation. (OC 464)
>
> How would it be if we had the words "They know nowadays that there are over... species of insects" instead of " I know that that's a tree"? If someone were suddenly to utter the first sentence out of all context one might think: he has been thinking of something else in the interim and is now saying out loud some sentence in his train of thought. Or again: he is in a trance and is speaking without understanding what he is saying. (OC 465)
>
> Thus it seems to me that I have known something the whole time, and yet there is no meaning in saying so, in uttering this truth. (OC 466)

But if there is no meaning in uttering the proposition, in what sense can there be a truth at stake here? In fact this remark seems to confirm Levett's interpretation even more

[219] I.e. where a genuine context presents itself, for example where one is trying to re-establish one's grasp of quite fundamental concepts following some mental disturbance or following a stroke.

firmly, since it now looks as if Wittgenstein accepts that there are indeed truths to be grasped but which cannot be formulated intelligibly. Elsewhere, however, he seems to reject the idea that anything is grasped (a truth or a proposition) at any level more elementary than normal discourse; indeed, it is out of a recognition of the difficulties with these propositions that he then looks for the foundations of knowledge and belief – as expressed in normal discourse – in *behaviour*:

> ….As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting. (OC 110)
>
> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)

It is these last remarks that suggest the account of the relation between the linguistic expression of knowledge and instinctive behaviour that Orr supports. I shall return to this in due course, but my immediate purpose is to examine Wittgenstein's equivocation over the nature and status of hinge propositions. Here I shall pursue what I believe to be the most sensible approach, which will be to seek the interpretation that yields the greatest amount of consistency between these remarks.

Whether the admission that hinge propositions are intelligible is in conflict with the view, generally attributed to Wittgenstein, that the meaning of a word is its *use* is not entirely straightforward. In the first place, Wittgenstein states only that the meaning of a word is *usually* though not always its use.[220] Here, 'use' means a *specific* move within a language-game, or the *specific* application of a concept,—leaving it open as to whether or not, in special circumstances, a proposition may have meaning without having a use in this sense.

Alternatively we may wish to stretch the meaning of 'use' to include propositions which have no *direct* application, but which, in the particular circumstances of their utterance, do stand in an intelligible relation to propositions having such applications. In other words, the meaning of hinge propositions will nevertheless be a *function* of the use that ordinary propositions have in everyday circumstances. In the case of hinge propositions, this 'use' may, for a particular purpose, be specifically to reflect some aspect of the language-game that is not made explicit in normal circumstances. This, broadly, is the approach I shall be endorsing.

[220] PI 43.

We should remind ourselves here of a point made in Chapter 4, that the equation of meaning and use should not be treated in a crudely functional way as a reduction to how a proposition can be used to achieve some purpose – as we observe in the simple language-games in the first pages of the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example. The meaning of a word or proposition is its use 'in the language'.[221] Hence, we may trace other kinds of relations between hinge propositions and discourse generally, without departing from what remains essentially a practical view of the nature of language,—and certainly without implying a conception of meaning that is *divorced* from practice.

The justification for such an approach will vary from case to case, for we will find that hinge propositions are not uniform in function. Indeed we should be especially careful to avoid dogmatism about how hinge propositions can acquire meaning. My feeling is that Levett's narrow focus on hinge propositions as links within a *system* is an example of such dogmatism. So let us look more closely for a moment at his conception of the genesis of hinge propositions, and at how they appear to be generated as items that are independent of the concrete employment of the propositions belonging to their parent language-game. I have stated that it is characteristic of hinge propositions that they 'are not formulated in everyday speech', but nevertheless represent truths that seem to be *implied* by everyday discourse. This view is echoed in Wittgenstein's remark:

> I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. (OC 152)

It is important to note that the kind of circumstance in which these truths seem to be implied by everyday discourse is not to be understood in the operational sense that whilst applying propositions in every day circumstances we are inclined to draw these truths as a matter of course out of our speech. Rather, their implication is something that arises only when we reflect on the propositions of everyday discourse in special circumstances, i.e. when doing philosophy – when we are forced to reflect on them by a philosophical sceptic, for example. In other words, it arises precisely when we are *not* employing propositions in ordinary contexts. Our 'discovery' of hinge propositions, then, is something that occurs independently of any concrete exercise of the language-game. This process therefore has two components: 1) in discovering hinge propositions, we are discovering something that is implied by our ordinary propositions, whilst 2) the occasion for this discovery is one that is set apart from the ordinary circumstances in which we

---

[221] Ibid. 43.

employ those propositions. This is the picture of the genesis of hinge propositions that is implicit in Levett's account (and which I believe is also the received view).

Now it is a feature of this situation that, although the truths expressed by hinge propositions are supposed to be *implicit* in everyday propositions, there is a strong sense in which the hinge propositions, once extracted from normal discourse, are then taken to comprise a realm of propositions with something to say about the nature and/or contents of the world *in their own right*. 'The earth has existed for millions of years' and 'I know this is a hand' are evidently treated as propositions corresponding to truths that are able to stand on their own feet,—even if their truth is related to the truth of ordinary propositions. This is constitutive of the sense in which hinge propositions may appear as an extension of a *system* of propositions, and is supported in the idea that hinge propositions are *implied* by,[222] but are not *reducible* to, the propositions of ordinary discourse. I shall return to this distinction very shortly, however my immediate concern is with the influence that this position has on Levett's general attitude towards the status of hinge propositions.

All the varieties of hinge propositions are assumed by Levett to fit the above model. To be sure, he recognises that there are differences amongst them; but he claims that they can all be treated in the same way as far as their rôle as 'hinges' is concerned.[223] The reason why they can apparently all be treated in the same way is simply that they all share the character of being truths in their own right but which nevertheless cannot be given utterance because they lack a real context for their employment. However, I believe that this model is confused and is not the only interpretation that can be made to fit this and other of Wittgenstein's remarks. Moreover, the different varieties of hinge propositions depart from the model in different ways, and so cannot be treated as having the same rôles.

To break down this model, we may begin by questioning Levett's conception of the circumstances in which hinge propositions are discovered, and compare this with the circumstances in which they stand fast for us. I have said that hinge propositions make themselves manifest when we reflect, in no practical or conversational context, upon everyday propositions. We might then expect this also to be the circumstance in which

[222] In fact Levett never says literally that hinge propositions are 'implied' by ordinary discourse, but he does say, for example, that they 'are some way embedded in the assertions and denials that we do make' (Levett p. 161). We may justifiably say, then, that there is a *concept* of implication at work here. We may note further that, within this conception, implication is *itself* treated as a process that may operate independently of any specific context – this being another aspect of the idea of language a system of propositions.

[223] Levett p. 157, footnote.

the propositions stand fast. And of course this is how things are presented by Levett, who construes this standing fast in terms of a recognition by the agent that here is a proposition expressing a truth which is a certainty. But this seems to me to be quite wrong. If the standing fast is not to be merely idle, then it must surely be related to the actual conduct of the language-game.

First of all, we should note that the standing fast of a proposition is not a philosophical position. The context in which hinge propositions stand fast is not in the isolated context of philosophy,—they are not standing fast for the philosopher, who is merely making observations of the language-game. Anything said in philosophy is grammatical in nature. Hinge propositions evidently are not grammatical remarks.[224] It may well be philosophy's responsibility to tell us whether such propositions are intelligible and whether or not it makes sense to doubt them, for these judgements will follow from philosophical reflection on the nature of the language-game. But the actual expression of doubt/scepticism, or the affirmation that they stand fast, is not a philosophical position. To say that hinge propositions cannot be the subject of doubt, for example, is to say that the context for doubt does not exist – the propositions are not intelligible as statements about the world within normal discourse. So if it makes sense to doubt them, and if the doubt is real, then this doubt must arise out of discourse. Likewise, if there is to be any substance to the standing fast of hinge propositions, then this must occur in some kind of active relation to the course of the language-game. The standing fast of the propositions is a phenomenon *within the flow* of discourse. This is their 'use'.

Let us approach this more closely by looking for some broad differences between the ways that that hinge propositions of different kinds stand fast. We may divide hinge propositions into three main categories:[225]

1) *Weltanschauung* propositions such as: 'The earth has existed for millions of years';
2) Existential propositions about physical objects, such as: 'This hand exists', 'The earth exists', 'There are physical objects', etc.;
3) Truistic claims to knowledge such as: 'I know that this is a hand', 'I know my name is HK', 'I know I have never been on the moon', etc.

Starting with *weltanschauung* propositions, it seems to me that the proposition 'the earth has existed for millions of years' is not so much a proposition *implied* by other

[224] In some circumstances they may be 'norms of description' – which comes close to being grammatical in nature (see later in this section).
[225] See Orr p. 147; Levett p. 157, footnote.

propositions[226] – as it were, a fact deduced from them and an additional link in the system of propositions – but is a proposition which *characterises* a language-game. It is a kind of elliptical statement of the language-game as a whole. My reason for saying this is that, although it is a proposition that may have been derived from idle reflection on our language-games of talk about the history of the world, etc., the actual standing fast of the proposition is rooted in a refusal to allow a challenge to the language-game *as a whole.* This can be seen from the fact that a challenge to *it* would be a challenge not just a proposition, nor even to the whole universe of discourse *via* a challenge to the proposition, but would have to be realised in a challenge *across* this whole universe of discourse. As a proposition that stands fast, it does not lie in a contextual vacuum; for the force of the proposition lies precisely in the way it is rooted in its relation to propositions that *are* employed in specific contexts. To place the emphasis on the proposition as an independent item corresponding to a fact derived from, but nevertheless entertainable and challengeable independently of the remainder of the language-game, is surely to distort the relation between the proposition and the language-game as a whole. We may express this relation by saying that the *weltanschauung* hinge proposition is not so much a proposition *implied* by a language-game but is, in a sense, *reducible* to it.[227]

If we now contrast this with the other two categories of hinge proposition, it is not obvious that the latter can be treated in such a way as *summaries* of a language-game. As a result, the connection of sense between these hinge proposition and the ordinary propositions of the language-game is less clear. In fact it is not clear why they should be treated as being *implied* by ordinary discourse at all: if I say 'I hurt my hand whilst gardening yesterday!', does this, without the provision of a further context, imply the proposition 'I have a hand'? I should have thought not. Nevertheless Wittgenstein did, in certain circumstances at least, regard such propositions as intelligible. It is true that he claimed that we cannot be said to *know* these propositions, and that Moore was wrong to say that we do,[228] but in many remarks he also held that hinge propositions of this kind 'stand fast for us', thus accepting their intelligibility. This needs to be explained.

[226] Which is not to say that it cannot be *derived* from them.

[227] I do not especially wish to raise further the question of the *truth* of *weltanschauung* propositions. It follows from this paragraph, I think, that we are not concerned so much with the truth of a *proposition* so much as – what we might prefer to call – the *validity* of a whole way of looking at the world. Perhaps we might say that these propositions are at the boundary of the conceptual and the empirical, but are not less substantially about the world for not being simply statements of fact (see Chapter 2). We might also note that Wittgenstein distinguishes *weltanschauung* propositions from those I am now going on to discuss, and clearly acknowledges that they have to do with our understanding of 'what the world is like' in a way that the others do not (OC 613).

[228] See OC 151, for example.

Wittgenstein describes what standing fast adds up to in a variety of situations, and hence what accepting the intelligibility of the propositions amounts to in those situations. For example, what *looks* like an empirical proposition may actually turn out to be a 'norm of description'.[229] Or, it may be that the attempt to deny the truth of a hinge proposition results from the failure to understand properly the concepts articulated in it.[230] Sometimes they *are* empirical propositions, but accepted without special testing;[231]—indeed there are 'countless general empirical propositions that count as certain for us'.[232] The attempt to doubt hinge propositions may even be a sign of mental disturbance.[233] But none of these correspond to the principal (non-*weltanschauung*) cases of what Wittgenstein has in mind when he speaks of such propositions as 'standing fast'. This, I believe, has more to do with the way they reflect something that remains solid in the *conduct* of the language-games and which supports the deployment of propositions that *are* open to doubt or query.

That this represents a departure in Wittgenstein's account of hinge propositions starts to become apparent in his equivocation over the apparently empirical nature of the propositions,—at first saying that hinge propositions *are* empirical propositions, only to conclude that, though they take the *form* of empirical propositions, they are *not* empirical after all:

> That is, we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if making judgements is to be possible at all. Or again: I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one. (OC 308)

This passage is not puzzling if it is taken to mean that there can only be language at all if there are many propositions about which questions of doubt simply are not raised. But it *is* puzzling if we regard 'no doubt can exist' as saying the same as that the propositions 'stand fast' (i.e. where this means that the truth of these propositions is recognised as being unassailable). For if, on the one hand, making judgements *is* 'possible', then we cannot but accept the relevant hinge propositions as standing fast; but if, on the other hand, making judgements is *not* possible (whatever that means!), then we could not even get so far as to try to doubt them since nothing would mean anything anyway. The problem that this gives rise to is that, since it would appear to follow from this that there

---

[229] Ibid. 167. This may be an example of a fact that has been integrated into a concept, i.e. that has been used to *determine* a concept. See Chapter 2.
[230] Ibid. 114, 126, 369 & 456.
[231] Ibid. 136, 137, 401 but 402.
[232] Ibid. 273.
[233] Levett p. 157; OC 155.

can be no such thing as an intelligible hinge propositions *not* standing fast (since it would mean nothing and so not exist), it is not clear what it can mean to say that it *does* stand fast either. So either we can step back from the idea of hinge propositions as standing fast and say simply that there are propositions which, if they are ever uttered, are just not questioned at all; or, if we do wish to hang on to the idea of the propositions as standing fast, then the account of 'standing fast' needs to be modified. The solution to this must surely be that the proposition's standing fast cannot simply be that the truth of it is in the circumstances recognised to be unassailable; rather: that the hinge propositions, when offered, are regarded as standing fast is a sign not so much of their certainty but of the 'force' within our lives of the language-game to which the propositions relate. Affirming their certainty is, as it were, simply the last resort in affirming the integrity of the language-game as a whole, and that is all.

In fact, this is connected with the idea that if a person tries to doubt certain propositions then he shows that he does not understand its concepts. In the first place, a person's grasp of a concept is manifested in his ability to make correct judgements.[234] From this point of view, the hinge proposition is the limiting case of a true proposition where, as it were, it coincides with a simple expression of the grasp of the concept. The invitation to treat the proposition as more than *just* a definition is to connect the grasp of the proposition's sense with a rejection of a wholesale doubt of the truth of the ordinary propositions that revolve about it. 'If this is not true, nothing is true' coincides with 'I can talk sense about this', so that the rejection of a challenge to the latter doubles as a rejection of a challenge to the former.

If we like, we can call this defence of the language-game the 'use' of a hinge proposition. In an obvious sense it is not a normal move *within* the language-game of which it is intended to be a defence. And yet it is a move which we may find ourselves called upon to make in a concrete situation if presented with a sceptical challenge. Quite apart of whatever we may think of the intelligibility of hinge propositions, their use remains the instinctive defence of the language-game that most easily comes to hand. I shall return to this point shortly.

We may see how Wittgenstein develops this thought. His anxiety over this is worth quoting in full:

> I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only proposition of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with

[234] See PI 242.

> language).—This observation is not of the form "I know...". "I know..." states what *I* know, and that is not of logical interest. (OC 401)
>
> In this remark the expression "propositions of the form of empirical propositions" is itself thoroughly bad; the statements in question are statements about material objects. And they do not serve as foundations in the same way as hypotheses which, if they turn out to be false, are replaced by others. (...und schreib getrost "Im Anfang war die Tat"[235]) (OC 402)
>
> To say of man, in Moore's sense, that he *knows* something; that what he says is therefore unconditionally the truth, seems wrong to me.—It is the truth only inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of his language-games. (OC 403)
>
> I want to say: it's not that on some points men know the truth with perfect certainty. No: perfect certainty is only a matter of their attitude. (OC 404)
>
> But of course there is still a mistake even here. (OC 405)

My feeling is that Wittgenstein is trying to move towards this position: although our focus is directed towards the propositions, it is not the propositions as such that are important as what they reflect of what is lying at the bottom of the language-game. This is something belonging more to our attitudes and/or our actions. Indeed, if the doubts at the hinge proposition level are treated as real, then it is the *form of life* that is made vulnerable, not just my confidence in the propositions used to express the certainties and the myriad of ordinary propositions that appear to depend on them:

> ....But what could make me doubt whether this person here is N.N., whom I have known for years? Here a doubt would seem to drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos. (OC 613) [236]
>
> That is to say: If I were contradicted on all sides and told that this person's name was not what I had always known it was (and I use "know" here intentionally), then in that case the foundation of all judging would be taken away from me. (OC 614)[237]

It is not so much that *if* the hinge propositions cease to stand fast for a speaker, the language-game will collapse; rather, saying that they are failing to stand fast (insofar as it is possible to get so far as saying this) would be *the same* as saying that his handling of the language-game is already crumbling. For if we are plunged into chaos, then this cannot follow from hinge propositions having been shown to be *false*, since the hinge propositions must fall into the same unintelligible chaos and so would not remain truth-functional. The failure of hinge propositions to stand fast, then, will be not be a falsification of them; neither will the ordinary propositions that appear to rotate about them have been shown to be intelligible but without foundation. To say that a hinge proposition stands fast *is* to say (and this is a grammatical remark) that if we try deny it

[235] Cf. Goethe, *Faust I*, opening scene in the Studierzimmer.

[236] We might also note here that in OC 613 Wittgenstein specifically differentiates between *weltanschauung* and truism type hinge propositions on this point,—the challenge to a *weltanschauung* hinge propositions being less damaging to our form of life and handled differently.

[237] See also OC 370.

we are already losing our grip on the reality of discourse and indeed of reality itself. If hinge propositions really are genuine propositions (i.e. spoken out of the life of a person), then 'I don't know that this hand exists or that there are physical objects', 'I do not know that this is a hand', 'I don't know whether I have been on the moon', etc. are not the propositions of philosophical scepticism but of someone losing his ability to engage in sensible discourse,—where his use of language is disengaging with his active relations to the world (or worse, where his active relations to the world as a whole are disintegrating). We do not have to allow that these denials belong to a rational state; they belong to an irrational one, but a state nevertheless (i.e. they are not just linguistic confusions or mistakes,—just as we saw in Chapter 4, that the failure of the child to get to grips with temporal relations, for example, is not just a matter of the failure to get the hang of the use of certain expressions).

In conclusion, Wittgenstein makes it quite clear that the standing fast of hinge propositions has to do with how the way we instinctively *act* is a fundamental element in the language-game:

> If I say "Of course I know that that's a towel" I am making an *utterance*. I have no thought of a verification. For me it is an immediate utterance.
> I don't think of past or future. (And of course it's the same for Moore, too.)
> It is just like directly taking hold of something, as I take hold of my towel without having doubts. (OC 510)
> And yet this direct taking-hold corresponds to *sureness*, not to a knowing.
> But don't I take hold of a thing's name like that too? (OC 511)

If 'I know this is a towel' means anything, it is not to make a knowledge claim in the ordinary sense;[238] it is not a proposition implied by the language-game, the truth of which we recognise as fundamental. It is just a way of refusing to allow doubt a foothold at the level in the language-game where action and not reason is of the essence.

Now as a way of rejecting the sceptical questioning, asserting propositions may be misguided – or at least unwise – inasmuch as it invites treating the propositions as attempts to state genuine facts. From this point of view, it may be better to follow the example that Wittgenstein set in another remark:

> The queer thing is that even though I find it quite correct for someone to say "Rubbish!" and so brush aside the attempt to confuse him with doubts at bedrock,—nevertheless, I hold it to be incorrect if he seeks to defend himself (using, e.g., the words "I know"). (OC 498)

[238] Ibid. 477.

On the other hand, all that a hinge proposition does too is brush aside the attempt to doubt at bedrock. As I have already said, the use of propositions to effect this 'brushing aside' is very natural, whilst being at the same time an affirmation of the language-game as it is played. Hence there may be greater wisdom in accepting this fact, whilst qualifying it with the recognition that propositions are not used only to state facts – as I have tried to demonstrate.

We might note, also, that since the standing fast of a (non-*weltanschauung*) hinge proposition is at most a move made from *within* a language-game in defence of a sceptical challenge *on* the language-game, and is not the assertion of a fact determined by the philosopher, it is not in any sense a proof of the existence of the world. It is not a proof directed against a global scepticism, neither does it contain any acknowledgement of the intelligibility of such scepticism. 'The earth exists' is not a fact implied by normal discourse, and so is not the answer to any question that can be asked either.

A central difference that is emerging between my position and Levett's is in my suggestion that the importance of action to the integrity of the language-game lies rather more deeply within the *form of life* than just in the way we handle individual propositions (i.e. our *attitudes* towards such propositions). This difference widens with Levett's refusal to allow that natural behaviour, insofar as it may itself be regarded as *expressive* of belief, can be supportive of the language-game. This will be the topic of the next section.

4 ~ Propositional and Non-propositional Belief

One solution to the problems arising from the idea that language is a system of propositions, necessarily linked to real yet unformulable hinge propositions, has been to argue that below the level of propositional belief is another mode of belief which is expressed just in the way we *act*. This mode of belief is then conceived of as providing the support for the propositions of everyday discourse that would otherwise have been provided by the problematic hinge propositions. This is consistent with the point of view I have tried to develop in the previous section. However, there, when I spoke of *action*, I was speaking not of non-linguistic behaviour, but of the *persistence*[239] with which we make the *judgements* that we do. In the present case, by contrast, we are concerned with the possibility of viewing propositions as linguistic analogues to a fundamental order in our non-linguistic behaviour. Hence we will be developing a quite different sense in which

[239] Cf.: 'I obey the rule *blindly*' (PI 219).

the propositions of normal discourse are supported by actions. Wittgenstein makes many remarks that appear to be consistent with this view, of which the following are obvious examples:

> My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on.—I tell a friend e.g. "Take that chair over there", "Shut that door", etc., etc. (OC 7)

> "An empirical proposition can be *tested*" (we say). But how? and through what? (OC 109)
> What *counts* as its test?—"But is this an adequate test? And, if so, must it not be recognisable as such in logic?"—As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting. (OC 110)

> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)

A proponent of this solution is D. J. Orr, who argues that belief expressed in instinctive behaviour can substitute for belief expressed in propositions, and so form an ungrounded, i.e. non-rational, foundation for propositional beliefs.[240] Levett's riposte, as has been noted, is that 'belief' expressed in behaviour cannot give support to propositions, since it can have no logical structure and so can have no logical connection with them. The primary assumption in Levett's position here is that behavioural content can only 'support' propositional belief if there is a logical relation between them. This can be challenged,—which will mean developing a different conception of 'support' from Levett's. The *crucial* issue will be the relation between linguistic expressions of belief and the behaviour that is supposed to correspond to the truths expressed in hinge propositions, not the truths expressed in ordinary contingent propositions. For the moment, however, we will start by examining the latter and their analogues in behaviour.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of a central point made in Chapter 4, that the concept of belief – along with many other concepts of phenomena within human life – has a wider scope than being the concept just of something done *in* language. Belief is a phenomenon of human life manifested both propositionally and non-propositionally; it is a relation to ourselves and to the world showing both in what we *say* and in what we *do*. Hence there is no metaphor in judging from a dog's behaviour that he *believes* he is going to be taken for a walk; the concept *belief* is just as at home here as when a child expresses in the same in words.

---

[240] Orr p. 141.

The concepts of belief and action are internally related throughout, for the propositional expression of belief depends on the relations of propositions to actions.— It is not something 'made possible' by an already given logical relation between a proposition and reality, as if once the relation between propositions and reality is established we can then 'use' them to express our beliefs.[241] The relations that propositions have to reality is a function of the rôle they have in our lives. This lies in the way in which they belong to how we *act*. And the pertinent dimension of this action is the natural, behavioural expression of belief. The very constitution of propositions is a function of the context of human action; for what makes what we say an expression of anything at all – and an expression of *belief* in particular – is to be found in its engagement with the rest of our lives.

By contrast, it is a manifestation of the conception of language as a system of propositions that identifies the essence of belief in an *attitude* towards propositions rather than in the way that propositions belong to our attitude towards the world. This is not to deny that we may, in special circumstances, speak of belief as an attitude towards propositions – for example, if we are trying to explain the use of the word to a foreigner who already has the *concept* belief embedded in his understanding of 'proposition' – only this will not provide us with a fundamental understanding of the nature of belief and its relation to behaviour. Levett remarks that:

> It is important here not to confuse our attitude towards these truths, and the nature of these truths themselves given the role that Wittgenstein ascribes to them. It has recently been suggested, for example, that these truths are to be understood as 'non-propositional', their nature to be spelled out in purely behavioural terms.[242] However, I think insofar as we have any grasp of the nature and role of these truths we must think of them as propositional. (Levett p. 159)

Levett takes it for granted here that if non-linguistic behaviour is to provide the substrate for the beliefs expressed in language, then it must be by virtue of *truths* grasped non-propositionally. It is at this point that he makes the further assertion that, since anything grasped non-propositionally will fail to achieve a logical relation to any proposition, such 'truths' must be in a propositional form after all – albeit an abstract one. This conclusion is inevitable if we try to characterise non-propositional belief in terms of the grasp of *truths*. Wittgenstein does make some remarks that might be

---

[241] See Chapter 4, Section 4.
[242] Orr p. 141.

interpreted in this way;[243] but this is not a necessary interpretation, and it is certainly not a necessary formulation of the concept of non-propositional belief.

It surely falls within the general *concept* of belief that a propositional belief may be conceived of as being 'supported' by non-propositional modes of belief. For within the embrace of the concept of belief, the relation between beliefs as expressed in behaviour and beliefs as expressed linguistically does not have to be a 'logical' one. The belief-expressing behaviour that pervades our lives provides the framework for the expression of propositional beliefs: the possibility of expressing beliefs in propositions depends, as I have noted above, on their being embedded in a life characterised by belief expressing behaviour. This is where the relation of support between behavioural and propositional belief lies and which we now need to define more closely. To demonstrate this, we need to show how the *identity* of a proposition as expressing a belief is dependent on its being seen within the context of such belief-expressing behaviour. Note, again, that at this point in the argument, we are not restricting ourselves to the support that is offered to expressions of belief by behaviour of the kind that is supposed to correspond to hinge propositions, but to the general situation where linguistic beliefs are surrounded by behavioural expressions of belief – beliefs that could be expressed propositionally but happen not to be. We should also note that our concern here is with beliefs that are directly to do with our relations to our immediate environment, rather than those where the connection between the linguistically expressed belief and any specific modes of behaviour is more attenuated. What we require, then, is to show that the concept of a propositionally expressed belief is the concept of something given against the background of specific natural expressions of belief (or where such expressions are always possible).

We might begin by considering behaviourally expressed belief of the kind that we might observe in the life of an animal – just to distinguish it clearly from linguistic modes of belief. A dog hesitates and falters before jumping across a stream. Perhaps it runs up and down until it finds a narrower section. Eventually it finds one and jumps confidently. Here it would be quite natural to say that when the dog is hesitant it *doubts*, and when it is confident it *believes*, that it can jump the stream. Again I emphasise that this way of speaking is not metaphorical: our concept of belief is determined just as much in these circumstances as when belief is expressed linguistically. We commonly predicate beliefs of pre-linguistic children and dumb animals where we see forms of behaviour that are, in

[243] OC 403, for example.

obvious ways, shared with ourselves as language users. Their lives are a constant stream of just such behaviour.

Now the same goes for the life of linguistic human beings,—the difference of course being that the flow of life is penetrated by speech.[244] I too may find myself running up and down the same river bank: here I may say, 'No, I can't jump this'; there, 'Maybe'; and further on, 'Yes, here I can'. These are all expressions of belief. They are strictly analogous to the behaviour of the dog; indeed the person may behave just like the dog but without speaking at all, even 'to himself'. But now, in what circumstances do we regard (or judge) that the utterances of the person *are* expressions of belief? In the situation I have just described, the utterances themselves will normally be taken as sufficient. But what if I constantly acted in contradiction to what I said? Or what if there were never any observable connection between my speech and my actions? What right would we have to say that my remarks were still expressions of belief? Indeed, at the limit, what right would we have to say that I am still speaking intelligibly at all? The attitude towards my utterances, that they are expressions of belief, is an attitude that takes what I say in the context of my actions. In other words, there is an internal connection between my behaviour and my words, but not in the sense that the *sense* of my words is logically dependent on the 'sense' of my behaviour.—The behaviour does not have a logically structured content related to the content of the propositions that it supports – which Levett rightly points out is incoherent. Rather, the *judgement* that these words express this belief is internally (i.e. *logically*) related to the *judgement* that they occur within these patterns of behaviour: our conception of any given utterance as the expression of a belief is logically related to our conception of its surrounding behaviour as expressing the same and/or related beliefs. It is in this sense that we may say that the beliefs expressed in the surrounding behaviour 'support' those expressed linguistically. Non-propositional belief supports propositional belief, because what makes a proposition the expression of belief that it is is the context of non-propositional modes of belief-expressing behaviour which are its natural surroundings.

An important point about this way of looking at the relation between non-linguistic and linguistic expressions of belief is that it is not a question of the linguistically expressed belief being *justified* by reference to the underlying non-linguistic form – either from the point of view of a subjective 'justification' on the part of the agent, or in the context of a 'transcendental' account of the possibility of linguistically expressed belief. For in looking

---

[244] See Chapter 4.

to the behavioural surroundings of linguistically expressed beliefs, we are not engaging in a traditional foundationalist account of language. We are simply examining the relation between natural and linguistic expressions of belief as they fall within our concept of the expression of belief. My argument is that it belongs to the grammar of the concept of the linguistic expression of belief that it is surrounded by non-linguistic, behavioural expressions of the same and connected beliefs. It is important to emphasise this, since the discussion of these issues can confuse these two approaches. What is at issue is the constitutive rôle of behaviour within that larger conception of belief which *also* contains the concept of its linguistic expression.

Of course, a speaker may well *reflect* upon his actions and allow his instinct or inclination to act in one way or another to influence the formulation of his verbal expressions of belief. This also belongs to our conception of the circumstances in which beliefs may originate, and so it adds to the senses in which a person's natural impulses to act in a specific way may support his verbal expressions of belief. However, this is a comment on how the transition may be made from non-linguistic to linguistic expressions of belief; it does not depend on the idea of a 'logical' relation between linguistically and non-linguistically expressed beliefs. Neither is it a case of the agent finding a non-propositional 'ground' for his propositional beliefs.

The behaviour that surrounds linguistic expressions of belief is pervaded by natural expressions of belief that might otherwise, and in appropriate circumstances, have been expressed linguistically. This is integral to our concept of belief. The remaining issue is whether within this flow of behaviourally expressed beliefs we can intelligibly identify those behaviourally expressed beliefs which are supposed to correspond to the beliefs or certainties expressed in hinge propositions; and if not, whether such behaviour may play any other rôle in determining our concept of certainty. These are the crucial issues.

5 ~ Doubt, Certainty and Action

Wittgenstein distinguishes between 'comfortable' and 'struggling' certainty:

> One might say: "'I know' expresses *comfortable* certainty, not the certainty that is still struggling." (OC 357)

The 'I know' he refers to here is the kind we find in Moore (in this case, 'I know that it's a chair'[245]), not the 'I know' we use in ordinary circumstances. It is the comfortable certainty of hinge propositions, which apparently has it origins in the *intrinsic* certainty of human action. The certainty that is struggling, on the other hand, is the certainty that is expressed in the ordinary course of events (linguistic or non-linguistic) – the certainty which might otherwise have been a doubt and which always remains open to challenge (or at least, where challenge is always *intelligible*).

Elizabeth Wolgast makes much use of this distinction in her account of the dilemma that Wittgenstein found himself in in *On Certainty*, namely that as soon as we take what is comfortably certain and express it in words, it cannot but be exposed to the possibility of doubt and so is immediately transformed into a struggling certainty.[246] However, before going on to examine Wolgast's attempt to resolve this dilemma, I would like to look briefly at one other way of making a distinction between comfortable and struggling propositional certainties;—one which has the attraction of allowing for the intelligibility of comfortable certainties, but unfortunately does not ultimately resolve the difficulty confronting us here.

In the ordinary course of daily life, we frequently make explicit expressions of certainty, e.g. 'I know that the book was here this morning, I saw it', or 'I am certain no one saw me', etc. These are clearly examples of struggling certainties, for it is easy to see how they might be challenged. However, the basis for any such challenge will be statements which, for the purpose of making the challenge, are not *themselves* challenged. For example, I may be asked whether I am sure it was this morning that I entered the room and saw the book, or whether I wasn't getting it muddled with the time I popped back into the office the evening before. Here it is not challenged that I did in fact see the book. *That* will be a certainty that is part of the *context* for the challenge, and *any* intelligible challenge will have such certainties as their context. If, on the other hand, any of *these* certainties is challenged, then it will just be that the *context* of the original challenge will have changed, and other certainties will have arisen in the foundations of the new challenge. This provides us with a perfectly intelligible way of making a distinction between comfortable and struggling certainties, namely a context based distinction in which struggling certainties are those treated as vulnerable to challenge, whilst comfortable certainties are those which are treated as the basis of any such challenge (or which are cited in the course of making statements expressing struggling certainties). The distinction is

[245] OC 355.

[246] See, for example, Wolgast1 p. 164.

therefore a relative one in which it is the rôle of the propositions *in context* that determines what is comfortable and what is struggling.

However we should also note that this distinction is not one in which the comfortable certainties correspond to hinge propositions. Rather, it is a distinction arising *within* the class of propositions that Wolgast counts as struggling certainties; that is, it applies to that class of propositions that *are* cited during normal discourse. Nevertheless it does raise an important issue, for it suggests that we ought to be wary of speaking of the 'challengeability' of propositions – as Wolgast seems to – as if that were a property of propositions outside any context,—as if it were an *intrinsic* property of propositions. This is harmful firstly because it is another encouragement to the idea of language as a *system* of propositions. It is also problematic to the extent that it carries, as a corollary, the idea that in order to establish certainty – either in propositions or in actions – it has to shown to be an intrinsic property. This is a theme that will emerge in the following discussion.

Returning to Wolgast, she examines one attempt to resolve the dilemma over comfortable and struggling certainty which appeals to the idea that certainty is a *form of life* – a move already suggested by Wittgenstein, though with little conviction.[247] If successful, this would enable comfortable certainty to be removed from the linguistic to the non-linguistic sphere, thereby placing it beyond the reach of linguistic scepticism. Wolgast rejects this solution, but not for the right reason, in my view. She argues that we cannot remove this problem by invoking 'certainty as a form of life', since, for one thing, we cannot describe the mode of life as expressing comfortable certainty without *that* being a move in the language-game, thus returning us to a struggling certainty. For example, if we observe a person acting with comfortable certainty, we can always ask what this certainty is 'based on'.[248] According to Wolgast, the fact that we are able to ask this means that we have engaged with the agent and are therefore participants in the language-game. In so doing we are making explicit what he is certain about and so opening it to question, with the result that it is turned into a struggling certainty once more. Hence it is not possible to observe a comfortable certainty neutrally in behaviour without making it into a certainty expressed in language.[249] She concludes that comfortable certainty cannot be 'buried' in the certainty of action:

> The burial ceremony is empty. Even to speak *about* their certainty is to assert them by implication, and that means bringing them back into the game. (Wolgast1 p. 159)

[247] See OC 358.
[248] Wolgast1 p. 160.
[249] Ibid. p. 160.

> Unlike a person's hope, which can be ascribed to him as part of a description, someone's certainty involves the speaker and his own judgement....With ascriptions of certainty, our own evaluations enter in. (Wolgast1 p. 164)

Having denied that linguistically expressed comfortable certainties can be grounded in analogous certainties expressed in behaviour, Wolgast is then able to isolate hinge propositions from any behavioural context: we no longer have to try to understand how they might have a 'use' (in the way that I have tried to do), the nature of which has to do with their relation to the bedrock of human action.—Wittgenstein would have been better off placing less emphasis on them.[250] Moreover, Levett would have found less to make an issue of and certainly less scope for imputing to Wittgenstein a view of language as a system of propositions. She can then conclude that hinge propositions are just 'relics' of little significance:[251]

> It seems to me more apt to characterize the comfortable certainties as curiosities, as relics in a philosophical museum, than to try to give them a role in some dynamical system of propositions. Why should we think that ordinary language, and the usual language-game of certainty, needs them in order to exist? Put this way, it seems obvious that we should not. Their role as foundational and structurally necessary is a piece of mythology. (Wolgast1 p. 165)

I certainly do not wish to give them such a rôle (as Levett does). But I do think there is something wrong if this is taken to imply that action at bedrock therefore has no rôle in our *conception* of the expression of certainty (linguistic or otherwise). I believe that Wolgast's inability to recognise this lies in her failure to distinguish properly the nature of the observations that are being made of bedrock action and its relation to linguistic expressions of certainty; for these observations are *conceptual*, not *participatory*. We are not restating the agent's certainty, just observing that this is what he *does*. In other words, we are describing the behavioural context for language use. We are making a conceptual link between (what for the moment we shall suppose to be) the comfortable certainty expressed in behaviour and that expressed in propositions. It is quite irrelevant to this whether the certainty expressed in behaviour is 'based' on anything. For if – following Wolgast – our recognition of *that* stimulates us into asking 'what did he based his belief on?',[252] all that shows is that for the moment we have *left* the conceptual investigation in

[250] Ibid. p. 165.
[251] Note that Wolgast's conclusion is echoed in Wittgenstein's remark: 'Does my telephone call to New York strengthen my conviction that the earth exists? Much seems to be fixed, and it is removed from the traffic. It is so to speak shunted onto an unused siding.' (OC 210) But this is not enough to sanction their radical dismissal.
[252] Wolgast1 p. 160.

favour of participating in the language-game,—we have moved from a position of *not* asserting the certainties, to becoming *accomplices* to their assertion.

The purpose of Wolgast's argument was to show that we cannot remove comfortable certainty (*qua* hinge propositions) to the non-linguistic sphere, with the conclusion that there is nothing of substance in behaviour that can provide support – from a place beyond doubting – to our normal discourse and struggling certainties. But the lesson I wish to draw from the failure of this argument is not that we should return to the idea that comfortable certainties *are*, after all, expressed in behaviour and *can* fulfil the rôle that Wolgast denies. Rather, I will argue that behaviour at bedrock *is* relevant to the integrity of the language-game, to linguistic competence and to the concept of certainty,—only that this will not be by claiming that certainty is *expressed* or *contained* in some way in behaviour at bedrock. So I intend, firstly, to deny the intelligibility of the idea that behaviour at bedrock is an expression of certainty, and then to show how, in spite of this, behaviour at bedrock is nevertheless an important component of our *concept* of the expression of certainty.

We should note here that what I am denying is not that certainty may be expressed in behaviour in certain contexts. Indeed we may also apply to action, *mutatis mutandis*, the relative distinction between comfortable and struggling propositional certainties which I explained above. What I shall be arguing against is the notion that certainty is an intrinsic property of action,—which would then apply to action at all levels, even at 'bedrock'.

The principal remarks of Wittgenstein's that show that he thought of comfortable certainty as something rooted directly in instinctive reactions (either in linguistic reactions of in non-linguistic behaviour) are:

> Doubting and non-doubting behaviour. There is the first only if there is the second. (OC 354)
>
> Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well.) (OC 358)
> But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC 359)
>
> I really want to say that a language-game is only possible if one trusts something (I did not say "can trust something"). (OC 509)
> If I say "Of course I know that that's a towel" I am making an *utterance*. I have no thought of a verification. For me it is an immediate utterance.
> I don't think of past or future. (And of course it's the same for Moore, too.)
> It is just like directly taking hold of something, as I take hold of my towel without having doubts. (OC 510)
> And yet this direct taking-hold corresponds to a *sureness*, not to a knowing.

But don't I take hold of a thing's name like that, too? (OC 511)

But why *am* I so certain that this is my hand? Doesn't the whole language-game rest on this kind of certainty?

Or: isn't this 'certainty' (already) presupposed in the language-game? Namely by virtue of the fact that one is not playing the game, or is playing it wrong, if one does not recognise objects with certainty. (OC 446)

....As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting. (OC 110)

Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (OC 204)

These remarks are emphatic that what lies at the bottom of the language-game is a certainty or a sureness or a trust – or whatever we like to call it – which is manifested either in the way we utter certain propositions as standing fast for us, *or* in the way we make ordinary judgements,[253] *or* in the surrounding behaviour in which the use of language is embedded. I have dealt with the first two of these in earlier sections, and so my interest now is principally with the last. What concerns me about speaking of the bedrock of non-linguistic behaviour as 'non-doubting' is that it makes it look as if certainty were of the *essence* of action, that it were *intrinsic* to action: as if normal action were the very expression of certainty and *doubt* in essential conflict with it,—the exception that proves the rule. But it seems to me that it only makes sense to speak of any behaviour as non-doubting or certain if it might otherwise be replaceable by a doubt or an expression of uncertainty. And that means that we can, in any case, only speak of the expression of certainty in behaviour *at all* where it is of the struggling kind.

It is not difficult to see how we might be driven to think of certainty as being of the essence of action, just because there is an obvious sense in which doubts can only be raised in the midst of the flow of life, i.e. where there is already a surrounding of certainty. And at first sight it is tempting to say that this (relative) certainty must go right down to bedrock;—indeed the deeper it goes the more it appears to be the epitome of certainty. It would seem that without a layer of comfortable certainty that *cannot* be convertible to doubting behaviour, there is no bulwark against the possibility of falling into a pervasive state of doubt expressed in every waking movement. It seems to be a necessity to characterise behaviour *as such* as either certain, or confident, or non-doubting,

[253] Cf. 'I obey the rule *blindly*' (PI 219).

or unhesitating. But there is surely something wrong with the very idea of such pervasive concepts of doubt or certainty.[254]

The way out of this impasse must be to recognise that at bedrock what we have is just *action itself*, unqualified by any further terms. *Action* is a fundamental concept in its own right; it does not stand in need of qualification in terms of certainty, or non-doubting, or lack of hesitation, or sureness, or trust. These are conceptions of action only applying in specific contexts and which take for granted the concept of action in its unqualified form. What underlies both doubt and certainty is what we might call the *fundamental coherence* of our primary activity,[255]—of behaviour at bedrock. This distinction, between the level at which the language-games of knowledge and certainty are constituted and the underlying coherence that they presuppose,[256] is, I believe, what Malcolm is struggling to express and which he refers to as the 'fundamental thing':

> This fundamental thing is so fundamental that it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to describe it in words. One would *like* to characterise it in mental terms – to call it knowledge, or belief, or conviction, or certainty, or acceptance, or confidence, or assumption. But none of the expressions fit. All of them have their appropriate application *within* various language-games. Whereas Wittgenstein is trying to call attention to something that underlies all language-games. (Malcolm1 p. 17)

Wittgenstein speaks in a similar vein of the 'thing that really matters':

> If the shopkeeper wanted to investigate each of his apples without any reason, for the sake of being certain about everything, why doesn't he have to investigate the investigation? And can one talk of belief here (I mean belief as in 'religious belief', not surmise)? All psychological terms merely distract us from the thing that really matters. (OC 459)

But I do not agree with Malcolm that the reason why these expressions do not fit is because there are no words to describe what 'underlies all language-games'. As I have argued at length, there is a language-game of talking about the various language-games and their behavioural context.[257] In observing the behavioural context for a language-game, we are not obliged to try to step outside all language-games and provide ourselves with a transcendental perspective on them, which inevitably results in the failure –

[254] This is not to contradict the point that doubt requires a surrounding of behaviour and propositions that are certain. Rather, the surrounding of certainty is certainty of the struggling kind, whilst *this*, as I shall go on to argue, requires a context of behaviour at bedrock of which it can add nothing to say that *it* expresses certainty.
[255] And which of course extends throughout our behaviour.
[256] That the *concept* of them 'presupposes', not that the language-game itself contains an *assumption*.
[257] This attitude is reflected in Wittgenstein's remark quoted earlier (OC 446) that one is playing the language-game wrong if one does not recognise objects with certainty. This is not a transcendental observation but a grammatical remark within our concept of the language-game – though in the present context my intention is to argue that we cannot take the concept of certainty down into the bedrock of human action.

predicted by Malcolm – to construct the transcendental concepts required to articulate this perspective. Neither are we in the position of trying to provide the foundations of a given language-game from *within*, which *would* mean taking for granted the very concepts one is trying to provide a foundation for. No, all we have to do is to recognise that underlying the language-games of doubt and certainty is just the active life. We may wish to say that this forms the solid base which makes sureness and certainty possible, and that without this base the broad stock of sure and certain actions – and the doubts that may be placed against them – would not exist. But this is not to say that action pure and simple represents a kind of super certainty. At bedrock is not non-propositional belief, but just *action* expressing neither certainty nor belief. Certainty is not the intrinsic or essential property of action; at best it is a property that action can acquire in specific circumstances,—just as we may speak, in certain specific contexts, of behaviour as expressing *beliefs*.

This may be made clearer by returning to consider the relation between the supposed expressions of belief lying in the bedrock of human behaviour and the genuine non-propositional expressions of belief that we noted in the example of the dog by the stream. For example, the behaviour expressing the dog's belief that it can jump the stream would, at bedrock, be supposed to 'hinge' upon behaviour expressing the belief that 'this is my leg', or that 'I am standing on the bank of a stream', and so on, i.e. truths similar to those Wittgenstein thought held fast for us such as 'I know that here is a hand'.[258] But this immediately brings us to a difficulty. For here we are having to interpret the normal behaviour of the dog as a natural expression of such certainties; and the trouble is that it is not easy to see what the content might be of such an interpretation. The sense in regarding the dog's final jump as a natural expression of belief is easy to grasp because it contrasts clearly with the previous state of uncertainty and hesitation. But it is not at all clear that there is anything in the ordinary course of the life of a dog which we could sensibly interpret as expressing the doubt that 'this is my leg', etc. Likewise in a human case, it is not obvious that it makes any sense to say that when I scratch my head this expresses my certainty that I have a hand and a head. When we think of the behaviour at the stream as expressive of belief/doubt, we are thinking of particular events in the life of the dog. But if we try to think of the behaviour as primitively expressing the certainty that 'this is my leg', we are thinking of something that must itself pervade the course of the dog's life at every step and in all its waking

[258] OC 9.

movements. If we then try to think of a contrasting behavioural expression of doubt in this context, it is difficult to avoid imagining anything other than the behaviour of the dog simply falling into confusion or incoherence. But this is not to imagine a primitive expression of doubt, which is surely to imagine something belonging to the flow of behaviour and is *not* to imagine that flow merely breaking down.

To view behaviour as expressing belief or doubt is already to regard it at a level of organisation that takes for granted a considerable measure of coherence in the way a creature behaves and relates to its surroundings. Thus we distinguish hesitation from merely having a fit. This background of action provides the context within which we identify behavioural expressions of doubt or certainty, i.e. expressions of *belief*. Hence, the manifestation of such coherence cannot in itself be regarded as even a primitive expression of belief, since the latter presupposes such coherence at bedrock (i.e. the concept of the latter presupposes the concept of the former). But this is just what we are doing if we try to characterise the normal behaviour of a dog as a primitive expression of the belief that 'this is my leg', etc.

This fundamental coherence certainly is a pre-requisite for language-games. This is why it is tempting to say that it cannot itself be the prototype for any one language-game, and so lies 'beyond description'. But it is a prerequisite only in the sense that it is already contained in the concept of behaviour, and so is, of course, already integral to our *concept* of a language-game – *any* language-game. Its seeming to be 'beyond description', then, is just a reflection of the fact that the concept of action is itself irreducible, and is not further illuminated by introducing any additional qualifying terms. We may also say that this fundamental coherence is what 'supports' beliefs and certainties expressed both behaviourally and propositionally. For it is constitutive of the forms of behaviour that are, at another level and in specific surroundings, conceived of as expressing belief or disbelief, certainty or doubt, trust or mistrust, confidence or hesitation.

6 ~ Possessing the Concepts of Certainty and Knowledge

In previous chapters we looked at how the possession of certain concepts is at least a *function* of how we are oriented towards the corresponding phenomena within our lives. In Chapter 4, for example, we examined how the possession of the concept *belief* takes for granted the ability to express beliefs in our speech; whilst in Chapter 6, the subject matter was the part played by our subjectivity in the formation of subjective, or

psychological, concepts. In the present and parallel cases, we need to reflect on how the possession of the concepts of certainty and knowledge might be similarly rooted.

The expression of certainty in our use of language is not something that we learn *after* we have learnt the use of propositions. It is integral to our use of language. It is a facet of the use of language in normal situations. 'Certainty' here does not mean merely the sureness with which we make assertions, but the way in which we *treat* what we say as certainly true. It shows in how we think and work things out, and in the way we respond to questions, challenges, etc., from others. If I haven't learned to utter propositions with certainty in this sense (i.e. in the relative sense as it applies to both the comfortable and struggling certainties), then I have simply not learned to speak: it is a feature of the spontaneous use of language. Similarly, that I can *know* things is not itself something that I learn only *after* having learned to speak: if I have learned to speak at all, then I already know plenty. And likewise, I show that I understand that I know things in the way that I can back up the things that I say in the course of conversation with others, and so on.

The ability to handle language in these ways – and which shows, in an important sense, that I understand what I am doing – is essential to our grasp of the concepts of certainty and knowledge. We judge that a child is getting hold of these concepts in the way that it shows that it is acquiring a *general* competence in the handling of language. The child's development of this relation to his own use of language is what I have already referred to in Chapter 4 as the 'primary' understanding of the respective concepts: the child is learning to *treat* things that are said as expressions of certainty or as demonstrations of knowledge, and this capacity is constitutive of the child's acquisition and possession these concepts. The child is, of course, also learning the terminology of the language-games of knowledge and certainty and learning to make judgements using the words 'certainty' and 'knowledge', etc. But this must be secondary. Learning to make these judgements cannot be achieved by having the phenomena of certainty and knowledge pointed out,—except insofar as the child already shows an understanding of them that is implicit in its use of language.

Relating these observations, at last, to the conception of language-games as *extensions* of more primitive behaviour, we would be justified in conceiving of the language-games of belief and doubt as extensions of behavioural expressions of either comfortable or struggling certainty, as long as these are conceived of in the relative sense described earlier. But they cannot be conceived of as extensions of a more fundamental certainty beyond words, for there is none.

If hinge propositions have a function it is not, whilst in anti-sceptical philosophical mode, to state facts that are comfortable certainties; neither do they belong to a system of propositions. Rather, their function it is to bar the way, whilst within the flow of discourse, to the projection of sceptical questioning into the foundations of the language-game. They do so by means of a kind of ungrounded affirmation of the language-game's normal conduct. In a sense we might say that it is the language-game 'speaking for itself' and brushing aside sceptical questioning.

However, there is a problem arising out of this 'use' of hinge propositions, which is that it is only too easy to misconstrue the context of their utterance and to present them as normally intended propositions which are, therefore, open to doubt: the 'comfortable' certainties corresponding to hinge propositions will, if expressed, collapse into 'struggling' certainties. The distinction between comfortable and struggling certainties can only be maintained if it is construed as a *relative* distinction in which, in a given situation, the comfortable certainties are those cited in support of struggling certainties but which are not themselves given support. There is no scope for an absolute conception of comfortable certainty, and neither is it required.

This situation is mirrored at the purely behavioural level. Ordinary struggling certainties may be expressed in behaviour, just as they are at the linguistic level; but it makes no sense to speak of comfortable certainties as being expressed in behaviour, unless of course we construe the distinction, again, as relative. Behaviour 'at bedrock', i.e. that behaviour which we might otherwise think of as expressing comfortable certainty, requires no further qualification in terms of 'certainty, or acceptance, or confidence, or assumption'.[259] The expression of doubt or certainty in behaviour depends on the behaviour being seen in the context of a bedrock of coherent behaviour of which it can mean nothing (or is just a plain confusion) to say that *it* is expressive either of certainty or uncertainty. This coherent behaviour is the fabric out of which all our specific acts and language-games are fashioned. And whereas the language-games of doubt and certainty may be regarded as extensions of their primitive behavioural expressions, they cannot be seen as an extension of coherent behaviour as such. 'In the beginning was the deed' – the deed being prior to certainty or uncertainty, knowledge or ignorance.

[259] Malcolm1 p. 17.

Chapter 8 ~ This Philosophical Form of Life

1 ~ Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to give an account of how intimately the possession of our concepts – and especially of those that are most pervasive of our thinking – is woven into the fabric of our lives. In particular, I have tried to emphasise how the possession of these concepts is not just an adjunct but is *constitutive* of our lives (including, of course, our *mental* life). Along the way, I have also tried to indicate at least something of the bearing that these observations have on our understanding of the genesis of philosophical perplexity and of the form that our understanding of these concepts must take in philosophy. In this final chapter, I shall examine aspects of these latter issues more closely.

In those earlier chapters I looked at the possession of these concepts – and language generally – from the point of view of the *instinctive* nature of the linguistic and non-linguistic reactions and modes of behaviour that are characteristic of that possession. This was principally because to identify what is instinctive in our form of life is to identify what most determines its character; and it says that we do not have to look to some phenomenon lying behind the 'given' of human life when trying to explain or characterise it.—We do not have to turn to rationalism or mentalistic theory, for example.[260] So an important extension to this discussion will be an examination of the extent to which philosophical perplexity *itself* has its origins in instinct – that its confusions are not just *mistakes* in our thinking. This will tell us something more about how such perplexity is structural to our form of life; and it will also make clearer the nature of the misunderstandings that such perplexity can give rise to. It is here that we will need to look in more detail – and following on from the latter chapters – at the ways in which we are orientated towards the specific concepts that give rise to philosophical perplexity, that is, at the *manner* of our possession of them.

This re-examination of the origins of philosophical perplexity will acknowledge the reality and the importance of the modes of genesis that are traditionally associated with

[260] Again, it should go without saying that this is not a 'theory' of human life.—The investigation remains a grammatical one: we are making a *conceptual* connection between language, concepts and *behaviour as such*. We may note also that the 'given' includes mental life, but not a conception of mental life involving a conception of privacy informed by a notion of private ostensive definition.

Wittgenstein. I have in mind the influence of confusingly similar surface grammatical forms or the 'pictures' that lie in the language and which fox us as to the proper relations between our concepts – and there are others besides. However, my intention will be to extend this catalogue to include other origins, such as those deriving from the complex relations to our concepts that I have tried to explain in the previous chapters. I shall also be drawing attention to the fact that Wittgenstein did not confine his own account to the former – most often quoted – origins of philosophical perplexity.

Before that, however, I shall revisit some of Rhees's general observations regarding the nature of philosophical perplexity, and the responses I gave them in Chapter 4.

2 ~ Philosophy and the Grammars of Particular Expressions

In Chapter 4, I agreed with Rhees that he is right to warn against identifying the roots of philosophical problems in the 'confusion of grammars of particular expressions',[261] if that simply means getting into a tangle over the rules governing these expressions. The reasons for his warnings lie partly in the fact that it is a view that owes much to the confused conception of the use of language as the operation of a *technique* – a point on which he found Wittgenstein wanting. But perhaps more importantly for Rhees, it detracts from the appreciation of the truly central issue in philosophy – whose ancestry goes straight back to Plato – namely the question of how we make the world intelligible to ourselves *at all*, of how discourse is *possible*. This cannot be answered just by examining in a narrow way the use we make of the expressions to do with the use of language, i.e. how we employ the expressions 'language', 'meaning', 'grammar', 'truth', 'fact', etc.

This is agreed, but here we need to be careful not to move too swiftly to a condemnation of this approach based on the most narrow and damaging interpretation of what constitutes the 'confusion of the grammars of particular expressions',—which, I believe, is ambiguous. If we try to think of the use of language as the exercise of a technique, or as the application of a set of rules as in a game, then this implies that the technique or game can be described *externally* – like any other practice – and does not presuppose an *internal* understanding of it.[262] From this it may seem that giving an account of the grammars of particular expressions must be essentially a trivial exercise and not a direct path to answering the central philosophical problems. But this is a confusion.

[261] Rhees3 p. 74.
[262] See Chapter 2 for this and the following paragraphs.

Now it is certainly true that an account of the use of *some* expressions can profitably be compared with the description of a technique, namely in those cases which are defined by reference to facts, i.e. where there can be a description of the use of an expression in terms that are intelligible *prior* to the understanding of the use of the expression itself.[263] And certainly such an account will seem a long way from the deeper questions of philosophy. But this does not apply to all those other expressions whose 'meaning lies in the language-game[s] in which we use [them]';[264] that is, where the description of the use of the expression *presupposes* an understanding of it (the concept expressed by it) – examples of these being: 'discourse', 'language', 'meaning', 'truth', etc. In these cases what *shows* in their employment is part of our understanding of the use of the expressions. It follows from this that an examination of the grammars of these expressions will, of necessity, involve an exploration of the corresponding concepts and their wider conceptual ramifications. Hence, I think it is clear that elucidating these grammars is integral to what is required in order to illuminate questions about the possibility of discourse and the response to scepticism, since these are after all conceptual questions.

It is not established, therefore, that the point Rhees wants to make *can* be made by contrasting the latter endeavour with treating the 'confusion of the grammars of particular expressions' – at least, not without further qualification. The most we might say is that we should be aware that the grammars of the expressions corresponding to our more fundamental concepts lie in different ways in the language, and that we should be warned against treating them on the model of expressions such as 'sitting down' – where an account of the concept will differ little from a description of the usage of the expression, and does not begin to mark out the deeper conceptual boundaries within our thinking. It may certainly be wise to avoid framing the investigation into the possibility of discourse in terms of an investigation into the use of particular expressions, just in order to avoid superficiality in the treatment of the grammars of the underlying concepts,—it is vital to warn against a *narrow* focus on the way these expressions are used. But we should not allow this to obscure the continuities between the different levels of grammatical investigation that we may find in philosophy.

---

[263] We should also add that even concepts such as 'sitting down' contain – amongst other concepts – the concept of a physical object, which is therefore taken for granted in giving an account of it and cannot itself be accounted for in this way. But I think that such would not normally be regarded as a part of the account of the grammar of the expression 'sitting down', which can otherwise be described more along the lines of a description of a technique.

[264] Rhees2 p. 49.

The gap between examining the uses of various expressions and answering the deeper questions in philosophy is further compounded by the fact that the kind of investigation we require in philosophy may, from other perspectives, appear not to be (simply) a *conceptual* matter in any case. Let us look at this a little more closely. When Rhees speaks of making clear 'the possibility of discourse' and of combating scepticism,[265] it looks as though what is required is a *general account* of language.—Not the kind of account that the study of linguistics or the psychology of language demand, but nevertheless an *account* in the sense in which that is distinct from the elucidation of a concept (as one might ordinarily understand it). For example, if we examine what Rhees provides us with when giving such an account, we find a very wide ranging description of the various circumstances in which we speak of someone having a language: of their 'having something to say'; of the relation between speaking and living; of the kind of life in which speaking has a part; of the circumstances in which we speak of *logic* in connection with the use of language; of the part language plays in the way we make sense of the world and our own lives; of the distinction between speaking and operating a calculus or technique; and so on and so forth.

The essential feature here is that the account involves the collation of many *facts*. It is this especially which deflects the attention from the conceptual nature of the investigation. But here again we have to remind ourselves that many concepts – even the most fundamental – may be constituted *partly* be reference to facts. And so the point must be made that the relevance of the gathering together these facts for the purpose of solving the deep problems of philosophy depends on seeing them in relation to the elucidation of the concepts of which they are components. Once this is understood, we must then recognise the further point that the constitutive facts are relatively superficial aspects of the determination of these fundamental concepts since – as has been argued previously – what is most fundamental to them belongs to the realm of what can only be *shown* (i.e. it is presupposed in anything this is *said*). As a result, the connection with the conceptual – and, especially in the present context, what is shown in the elucidation of the grammars of the corresponding expressions – is maintained.

The fact remains that the kind of account of language that we require in philosophy is essentially a *conceptual* account. Moreover, attention to the grammars of particular expressions will remain a principal point of entry into both the genesis and resolution of the underlying issues in philosophy. When we speak of investigating 'the grammar of a

[265] E.g. Rhees1 p. 278.

particular expressions', this can be applied just as much to the grammar of 'language' and 'discourse' as to 'sitting down', and the like. The crux of the matter is that if we do apply it to the former, then it must be borne in mind that the investigation is into something lying deeply in our ways of thinking and which is not revealed *merely* by looking at isolated or individual circumstances of their use. If Rhees' warning is against this kind of reduction, then it is well taken. But it should not be taken to mean that an investigation into the possibility of discourse (and the battle against scepticism) is not, at bottom, a grammatical investigation, nor that the grammars of these fundamental concepts will *not* surface in the way their particular expressions are used in particular circumstances.

I have laboured this point at the outset of this chapter because I shall be devoting much time to looking at reactions *with*, or *to*, particular expressions that are typical of the genesis of philosophical problems. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that these reactions normally also belong to widely ramifying *patterns* of inquiry and only in this interconnectedness amount to expressions of the fundamental problems of philosophy. The grammars of the expressions corresponding to the concepts on which the major issues turn are not isolated, and so, in any case, cannot be examined fruitfully except as a part of the whole.

3 ~ The Disease is Different from the Cure

At this stage, we need to distinguish clearly between, on the one hand, the actions that need to be pursued in order to solve philosophical problems and, on the other, the responses or interests that express the original philosophical perplexity that gives rise to this need. The natures of both of these are of interest to us, but it is the latter that are most relevant to this thesis and which are the least well understood; and so it is principally in this direction that my efforts to distinguish the two will be aimed.

It has been a consistent theme of this thesis that the kind of inquiry required to solve philosophical problems has to be recognised explicitly as *conceptual*. But I think it is equally clear that a recognition of the conceptual nature of philosophical problems is certainly *not* a requirement for the original, spontaneous generation of philosophical perplexity. In the first place, if I am baffled or uncertain about the nature of mind, or truth, or reality, I will not necessarily conceive of my bafflement as being over the grammars of the respective concepts nor even as conceptual at all,—at least, not unless I am already acquainted with philosophy as a subject and have arrived at a view of the

nature of its subject matter. Hence, if I am looking at the people around me and wondering whether I can know the reality of their minds, then, in terms of the place that these reactions have in my life, this is not consciously the *same reaction* as being baffled over (the grammar of) the concept *mind.* Similarly, if I wonder whether I can really know or be certain about anything, this is not the same as being puzzled by the grammars of the concepts of knowledge or certainty. The philosophical perplexity does not first show its hand in puzzlement over what the concepts *mind, belief* and *knowledge* amount to; rather, we wonder *whether we can really know other minds, what our belief in the world is based on* or *whether we can really know anything.* This is the *form* of our puzzlement in its most natural state;—it is not explicitly a reflection upon a concept, but a reaction *by means of our concepts* to the respective *phenomena.* I believe that this is an important distinction notwithstanding the recognition that the original puzzlement remains conceptual in kind.

This idea that the instinctive philosophical reaction is essentially a reaction to a phenomenon rather that to a concept should be understood in connection with a position I urged in Chapter 2, namely that the concepts we have formed of the world, of ourselves, and of our relations to the world form our understanding of the *nature* of these things *in their most general form.* This is why, when we are thinking in the most general way about the nature of a phenomenon (e.g. mental life), our reflections really are reflections upon a *phenomenon* and not just upon the language in which the concepts are expressed. This is the rôle they have in our lives, and it also clarifies what is meant by saying that philosophical perplexity arises *within* our understanding of the world.

We may distinguish, therefore, between the preoccupation with *phenomena,* which characterises the perplexity that is at the instinctive origins of philosophical thinking, and the explicit reflection upon our concepts that is required in response to this original perplexity. The latter will engage with these same reactions, but it also requires a further step, namely an immersion in the subject of philosophy and a recognition – or at least a *view* – of the nature of the difficulties encountered. Interestingly, responding to this perplexity may also require engaging with a different set of instincts; for the arduous intellectual activity that is required to resolve these difficulties will depend on reactions which go *against* the former instincts,—or at least, which require the mobilisation of instincts in a different dimension:

> People are deeply embedded in philosophical, i.e. grammatical confusions. And to free them from these *presupposes* pulling them out of the immensely manifold connections they are caught up in. One must so to speak regroup their entire language.—But this language came about //developed// as it did because people had—and have—the

> inclination to think in this way. Therefore pulling them out only works with those who live in an instinctive rebellion against //dissatisfaction *with*// language. Not with those who following all their instincts live within the herd that has created this language as its *proper* expression./ (BigT p. 185)

Clearly Wittgenstein thought that unless we have an instinct to rebel against these forms of language – that is, an instinct occurring at the level at which the forms of language are generated and working in the opposite direction to the instincts that give rise to confusion – we are not going to be in a position to resist the instincts that drive that confusion.

This passage is also interesting for containing a suggestion that is the opposite of the one that is most frequently attributed to Wittgenstein, namely that it is just an accident that our language is brimming with irresistible false analogies and pictures – the 'mythology' deposited in the language. On the contrary, we may not be such passive victims in this process, for we might just as well suppose that the form of our language is the *product* of a deep seated inclination to think in certain ways, and that the false analogies lying in the language may only crystallize and perpetuate these deeper tendencies. This is, I think, an important possibility, without which it is perhaps not so easy to understand why philosophical confusions and perplexities have the extraordinary grip on our thinking that they do have. My aim will be to examine a range of the non-'surface grammar' circumstances which may be implicated in generating the instinctive reactions that are at the bottom of philosophical perplexity. Before this, however, I shall make some more general observations about these reactions and their relation to the use of language.

4 ~ The Instinct for Metaphysics

Wittgenstein remarks:

> We must not forget: even our more refined, more philosophical doubts have a foundation in instinct. E.g. that expressed in 'We can never know...'. Continuing accessibility to further arguments. We should find people to whom we could not teach this mentally inferior. *Still* incapable of forming a certain concept. (CV p. 73)

> I really want to say that scruples in thinking begin with (have their roots in) instinct. Or again: a language-game does not have its origin in *consideration*. Consideration is part of a language-game.
>
> And that is why a concept is in its element within the language-game. (Z 391)

> ....the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will. (BigT p. 161)

Wittgenstein believed that philosophical problems have their roots in instinctive reactions, and evidently found a comparison between the origin of philosophical perplexity and the generation of the instinctive reactions that are at the bottom of superstitious practices and beliefs. One could examine the textual evidence for this claim in detail, but for the present it should suffice to point out that he used the very same phrase in both the 'Remarks on Fraser's *Golden Bough*' and in the 'Big Typescript' to comment on how both our magical and our metaphysical inclinations are rooted in us:

> In unserer Sprache is eine ganze Mythologie niedergelegt. (RFGB p. 132 & BigT p. 198)

Which is translated as:

> A whole mythology is deposited in our language.[266]

The relationship between these two, and their connection with the instinctive foundations of philosophy, has been explored by H. O. Mounce.[267] Mounce observes that certain kinds of superstitious belief have their origins not in some faulty or mistaken reasoning but in certain *reactions*. These reactions are not in themselves (rational or) irrational[268] but they may, if unchecked, develop into irrational beliefs. As examples, he cites the disturbed reaction to the loss of a wedding ring, which may lead to the belief the marriage is in jeopardy, or the revulsion at sticking a pin into a picture of one's mother, which may develop into the irrational belief that her sight will be affected by the action.[269] The important feature here, for our present purposes, is that these are *primitive* reactions – they occur to us irresistibly and are not the *product* of (faulty) reasoning.[270] Indeed the attempt to use a rational explanation to explain them away would be a failure to see the

---

[266] L. Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Fraser's *Golden Bough*', translated in *The Human World*, No. 3, May 1971, p. 35. I prefer this translation to that given in *Philosophical Occasions*, to wit: 'An entire mythology is laid down in our language', (RFGB p. 199).

[267] H. O. Mounce, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *Philosophy*, Vol. 48, 1973, pp. 347-362.

[268] Ibid. p. 359. One may wish to question whether the reactions themselves are irrational or not. However the important point here is to distinguish between the primitive reaction and the belief that may or may not arise from it. If I am subject to the spooky feeling that if I am able to avoid stepping on the cracks between the paving stones then, in some nebulous way, I will be 'all right', one might say that this is an absurd and irrational reaction. But I think we would hesitate before saying that in exhibiting this reaction *I* had fallen into irrationality unless I took it seriously and allowed it to enter into my beliefs about how I should promote my well being. A similar example: 'touch wood'. We see the attraction – i.e. the apparent intelligibility – of what we otherwise recognise as an irrational idea.

[269] Ibid. p. 353.

[270] Ibid. p. 355.

reactions for what they are.—This is why the attempts by philosophers and anthropologists to dismiss these primitive responses as just stupid errors are misunderstandings of them and of how they are situated in our lives.

If I may introduce an example of my own: imagine finding a friend throwing darts at the picture of some hated politician. We ask him what he is doing, to which he replies 'I am throwing darts at the prime minister, whom I hate'. And let us suppose that we respond by saying 'Oh, you are not really throwing darts at the prime minister, this is only a picture of him; in fact in reality this is only a sheet of paper with inks distributed about its surface'. I think he would have the right to say that we had missed the point; indeed that we had *misunderstood* him, and to which he might *reasonably* reply: 'No, I am throwing darts at the prime minister, whom I hate'. Our response would comparable with missing the point of – or trying to explain away – a joke. Any attempt to reconstruct his reaction on some other model would be a misunderstanding. Unless we recognise that the way he speaks has its own integrity and accept that no other way of speaking could be substituted without distortion, we will not see the reaction for what it is: an action *directed* at the prime minister. This of course is *not* to say that we are committed to attributing to him the belief in a systematic relation of cause and effect between his actions and the demise of the prime minister.—Although, of course, it would not difficult to imagine this reaction developing into something that we *would* call an irrational belief, for example, if he went on to contact the police and inform them that he had just assassinated the prime minister.

Mounce now compares these sorts of reactions – and the irrational beliefs that they can give rise to – with the genesis of philosophical problems, and finds, similarly, that we may distinguish between the reactions that are often at the bottom of philosophical puzzlement and the genuinely confused metaphysical beliefs that they can generate. This distinction is perhaps most easily observed when we distinguish in philosophy between *what we are tempted to say* and what our critical faculties tell us is intelligible or not; the salient point here being that we may continue to feel the temptation *in spite of* our recognition that giving way to it would lead us into irrationality.

A typical example of such temptation is the one mentioned by Wittgenstein above, namely the feeling that '[w]e can never know…[what another person is feeling, for example]'. Unchecked, the reaction may develop into scepticism about other minds. Mounce also cites another example relating to the nature of mind, and which bridges the realms of the superstitious and the metaphysical, namely the belief that 'there are certain

men who can see into other men's minds'.[271] This is a common enough belief amongst 'primitive' peoples, but it also has its analogue in 'civilised' society. For example, we may imagine a man who, noticing that someone about whom he had just been thinking is looking at him, feels instinctively that the man can see into his thoughts.[272] In all these instances, and in many more besides, the pattern is repeated: an instinctive reaction – innocuous enough in itself – arises in particular circumstances and then leads, normally *as a matter of course*, to conceptually confused beliefs.

Now such a transition from an instinctive reaction to a fully fledged language-game with its own system of concepts is, of course, typical of the growth and development of language – as has been discussed at length previously.[273] It will be helpful, therefore, to examine more closely the nature of this transition as it occurs in the parallel case of the development of philosophical beliefs.

5 ~ Instinctive Reactions and the Metaphysical Language-game

The alignment of the origins of philosophical perplexity with superstitious reactions has been helpful in conveying the deeply rooted nature of that perplexity, and that it is not merely an intellectual stumbling over the rules governing our concepts (not a *foolish* 'entanglement in our own rules'[274]). One way of responding to the question '*how* deeply rooted?' will be to remind ourselves that philosophical talk arises *naturally* out of our lives,—out of our *responses* to the world. Now it is an abiding theme of this thesis that amongst the determinants of a language-game – and so of the *formation* of the concepts within the language-game – are the instinctive reactions (linguistic and non-linguistic) that are its cornerstones. There may be some mileage, therefore, in conceiving of the instinctive reactions that are at the bottom of philosophical perplexity as themselves determinants of a language-game: *the metaphysical language-game*.[275] To be sure, the reactions in question do (very often) represent a tendency to *abuse* these concepts; but it does not follow from this that a comparison with concept-formation may not be fruitful. It is a commonplace to speak of philosophically confused *conceptions*, and so it is not especially

---

[271] Ibid. p. 360.
[272] Ibid. p. 360.
[273] See especially Chapter 5.
[274] PI 125.
[275] I use the word 'metaphysical' here to distinguish talk dealing specifically with conceptions of the *natures* of things from the concepts which have been forged within philosophy as tools in the general application of its critical methods,—for the elucidation of the grammars of concepts, for example. See also my comments on the use of 'metaphysics' in Chapter 1.

remarkable to speak of philosophy as generating specifically metaphysical concepts. But I suspect that the notion of a philosophically confused conception is normally thought of as a conception that has been *arrived at* by making wrong moves in an analysis. By contrast, the principle I wish to establish here is that confusion originates at a level that is *prior* to analysis, indeed at a level comparable with that at which our other most fundamental conceptions emerge,—in other words in the direct establishment of a *practice* rather than by describing a rule or giving a definition.

We might start by reminding ourselves of some of the essential features of what I have referred to as 'secondary' use of words – that is, where a concept is formed by means of a primitive linguistic reaction that is parasitic on a previously established use of a word.[276] This can be an important component in the determination of subjective concepts,—in the use of 'dull' in 'a dull pain', for example. Here too we may be *inclined* to say that the secondary use is a kind of abuse of the primary use. But there is an important difference between this and the case of the metaphysical reaction, in as much as the language-game that is subsequently erected upon the secondary use is not in conflict with the primary uses. This is because the secondary use occurs in a *new* context, whilst in philosophy the difficulties arise precisely because the new conception (of 'truth' or 'knowledge' or whatever it may be) is returned to its *original* context, where it attempts to occupy the same 'logical space' as the established concept. This is one of the central conflicts in philosophy.

The relation between the two can perhaps be made clearer by considering an example which – depending on context – might count either as a secondary use of language or as the beginnings of a conceptual confusion. In the course of the 'private language argument' sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein considers the spontaneous statement: 'I know how the colour green looks to *me*.'[277] This is the kind of remark that might get uttered in the course of a philosophical argument by someone defending private ostensive definition; but there is no reason why it might not also be uttered outside the context of philosophical discussion where the phrase may be used to express a particular 'sensation' of privacy. And if one objects that sense cannot be made of such a conception of privacy, then of course the same might be said of any secondary use of language, e.g. '[f]or me the vowel *e* is yellow'.[278] For it is of the essence of the secondary use of words that they do not 'make sense' – at least, not if that means being

[276] See Chapter 6.
[277] PI 278.
[278] Ibid. p. 216.

able to *derive* their secondary employment from their primary use. Either way, the facts remain: a) that we have the irresistible inclination to use these expressions in these ways, b) that these uses are not the *product* of reasoning, and c) that this inclination is *shared* amongst people. This is enough to establish a legitimate language-game – to determine an intelligible *concept* – just as long as it is not treated as a *logical* extension of a primary use, and is not brought into conflict with its primary use.

Wittgenstein noted for himself the equivocal character of such reactions a little later in the *Investigations*, where he spoke of our inclination, when reflecting on our perceptions in a particular way, to speak of '[t]he visual room':

> The 'visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation. (PI 400)

When the visual room seems like a discovery, it gives rise to a conception that is at the bottom of philosophical idealism and other subjectivist theories of perception. Left undeveloped, it is just a harmless sensation. But in both cases, a *concept* is determined.

Wittgenstein describes the compelling and primitive nature of the subjective impressions that disorientate our appreciation of the organisation of our concepts and the kinship between these impressions and secondary uses of language,—or at least, the secondary 'experiences' which they express:

> Think here of a special kind of illusion which throws light on these matters. – I go for a walk in the environs of a city with a friend. As we talk, it comes out that I am imagining the city to lie on our right. Not only have I *no* conscious reason for this idea, but some quite simple consideration was enough to make me realize that the city lay behind us. I can first give no answer to the question *why* I imagined the city in *this direction.* I had *no reason* to think it. But though I see no *reason* still I seem to see or surmise certain psychological causes for it. In particular, certain associations and memories. For example, we are walking along a canal, and once before I had followed a canal which lay in the direction I had imagined. I might as it were psychoanalytically investigate the causes of my conviction. (Last1 787)
>
> But how is a person who feels that the city is located in this direction to express his experience correctly? Is it correct, for example, to say that he feels it? Should he really coin a new word for it? But then how could anyone learn this word? The *primitive* expression of the experience couldn't include it. He would probably be inclined to say "I feel as if I knew that the city lay over there". Well, the very fact that he says this, or something like it, in these circumstances is itself the expression of this singular experience. (Last1 789)
>
> "I feel as if I knew the city lay over there." – "I feel as if the name Schubert fitted Schubert's works and his face." (Last1 791)

It is important to note that the compulsion to speak in these ways does not arise only in connection with the use of individual expressions in specific situations. The inclination to use the expression 'the visual room' is not isolated from the way we use other expressions and say other things. If that *were* so, then the reaction would amount to little more than a nervous tic. On the contrary, the use of the expression forms part of a whole network of related trains of thought.—This is a hallmark of a *concept*.

Now we may still feel reticent about calling the generation of these responses *concept-formation*, on the grounds that the new concept is not *applied*; that is, it does not find its way into the way we engage with the world about us. Well, even if the new concept is confined to the realms of the imagination – to idle moments of philosophical speculation – this should not necessarily undermine its status as a concept; for this rôle too is a 'use', even if an incoherent one. But in any case, we should not assume too hastily that these tendencies do *not* find expression is our outward lives. It is beyond the scope of this thesis fully to address this question, but one might reflect, for example, upon the influence that the notion of mental privacy has had upon the genesis of the idea that the soul has an identity independent of the body – an idea that has had ramifications throughout human history.

We might also take into account the fact – as previously noted – that these are responses *to* the world. They are reactions to our *circumstances* and are not confined to the working out of abstract conceptions, and so are not wholly idle in this respect. It might be relevant here to make the connection again between these kinds of reactions and the example of the person throwing darts at the picture. I argued there that it would be a misunderstanding to treat his reaction as a *mistake*. For just as throwing darts at the picture has the form of a reaction to a *person*, so the reactions expressing philosophical perplexity have, in their most instinctive roots, the form of a general reaction to a *phenomenon* – which may include reactions to situations, or to persons or experiences, or whatever. This tells us of the position that these reactions occupy in our lives – that they are not merely intellectual in origin – and hence also of the kinds of relations they can have to other aspects of our lives, to our religious and moral beliefs, for instance. It matters not that these perplexities, if they develop into metaphysical views, can by conceptual investigation be shown to be confused; just as it does not detract from the reality and the quality of the instinctive superstitious reaction that its subsequent development into a superstitious *belief* about the nature of things would be demonstrably irrational.

We are trying to avoid a rationalist account of the origin of philosophical problems,—that is, the account that holds that our philosophical conceptions *originate* in faulty reasoning mistakenly applied to our concepts. Certainly the primitive metaphysical reactions drive confusion in our thinking; but in themselves they are no more *based on* reason than are our concepts in general. These instinctive reactions are the cornerstones of the metaphysical language-game, and their primitiveness confers on the concepts to which they give rise a kind of independence from their analogues in daily discourse – whose roots are elsewhere.

6 ~ Philosophical Perplexity and Natural Uncertainty

We may now return to the nature of the reactions themselves. I have been arguing that the origins of philosophical perplexity may lie not so much in the effect of the repetition of misleading analogies in the forms of our language – though there is no denying their importance – as in the circumstances of the possession of our concepts. Some of these circumstances have already been described in detail, especially in the latter sections of Chapters 4 and 6, however, the discussion may now be broadened and further examples examined.

For the most part, we shall be considering reactions which, in their *nature*, show an inclination towards a confusion of concepts; but we may also encounter reactions that exhibit not *confusion* but natural *uncertainty* about the workings of a concept and the behaviour that surrounds it. It might be helpful to begin by considering an example of this kind, since it will also be suggestive of the larger framework of circumstances that can provoke philosophical difficulties. Consider the following remarks by Wittgenstein:

> Think of the uncertainty about whether animals, particularly lower animals, such as flies, feel pain.
>
> The uncertainty whether a fly feels pain is philosophical; but couldn't it also be instinctive? And how would that come out?
>
> Indeed, aren't we really uncertain in our behaviour towards animals? One doesn't know: Is he being cruel or not? (RPP2 659)
>
> For there *is* uncertainty of behaviour which doesn't stem from uncertainty in thought. (RPP2 660)

The inclination here may be to conclude that there is an interesting parallel – but nothing more – between the uncertainty that arises when reflecting philosophically on the problem of other minds and the familiar uncertainty that is commonly experienced in

everyday situations. And if we take it for granted that philosophical confusion arises only through misleading analogies and pictures lying in the language, then it might remain an interesting parallel only.[279] On the other hand, I have already argued that our instinctive, inter-subjective relations (to other persons *and* animals) are integral to the formation and possession of psychological concepts. And so to the extent that such relations are infected by this uncertainty, there is no reason why it may not also be bound up with the intellectual puzzlement at the root of genesis of the problem of other minds.

The uncertainty here is of the validity of projecting a concept into a situation differing from those in which the concept has been determined (the latter of which must of course be 'certain' otherwise the concept will not have been determined). But it is not merely an instance of that very familiar case where, at the *boundary*, a concept is simply not clearly determined. For example, it is not like the uncertainty over what we are prepared to call a 'heap' or not,—which we may say *is* arbitrary. Rather it is an uncertainty already lying in the patterns of behaviour – linguistic and non-linguistic – that *surround* the possession of the concept. It is something inherent in our form of life, and which may naturally vary from one person to another. Hence there may not be an 'intellectual' solution to the conceptual problems that arise from it; nor a way of reconciling the differences between people's attitudes towards animals.

In as much as the determination of our concepts is dependent on instinctive linguistic and (especially) *extra*-linguistic reactions, and insofar as there is both enough common ground between people to determine a concept and yet a significant band of divergence also, it is quite possible for irreconcilable conceptual differences to emerge. These differences are not philosophical differences, but they may give rise to intractable difficulties within philosophical argument.

7 ~ The 'Outer-ness' of the Language-game and Psychological Concepts

Psychological concepts (and concepts generally to do with mental faculties) lend themselves especially to situations that conspire against the achievement of a clear reflective understanding of them. I am thinking particularly of how the subjective component of their possession can clash with the circumstances in which we *do* philosophy,—circumstances which, in their very nature, divert our attention from the

[279] One might wish to argue that the uncertainty of our behaviour towards the fly is itself the product of philosophical uncertainty. But I see no reason to *assume* this, and Wittgenstein is surely right that there is such uncertainty that exists independently of thought,—the dog at the river side in Chapter 7, for example.

subjective mode. Discussing the relationship between concepts of the 'inner' and of the 'outer', Wittgenstein remarks:

> "Of course actually all I see is the outer."
> But am I not really speaking only of the outer? I say, for instance, under what circumstances people say this or that. And I do always mean *outer* circumstances. Therefore it is *as if* I wanted to explain (quasi-define) the inner through the outer. And yet it isn't so.
> Is the reason for this that the language-game is something outer? (Last2 p. 63)

In earlier chapters, I explained that the elucidation of a concept is conducted not exclusively by direct appeal to a selection of what we accept as sensible propositions employing it, since the description of the *circumstances* of its employment will also be important. This is because a) there are grammatical links between a concept and the concept of the language-game in which it is embedded, and b) the concept of the language-game may be partly constituted by *facts* about it which may then be described. Hence it is perfectly legitimate to describe the outer circumstances of any language-game as a part of the elucidation of its concepts.

Now of course, very many concepts (the overwhelming majority no doubt) have as their *whole context* their outer circumstances. Hence an account of those circumstances and the employment of language within them will coincide with a complete account of the concept.—The 'account' will be either in the form of a *description*, or, if the concept of those circumstances is irreducible and graspable only in practice and without reference to fact, in the form of a 'showing'. Moreover, the material reality of any language-game is itself something 'outer'. As a result there may be a natural tendency to think of *the* circumstances of *any* language-game as its *outer* circumstances. But this equation breaks down in the case of psychological concepts; for when we speak of the *circumstances* of a language-game in which psychological concepts are embedded, this *ought* to include both its outer and its *inner* circumstances. This is because the concept of a *subjective* response is also an element in our conception of the language-games that articulate psychological concepts.[280] Certainly an account of the outer circumstances of psychological-concept language-games will be a valuable contribution to their elucidation; but this does not exhaust what is *understood* when we understand a psychological concept, since this understanding is also a function of its *inner* circumstances. For this reason the description of these circumstances can only provide a partial elucidation of the concepts embedded within the language-game.

---

[280] See Chapter 6.

To *speak* of the 'inner circumstances' of the language-game in this context is to make the link between the outer circumstances and what is subjective in the grasp of the concepts embedded in it, since the concept of a subjective response is evidently grammatically linked to the subjective/psychological concepts embedded in the language-game. Evidently it can mean nothing to speak of understanding the concept of a subjective response unless we are already in command of a range of concepts, the understanding of which has a subjective component. Hence our concept of the language-game is itself dependent on the understanding we have of the subjective component of the concepts embedded within the language-game.

We might also be reminded that when we describe the outer circumstances of the language-game, we are describing the surrounding *facts* that are integrated into our conception of it.[281] These facts belong to what can be *said* in the elucidation of the concept, and for this reason come more readily to hand than what can only be *shown* – which is naturally more elusive. The subjective component of the understanding of psychological concepts – and of subjectivity generally – lies in that aspect of the grasp of the concept that is, in essence, both practical and irreducible, and hence can only be elucidated by showing.

Taking these observations together, we can see how, when we approach our account of psychological concepts through an account of the circumstances of the actions surrounding the language-game, our attention is easily diverted away from their subjective component. There is therefore a powerful inducement, if we take this approach, to reduce psychological concepts to outer circumstances, and so to behaviourism. And yet this diversion is not necessary. The description of the outer circumstances should not prevent us from acknowledging the subjective component.—Hence Wittgenstein's remark, 'And yet it isn't so'.

Now it may be objected here, again, that the subjective component of a psychological concept is not relevant to the improved understanding of it that we seek in philosophy; all that we have to do to achieve this is to observe, with greater clarity, what is allowed in the way that various expressions can be used in connection with one another, i.e. their

[281] For example, if we are giving an account of the use of visual concepts, we will describe the use of visual language in connection with the handling of objects in front of our eyes. This is part of our concept of the language-games with visual concepts, though the description – as far as it goes – does not in itself presuppose the use of visual concepts. The behaviourist will, of course, try to stop the account of visual concepts at this point. To avoid the behaviourist *cul-de-sac* we have to have the courage to continue to use the language 'full blown' (PI 120), which will mean employing visual concepts in the description. This of course makes the description circular, so that what we learn from it is something 'shown' and not 'said'.

formal relations. This is enough to show 'what kind of object anything is'.[282] Hence only the language-game as something 'outer' is, in any case, relevant to the solution of the philosophical perplexity, since this is the arena within which propositions are handled. Against this I have argued[283] that philosophical perplexity arises *within* our understanding of our concepts and not just within the observation of the formal relations between propositions or expressions. Hence it is the observation of those formal relations that should serve the growth of a greater understanding of the concepts, and *not* the other way about.—That is, it is not that the *understanding* of the concepts is, at best, only a necessary condition for understanding the analysis of their formal relations or, at worst, *irrelevant* to the analysis. For if philosophical activity is to cure diseases of the understanding, then the analysis cannot serve only itself; it must serve the enrichment of our understanding of the concepts themselves in the special circumstances in which we reflect on them.

The concept of understanding psychological concepts is the concept of something in the life of a person that *includes* the fact of his subjectivity and his subjective relations to language. It is perhaps the general failure to recognise this that makes it look as if we were on the horns of a dilemma: either psychological concepts are determined wholly within the concepts of outer circumstances, in which case we are driven to behaviourism, or they are determined by private ostensive definition, in which case we are driven to mentalism. No doubt there are many other roots to these philosophical positions, but one influence might simply be that we are deceived by the 'outer-ness' of the language-game: when we turn our attention to the language-game we are immediately in 'outer mode', as it were; this eclipses the subjective aspect of the determination of psychological concepts.

8 ~ Subjective Sources of Philosophical Perplexity

The kinds of phenomena that may confound our understanding of our most fundamental concepts are not limited to the *external* circumstances of our language-games. Familiar subjective impressions may also play a part,—the impression that one can give oneself a private ostensive definition of a psychological or mental concept perhaps being the most notorious. The origin of this phenomenon undoubtedly has many roots. Amongst these must be counted the powerful influence of certain specific

[282] PI 373.
[283] Initially in Chapter 2, but in later chapters also.

subjective experiences associated with the use of language. Principal amongst these, I believe, is the so called 'experience of the meaning of a word'. Wittgenstein discusses this and related experiences at length in Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In some respects the phrase 'the experience of meaning' shares much in common with 'secondary' uses of words in as much as *meaning* is not, after all, an experience. In other respects, however, it is *not* like other secondary uses. In particular there is an obvious sense in which the experience can be shown to be an intelligible – indeed *expected* – product of the way that words are woven into our actions; for we should expect words to be experienced differently from other objects in virtue of the part they play in our lives. Moreover, we should also expect to experience individual words as meaningful in their own unique way in virtue of the unique rôle that each has – as unique as Schubert's name fitting his face and works, for example. And yet the fact remains that meaning is *not* an experience. For this reason, the extension of this experience to the thought that one is actually experiencing the very essence of the concept to which the word corresponds is illusory and is a transition guaranteed to create havoc. It is especially dangerous when it occurs in connection with subjective or psychological concepts, where it undermines our understanding of the nature of mental life and of the kind of reality that subjective phenomena have.

The belief that one can give oneself a private ostensive definition of a mental state is a case in point. For it is not difficult, I think, to see the connection between the experience of meaning and the subjective feeling that one can also experience the *essence* of the object to which the word refers,—the essence of a colour, for example. The perception of meaning and the perception of the essence of a thing are evidently sister experiences. We may – with justification – present the descriptions of experiences of meaning and essence as secondary uses of words in their own right; but if so, we are equally obliged to make the further observation that the potential of these experiences to convert into beliefs about the natures of the phenomena is the potential for conversion into confused metaphysical beliefs.

A closely related experience is described in one of Wittgenstein's most striking evocations of the sensation of mental privacy:

> It seems that I can *trace* my identity, quite independent of the identity of my body. And the idea is suggested that I trace the identity of something dwelling in a body, the identity of my mind. (NFL p. 270)

I have already referred to this remark in the Introduction to Chapter 6, where I described it as expressing a natural reaction to our own subjectivity. In this respect, it belongs amongst those instinctive responses – again akin to secondary uses of language – that are, in themselves, the harmless expressions of subjective states. But it evidently also provides the foundation for the confused belief in the existence of the mind or self as an independent object.

Returning to the 'visual room', we now find Wittgenstein exploring further the interaction between subjective impressions and philosophical problems:

> The 'visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what its discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation. (PI 400)
>
> You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing. (Think for example of the question: "Are sense-data the material of which the universe is made?")
> But there is an objection to my saying that you have made a 'grammatical' movement. What you have primarily discovered is a new way of looking at things. As if you had invented a new way of painting; or, again, a new metre, or a new kind of song.— (PI 401)

Wittgenstein describes here the muddling up of the formation of a new concept with the discovery of a new fact (object).[284] The subsequent wavering between a movement in grammar and a new way of looking at things is really a fluctuation between two aspects of the same thing: *the formation of a new concept* – understood either from the point of view of its being a new extension to our grammar, or from the point of view of its *content* (way of looking at things). But the important point remains: we are not in the act of discovering some new object – a new *fact* – but a new *conception.*[285] And whereas a new conception may not be merely a new 'style' of thinking but represent a new insight into the form of the world (or at least, a new possibility within our relations to the world), the demonstration of what is new remains a matter of showing a new grammatical form and not a new fact.

Now the explanation for this muddle may well have to include the confusion that arises from analogies in surface grammar.—Clearly the confusion of fact and concept arises partly from the fact that we express grammatical points using factual language (again, see Chapter 2). But I suspect other forces are at work here. The tendency to interpret a concept as if it were a fact is closely associated with the distinction I made in Chapter 5 between the view of the world 'from the boundary' versus the view 'from the midst'. Our

---

[284] See Chapter 2.
[285] The assumption here is that we are dealing with a concept that does not *contain* a fact.

possession of our concepts lies, as I have been arguing throughout, in the *dynamic* of life; that is, it lies essentially in our *practice.* And yet this dynamic goes unobserved when – as we do in philosophy – we focus our attention on statements of fact. It is important to observe here that we do not have to *refer* to the dynamic when stating a fact; on the contrary, the dynamic is the very thing – the established background – which makes it possible to focus *just on the statement and on the state of affairs it describes.* Yet our whole appreciation of the relation between language and reality is affected if, in ignorance of this pragmatic context, we take what is immediately present to us (the proposition and the state of affairs it describes) as our guide to understanding the general nature of this relation. It is precisely this divorce in our thinking between the propositions considered in themselves and their pragmatic context that generates the 'view from the boundary'.

The 'experience of the meaning of a word' is, again, implicated in this divorce. Precisely because it presents the sense of the proposition as if it were an item of experience, the experience of meaning reinforces the conception of the proposition as a picture *in its own right.*—The proposition just hangs there, mirroring the state of affairs it represents. Consequently, not only do we *not* have to recognise how the sense of what we say depends on the whole of our social and physical interactions with the world – the 'hurly-burly of human actions'[286] – we also have a ready explanation for this: the sense of what we say is an *independent* property of our mental states. The opportunity to appreciate the pragmatic context of language has been short-circuited.

I wish to emphasise here the tie up between our preference for what is most easily grasped, i.e. *facts*, and the 'view from the boundary'. Our most fundamental misconception of our relation to the world is also an aspect of our misunderstanding of the nature of philosophical perplexity. For the preoccupation with grasping facts that generates the 'view from the boundary' is also an aspect of the failure to distinguish the nature of that which can only be *shown.* There is an image from Zen Buddhism in which a person looking at the reflection of the moon in a pool reaches out to try to grasp the reflection, but his hand breaks the water and the image is lost. Understanding does not consist in 'grasping' the thing, but learning to sit and look. If we set the stage correctly and dispose ourselves in the right way towards it, what we seek will show itself. This is the same sentiment that Wittgenstein expresses in *On Certainty*:

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

[286] Z 567.

But of course in order to come to this realisation, first you have to recognise that this is what you have to do; and it is hard to recognise this just because this too is something that has to show itself,—whilst our instinct tells us otherwise.

9 ~ Our Concepts Passing us by

Finally, on the origins of philosophical perplexity, I should like to return briefly to points I made in Chapter 4 (Section 4 and following) on the different relations we have to those concepts that are especially implicated in the major philosophical issues (i.e. belief, truth, meaning, fact knowledge, etc.). I argued there that in these cases we have what I called a *primary* understanding of them (and their grammar), which is an understanding that is inseparable from our actual command over speech,—from our 'being able to speak'.[287] For example, our ability to distinguish true from false within the flow of discourse – which belongs to our *possession* of the concepts of truth and falsity and which is essential to saying of anyone that they are in command of the language – is not the result of being *taught* the concepts *true* and *false*, if that means anything like having true and false statements pointed out to us or being trained explicitly in the *application* of the concepts *true* and *false.* For we can hardly learn the explicit (i.e. secondary) employment of the concepts unless we are already in command of the distinction within our speech,—in our trying to say things that are true, or in distinguishing truth from falsity in the things that people say. Acquiring a primary command of these concepts is a part of learning to make any kind of sense at all in language, and is a presupposition of our secondary understanding.

The relevance of this to the present discussion is that, on the one hand, it provides a further explanation for our inability to reflect clearly upon the grammars of these concepts; whilst from another point of view it makes it more puzzling *why* the twisted versions of our concepts which we find so tempting are not more transparent to us in their falsity. Let us examine this paradox.

We are principally concerned here with those concepts whose possession is fundamentally *constitutive* of our consciousness.—The concepts *truth*, *meaning*, *belief*, *knowledge*, etc., are structural to the consciousness that is expressed through our linguistic relations to the world. For this reason alone it would seem reasonable to suppose that the workings of this consciousness are not in themselves natural objects of conscious

[287] Rhees3 p. 74.

attention. Now our first inclination in trying to expand upon this observation might be to point out that there is an obvious sense in which we attend most naturally and most easily to what we have learned and apply *explicitly* (either by statement of fact or by practice), whilst our grasp of the more troublesome concepts, which are more deeply and pervasively situated in our lives, is acquired less self-consciously and so is less obviously present to us and comes less easily to hand. However, I think this does not get to the bottom of the matter, which can be put more strongly. In the first place, let it be understood that it is *because* our most fundamental concepts are woven into our 'ability to speak' that as 'conceptual agents' we can attend to anything at all. Or to put it another way: our mode of *attending to anything at all* is inseparable from our ability to speak, and hence belongs to the *exercise* of our primary understanding. We could almost say that, in their primary understanding, these concepts are not learned *explicitly* (or consciously) as 'concepts' at all, just because they are so much a part of the *fabric* of our ability to speak; but we should note that, in spite of this, we may still maintain that the primary understanding remains an essential constitutive element of our understanding of these concepts, since it is taken for granted in the learning and application of what *is* explicit in their possession. My point, then, is that the difficulty of reflecting on our concepts arises not merely from the fact that we acquire our primary understanding unreflectively, it is rather that the very manner of this understanding is to be a part of the framework of our thinking, and hence is not something for which we will have normally developed the tools to think *about.* Of course, the fact that the *ability* to attend is constituted in our primary understanding is not in itself a reason for supposing that it cannot be reflected upon. It is rather that the difficulties – discussed previously – of turning our attention upon the grammars of these concepts, i.e. the difficulties associated with *showing* as opposed to *saying*, are taken into a new dimension with these concepts. Indeed it is perhaps only if we are possessed of Wittgenstein's 'instinctive rebellion against language' that we are fit to develop this critical ability.

Let us look at an example. In what sense is the impossibility of a private language *shown*? We might put it this way: such a language is impossible since there is no distinction between following it and *seeming* to follow it,—between talking sense in it and only seeming to talk sense in it. Or similarly: the concept of speaking, or following, a private language is at best the concept of a subjective state, whereas to qualify as a *bona fide* language, it must make sense to speak of succeeding or failing to talk sense,—this being a distinction that cannot be founded on the irresponsibility of a subjective judgement. Now

if we accept this argument as demonstrating that the concept of a private language is incoherent, then this is not because we have accepted any contingent fact about the circumstances of the use of language, nor any contingent fact of linguistic usage,—of what we *call* 'language'. Neither is it that we have recognised any fact as having been integrated into our *conception* of what constitutes the intelligible use of language (though that will no doubt be an element in what has been demonstrated). And it would also not be enough to be able to refer to some agreement that the establishment of sense and the subjectivity of judgement have been *stipulated* as incompatible. For these are not concepts that can have been *consciously* determined at all.—They are not voluntary concepts. Rather, they are concepts that have developed in proportion to the development of language itself. They are, as it were, part of the branch we are sitting on if we are saying anything at all. Hence, the incompatibility between our conception of what is fundamental to language and subjective judgement is already given in our speech: it lies in what is already fundamental and structural to the understanding on which speech depends. And the *acknowledgement* that this is so – the acknowledgement that is necessary for us to realise that these are incompatible – is dependent on an appeal to that understanding and *not*, in the first instance at least, by reference to any fact or to anything stipulated. For indeed, the force of any such references will itself already depend on the underlying, primary understanding of what makes sense and what does not. It is this, and the manifold ways in which it informs our judgments as to which of the moves in the argument are valid, that determines the view of language – and its 'possibilities' – that we accept as making sense. The force of the conclusion that the notion of a private language is not intelligible must therefore come from conceptual insights in which the concepts 'speak for themselves'.[288]—This is the sense in which the insights depend on something being *shown*. And the problem with the really troublesome concepts is that what needs to be shown in order to resolve philosophical difficulties is something that must show itself in the way it ramifies *throughout* our language-games and which does not reveal itself – or at least only in a fragmentary way – in the immediate circumstances of their specific employment or in what is explicit in their employment.

From this it might seem intuitively obvious why it should be so difficult to reflect on these concepts without hindrance – or at least, why we are so vulnerable to being blown off course in these reflections – just because what needs to be seen cannot be gathered from the surface of language but is buried deep. But we only have to shift the point of

[288] Cf. OC 139.

view a little before we begin to feel that it still does not really explain why, when we are first touched by philosophical perplexity, these truths – which we possess so intimately – so resolutely refuse to speak for themselves. For we are not merely observers to them, but are speaking of something built into our very *understanding* of them. So why does this understanding not speak out more clearly for itself? In previous sections I have catalogued various forces that conspire against clarity of conceptual vision; yet it seems that we still have the right to wonder why our deeper understanding is not able to brush these annoyances aside.

At this point I think we need to distinguish between two situations in philosophy where the primary understanding has the opportunity to assert itself. The first is when we are trying to give an *account* of the grammar of a concept, the question then being whether we have the right to expect to be guided by the primary understanding in giving that account. The second is whether we feel we have the right to expect this understanding to prevent us from being seduced by our instinctive metaphysical reactions. Just to clarify the latter a little, it will be remembered that in the case of the primitive superstitious response there is no conflict between someone feeling the attraction of the superstitious reaction – the disturbance at sticking the pin into the photo of one's mother, for example – and recognising simultaneously that it would be irrational to allow the reaction to develop further into a superstitious belief. Similarly there is no obvious reason why we should not, on the one hand, feel attracted to the idea of a private language, whilst seeing just as clearly that it is senseless.

Of these two situations, the first is perhaps the more easily explained, since the ability to reflect on and give an account of a concept has many aspects that may well be regarded as skills in their own right, and this no doubt provides opportunities for making wrong moves and taking wrong turnings. However I suspect that in both cases, something like the following is at work: that they demonstrate the size of the gulf between our capacity to form, possess and apply concepts within their *normal* home range, and our capacity to project them into contexts unanticipated by the circumstances in which they were determined. If we pursue this line of thought, then I think it also helps to explain why the most fundamental concepts, those which are most integral to our thinking, prove to be the most troublesome. For it is perhaps precisely because the most fundamental order in our concepts is integral to being able to say anything at all, and so is *structural* to that normal range of circumstances, that we find ourselves so easily at sea when tempted outside that range. This can explain why we are so vulnerable to

being blown off course and so unable to recognise their sensible application when we try to project them into circumstances departing from normality. In these situations we find ourselves alienated from our own more fundamental understanding and without the instinctive reactions required to repair it. And yet, appeal to this primary understanding we must if we are to pull ourselves out of 'the immensely manifold connections [we] are caught up in'.[289]

10 ~ Showing and the Contemplative Art of Philosophy (Instinct and the Expression of Understanding)

In this final section, I want to turn to the other side of this same coin and examine more closely the phenomenon of *showing*, and in particular the different forms that it may take in the two contrasting settings I have referred to above.

If we are to employ concepts at all, then the application of those which are most fundamental must 'speak for itself' – that is, without further qualification or explanation. This notion of 'speaking for itself' is identical with the idea of grasping what has to *show* in the application of a concept; for what must show is that aspect of the understanding we already have of the concept that is not explicable or reducible to any other concept or concept-forming fact. The point I wish to emphasise here is that this 'speaking for itself', or showing, is a part of our normal possession and application of these concepts; it is *not* something raised only in the context of philosophical reflection. We can distinguish, then, between what shows in our daily use of language – and which belongs to the consciousness with which we use language – and how this shows in the context of philosophical reflection. And we may mark this distinction by saying that when we are doing philosophy we are bringing what shows in our daily use of these concepts into the *reflective* arena. My interest in this section is to examine more closely what falls within this arena.

D. Z. Phillips expounds what he calls a 'contemplative conception of philosophy':

> A contemplative conception of philosophy raises fundamental questions about the nature of reality and the possibility of discourse. We are asked to give a certain kind of attention to our surroundings without meddling with them.[290]

---

[289] BigT p. 185.
[290] Phillips p. ix.

The principle at work in this conception of philosophy is that our aim is to view our concepts 'where they are' – in the *logical space* which is their home – and not to try to assimilate them to others or to reconstruct them on some newly invented models of our own. In philosophy what we seek is a reflective revelation of what already shows in our daily lives with our concepts.—This is the learning to sit and look that I have already referred to. Now in Phillips' account, the contemplative element is presented principally from the point of view of how we should conduct ourselves in philosophical *discussion*: that the *account* that the philosopher gives should resist meddling with its object. This is commendable and is the conception that also informs the present thesis. However, I believe that there is also room for another principle of contemplation here, which is consistent with the general principle of non-meddling but which is more directly to do with the *showing* than with the kind of *account* that we give, and could perhaps be distinguished by saying that it is (or can be) more in the nature of a contemplative *state.*

A first reaction to this suggestion might be to feel that the distinction I am driving at here is not a real one, for in order to be able to give a correct account of a concept in philosophy there must be an insight into the grammar of the concept in question and so – for as long as the account has not been meddlesome – something in any case must already have been *shown.* Hence the contemplative state – if it be real – is already a component of the contemplation that Phillips describes. Likewise we may argue that the criterion for having any kind of reflective insight into a concept must lie in our ability to give an account of it; so the two are in any case not distinguishable. However, I believe this would be a mistake, since we can distinguish *different* reflective contexts in which the grammar of a concept is shown. The distinction we require here turns on the further distinction between the showing that is needed in order to be persuaded of the coherence or otherwise of a philosophical conception, i.e. the showing that belongs to being able to give an *account* of a concept, and the showing that is linked with the instinctive reactions that, as I have argued, are prior to rational (or irrational) philosophical discourse. It is quite normal for these two modes of showing to lie in a state of tension *alongside* one another. Our responses to the private language argument will serve as an instance.

For those of use who find the private language argument convincing – and so agree that the notion of private ostensive definition is incoherent – it is quite usual to find (in fact it is the norm) that we are not at the same time able to rid ourselves of the *attraction* of the idea of private ostensive definition. The insight into its incoherence goes against the grain of the instinct to regard private ostensive definition as a possibility, and so the

two remain in tension with one another. This situation is repeated throughout philosophy. Now of course, this intellectual insight is not possible except insofar as we have grasped what the application of the concepts of subjective judgement, experience, meaning, definition, etc., shows in normal circumstances; and this means that the concepts of intellectual insight and of what shows in the application of the concepts are logically linked. But this must now be separated from the insight (or lack of it) that expresses itself at the instinctive level, for it is equally evident that how we react with these concepts at the instinctive level *also* defines a context in which the intelligibility of a concept shows.

Let us look at this in more detail. The intellectual insight that is required in philosophy is an insight into our primary understanding of a concept, but it is one that is revealed principally through the processes of reason and argument. Typically, it works through coming to see the *consequences* of adhering to a particular metaphysical interpretation of our concepts,—its bearing on the other things we accept as making sense, for example. This kind of reflection, then, is more by way of an extension of the normal application of our concepts but in a setting in which we are more attentive to their circumstances. For instance, being convinced by the private language argument is largely a matter of coming to see that a private ostensive definition is not a judgement validated from some inner Archimedean vantage point but is merely a subjective impression – which is not acceptable as a justification for language, since it abolishes the distinction between making sense and only appearing to make sense. We are convinced of the incoherence of the notion of private ostensive definition, then, because in thinking it through we are forced to acknowledge that it is in conflict with other conceptions which we are not prepared to give up. Now the recognition of what we are prepared to give up (or not) is an expression of the concepts 'speaking for themselves' from the contexts in which we normally use them. So this process does depend on a *showing* in as much as it depends on a circular appeal to what we already understand of these concepts,—and so depends ultimately on our primary understanding of them. But it does not depend on a reversal of our *first* instinct, which is to find the notion of private ostensive definition attractive and intelligible. Hence, what we find intellectually convincing and what we find instinctively intelligible pass each other by.

I argued earlier that the instinctive metaphysical reaction is the manifestation of a *tendency* to misunderstand a concept.—It certainly represents a lack of *insight* into the concept at the instinctive level. The reaction may therefore be regarded as an instance of

showing in its own right – albeit a tendency for a concept to show itself wrongly. Now it is at least conceivable for such instinctive reactions to go into *reverse*, and so for the concepts to speak correctly of themselves (or *show* themselves correctly) at the instinctive level. If so, I believe this creates an alternative context in which we might speak of a contemplative conception of philosophy, namely one which is constituted at this instinctive level of insight into our most fundamental concepts. And I think we may fruitfully think of this as a contemplative *state* just because it occurs – if it occurs at all – at the level of our instinctive reactions to our circumstances, and so is directly implicated in our introspective states and our self-consciousness.

Let us re-examine an example of such a reaction that might also be a candidate for this reversal:[291]

> It seems that I can *trace* my identity, quite independent of the identity of my body. And the idea is suggested that I trace the identity of something dwelling in a body, the identity of my mind. (NFL p.270)

I described this reaction – in the first instance – as the harmless expression of a subjective state or sensation. At one level it may be regarded as merely the expression of a subjective reaction to our own subjectivity, which in itself does not express either a rational or irrational act, and the words expressing it as being used in a 'secondary' sense, i.e. in a way that is not answerable to their normal, 'primary' use. But I also argued that it provided the foundation for the development of a metaphysical belief – in this case the belief in a 'self' dwelling in the body. Now the sense in which it may provide such a foundation needs to be refined in the present context, for I think we will have to say that the reaction is harmful not only where it actually generates a belief in the existence of an inner self, but also in the situation where it falls short of belief but nevertheless is *not* treated as *merely* secondary. Thus, to the extent that it contains the *idea* or *appearance* of a 'something' dwelling in the body, even if we are not led to *believe* in the existence of this 'ego', there is a clear sense in which this thought/experience is *illusory*.—The apparent intelligibility of the concept of an inner self, and its seeming presence, is an illusion.

We may apply the same principle to private ostensive definition. If I say that I can perceive the *essence* of a colour, then – in the absence of any further elaboration – 'essence' may be being used harmlessly in a secondary sense. But to the extent that I *do*

[291] See Chapter 6, Section 1 and Section 8 above.

seem to perceive it, this is an illusion, since '*essence* is expressed by grammar'[292] and is not an object of perception.

This distinction between philosophically harmless secondary uses of language and those that are problematic from the start has already been suggested in Section 5, where I noted that the reactions that give rise to philosophically confused conceptions do so because – unlike other secondary uses of language – they have the potential to compete with established concepts.[293] This conflict is potential in the initial instinctive reaction, and actual when it develops into a belief.—Or, to express the point in Phillips' terms, it becomes actively meddlesome, and hence generative of non-contemplative philosophical activity, as it turns into a belief. This potential for conflict is intrinsic to the new conception determined by the instinctive reaction, and it is this which justifies calling it illusory. By the same token, were these reactions to be reversed and replaced by ones which are 'true', these might then be regarded as expressing a reflective *insight* into the relevant concepts and so into the nature of the corresponding phenomena. We might cite as examples my ceasing to have any sense of being able to trace my identity independently of the identity of my body, or of being able to give myself a private ostensive definition of this colour. These are insights 'from the midst', and they remain 'contemplative' in Phillips' sense insofar as they directly reflect the concepts as they are embedded in our lives.

11 ~ Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have concluded my thesis by applying the lessons of the previous chapters, in regard to the nature of our possession of our concepts, to that arena in our lives where our concepts are most *tested*, namely in our struggles with certain of them in philosophy. The way in which concepts are embedded in our lives – in how they are structural to our form of life, and in how this is manifested in the different modes in which language enters our lives – is complex and confusing. To help elucidate this I have used as an anchor for the discussion the concept of what is *instinctive* in the use of language. This is central to our conception of the relationship between language and the 'hurly-burly' of life which together comprise the medium within which our concepts are possessed. It could be argued that the emphasis on instinct has brought a bias to the

[292] PI 371.
[293] It is difficult to see how 'Tuesday is lean' contains any kind of *illusion*, for example.

discussion. However, I have endeavoured to avoid using it as an *explanatory* concept but rather to place it centrally as an elucidatory *device*: one amongst the preferred alternatives to the formulation of a 'thesis', within a philosophical tradition predicated on the principle that the result of the investigation is something more *shown* than *said*,—more *understood* than *proven.*

Bibliography

BAKER, G. P. & HACKER, P. M. S., *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). (Hacker1)

BLYTH, R. H., *Zen & Zen Classics, Volume II, History of Zen*, (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1964).

BLYTH, R. H., *Zen & Zen Classics, Volume III, (Nangaku Branch), History of Zen*, (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1964).

COOK, J. W., 'The Metaphysics of Wittgenstein's On Certainty', *Philosophical Investigations*, 8:2, April 1985, pp. 81-119.

EMMETT, Kathleen, 'Forms of Life', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:3, July 1990, pp. 213-231. (Emmett)

GAITA, Raimond, 'Language and Conversation: Wittgenstein's Builders', in *Wittgenstein Centenary Essays*, ed. A. Philips Griffiths, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 101-115. (Gaita)

GARVER, Newton, *This Complicated Form of Life*, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1994).

HACKER, P. M. S., *Insight and Illusion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). (Hacker2)

HACKER, P. M. S., *Appearance and Reality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

HANNA, Patricia, 'Must Thinking Bats be Conscious?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:4, October 1990, pp. 350-356. (Hanna)

— 'If You Can't Talk About It You Can't Talk About It - A response to Mounce', *Philosophical Investigations*, 15:2, April 1992, pp. 185-190.

HERTZBERG, Lars, 'Primitive Reactions - Logic or Anthropology?', in *The Wittgenstein Legacy, Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Eds. French, Uehling & Wettstein, XVII, (Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 24-39. (Hertzberg)

LEVETT, Jonathan, 'Discussion: Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Propositions', *Philosophical Investigations*, 16:2, April 1993, pp. 154-162. (Levett)

MALCOLM, Norman, 'Wittgenstein: The relation of language to instinctive behaviour', *Philosophical Investigations*, 5:1, January 1982, pp. 3-22. (Malcolm1)

— 'Consciousness and Causality', in: D. M. Armstrong & Norman Malcolm, *Consciousness and Causality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 45-66. (Malcolm2)

— 'Language game (2), in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars*, eds. D. Z. Phillips, & P. Winch, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 35-44.

— *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. P. Winch, (London: Routledge, 1993).

MOUNCE, H. O., 'Understanding a Primitive Society', *Philosophy*, Vol. 48, 1973, pp. 347-362.

— 'On Nagel and Consciousness', *Philosophical Investigations*, 15:2, April 1992, pp. 178-184. (Mounce1)

MULHALL, S., *On Being in the World*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

NAGEL, Thomas, 'What is it like to be a bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 83, 1974, pp. 435-450. (Nagel)

ORR, Deborah Jane, 'Did Wittgenstein Have a Theory of Hinge Propositions?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 12:2, April 1989, 134-153. (Orr)

PHILLIPS, D. Z., *Philosophy's Cool Place*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). (Phillips)

RHEES, Rush, 'Preface', in: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969) pp. v-xiv. (RheesBB)

— 'Art and Philosophy', in *Without Answers*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 134-135.

— "The Philosophy of Wittgenstein", in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), pp. 37-54. (Rhees2)

— 'Can there be a Private Language?', in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), pp. 55-70.

— 'Wittgenstein's Builders', in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), pp. 71-84. (Rhees3)

— *Wittgenstein and the possibility of discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, (Cambridge University Press, 1998). (Rhees1)

— 'On Editing Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, 19:1, January 1996, pp. 56-57.

— 'Language as emerging from instinctive behaviour', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:1, January 1997, pp. 1-14. (Rhees4)

STERN, David G., 'A new exposition of the "private language argument": Wittgenstein's "Notes for the 'Philosophical Lecture'", *Philosophical Investigations*, 17:3, July 1994, pp. 552-565.

WALKER, Margaret Urban, 'Augustine's Pretence: Another Reading of Wittgenstein's PI 1', *Philosophical Investigations*, 13:2, April 1990, pp. 99-109.

WINCH Peter, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in *Ethics and Action*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1972), pp. 8-49.

— 'Discussion of Malcolm's Essay', in: Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. P. Winch, (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 95-135. (Winch)

— 'Norman Malcolm, Wittgensteinian Themes Essays 1978-1989', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:1, January 1997, pp. 51-64.

— 'Can we understand ourselves?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 20:3, July 1997, pp. 193-204.

WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Zettel*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

— *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. R. Rhees, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

— *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, (London: Routledge, 1971).

— 'Remarks on Fraser's *Golden Bough*', translated in *The Human World*, No. 3, May 1971.

— *On Certainty*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

— *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976).

— *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. Linda J. McAlister and Magarete Schättle, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).

— *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, eds. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

— *Culture and Value*, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. P. Winch, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

— *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

— *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

— *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

— *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, eds. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

— 'Remarks on Fraser's *Golden Bough*', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, trans. J. Beversluis, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993) pp. 118-155.

— 'Philosophy', Sections 86-93 of the "Big Typescript", in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993) pp. 160-199.

— 'Notes for lectures on "private experience" and "sense data"' in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, trans. R. Rhees, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), pp. 202-288.

— 'Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. J. C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993) pp. 371-411.

WOLGAST, Elizabeth, 'Whether Certainty is a Form of Life', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 147, 1987, pp. 151-165.

— 'Primitive Reactions', *Philosophical Investigations*, 17:4, October 1994, pp. 587-603.