Discourse On Method.

Introduction:

> The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.
>
> (Philosophical Investigations §255)

My title is both my purpose and Wittgenstein's target. My purpose is an investigation of Wittgenstein's distinctive philosophical method. He sees the traditional problems of philosophy as symptomatic of a misunderstanding of the deep grammar of our language. Wittgenstein analyses the grammar of ordinary language to make the problems of philosophy disappear, rather than solve them. I want to look at this method through the description of his treatment of scepticism. I shall begin by identifying the target of Wittgenstein's remarks, the particular philosophical scepticism invited by the foundationalism of Descartes. Since his 1737 paper of the above title Western philosophy has been terrorised by sceptical concerns. With the help of Descartes and Hume I will make the sceptic's position clear.

I shall then describe how Wittgenstein treats the 'problem'. Through an analysis of the ordinary use of the words 'knowledge' and 'doubt' he suggests the sceptic's radical position is senseless. A senseless question warrants no reply; thus he refuses the challenge. The purpose of this exposition is to demonstrate the linguistic method. Criticism is only possible if the tenets of Wittgenstein's position are taken to be a theory, which can then be opposed. I refrain from internal criticism of the treatment because I want to argue that Wittgenstein meant no such theory.

In refusing scepticism Wittgenstein does not give us an alternate theory from within the tradition; he rejects traditional philosophy. This leads to a critical discussion of Wittgenstein's method in relation to his remarks about the role of philosophy. He claims we must not "*advance any kind of*

theory"[1] but his work is laden with deep contributions to the ongoing debate. At the very least his stance on philosophy as a descriptive practice must be a philosophical theory. I want to suggest that Wittgenstein's own work lacks the alleged contradiction. If we attend to the method he indicates the problems dissolve.

Diagnosis:

The challenge of scepticism is as old as philosophy itself. For example, Pyrrho of Ellis[2] advocated an early sceptical position, a method was outlined to initiate a dialogue with an opponent and various techniques were used to prevent the dialogue from ending. This is an early reaction to the excesses of human reasoning: Pyrrho was suspicious of any thesis that departed from ordinary common sense. The strain of scepticism Wittgenstein aims at in his reflections arises from the work of Descartes. Descartes was dissatisfied with the sophistical ramblings of scholastic philosophy. Inspired by the recent successes in the natural sciences he proposed a radical reconstruction of philosophy. This success was grounded in a rigidly systematic methodology in which each new discovery was explained and grounded in those which precede it. For example geometry assures us of its proofs by tracing them backwards and grounding them in a set of self-evident propositions (Euclid's axioms). Knowledge could be seen as a homogenous structure advancing methodically outwards from its foundation of certain propositions. In his 'Discourse On Method'[3] Descartes suggests philosophy must begin afresh along these lines. He introduces the notion of methodological doubt in order to initiate the search for a set of indubitable propositions, the foundation of his reconstruction. Descartes believes he must suspend belief in everything that is in the slightest bit uncertain. He uses the argument from illusion to cast doubt upon his senses and the evil demon hypothesis to doubt his rationality thus leaving him doubting *everything*. We shall come back to the coherence of this position when we come to Wittgenstein's treatment. But if Descartes can doubt then he is thinking.

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[1] P.I. §109
[2] c 365-270 $_{BC}$, from Honderich, 1995
[3] 'Discourse on Method', C.S.M. I, p24.

He asserts, as his first foundational proposition: that he is thinking, that he exists[4]. From this starting point, one of subjective certainty, Descartes sets out to reconstruct the corpus of knowledge. By arguing that a supreme God would not constantly deceive us he assumes the validity of his clear and distinct ideas and goes on to recover the world. Descartes' foundations for knowledge are the certain or indubitable propositions of our experience.

The problems begin when we wonder about the status of our knowledge about the world beyond our experience. The sciences allegedly treat of an objective world independent of any subject. How can we move from subjective self-certainty to objective knowledge of the world? The sceptic will always ask, "How can you know that your senses report the true nature of the world?" It looks as if our criterion for knowledge wont reach out that far without inspiring scepticism. If the inferences we make do not follow deductively from our immediate sense experience the arguments we support them with must be inductive. Whatever answer is given the sceptic can attack with doubt. It is the nature of the empirical or factual world that is might have been otherwise; the world is contingent. The sceptic merely points to this everyday state of affairs to assert his point. Our inferences about the world are of variable strengths, may even just be wrong, but no induction about matters of fact can be certain.

In his Enquiries (part 1, §12) Hume outlines three main arguments the sceptic can use to throw doubt on the status of knowledge. The first of these focuses on the problem of illusion (e.g. Descartes' dream argument). He introduces the standard examples of illusions such as an oar appearing bent under water to indicate the possibility of a mistake, thus is our certainty lost. Hume suggests (Wittgenstein later agrees) that the strong thesis from illusion is untenable. We could not always be deceived without the concept of deceit losing its sense. The weaker thesis, when we are in error is less problematic. Hume suggests the occasional illusionary tendencies of our senses be relieved by appeal to reason. When

[4] '2nd Meditation', C. S. M. II, p17.

consideration of the circumstances or medium are brought to bear the illusions are no longer threatening. This position does not answer the sceptic though, for the process of rationalisation involved will also depend upon our senses. How can we know which experiences are veridical in order to use them to support or deny others?

The second argument Hume discusses he considers far more worrying. It rests on a familiar distinction between our perceptions and their objects. As I move about my perceptions of this table change but it would be strange to suggest that the table changed too. There is, then, a difference between my perceptions of an object and the object as it is in itself. Given this observation the sceptic asks how we can be sure that there are such objects. Again the arguments from illusion support the hypothesis. When I am dreaming I perceive all sorts of objects and events which are not causally grounded by the objects they refer to. Once again the certainty will not carry over. The third argument is a natural extension of the second and based on Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities[5]. Science argues that the 'true' or 'essential' natures of objects differ from the ways in which they effect us. What we see as redness is explained as the reflection of light at certain oscillating frequencies by the object. Given this disjunction how can we be sure that the scientific stories that we tell describe the true nature of the external world? This argument from primary and secondary qualities is a specialised version of the former argument directed against a particular view of science. Both arguments presuppose that the sensible qualities of an object lie in the mind of the perceiver and not in the object itself.

Traditionally there are two ways to approach the sceptical challenge. The first involves bridging the gap between the external world and our perceptions of it. It seems an intuitive move to posit an objective external world to account for the coherence of our multiple experiences. Our experience allows us to infer causal links between that experience and the world as its ground. Given the uniformity of nature it is a very strong

[5] 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding' §2, viii, 9.

induction indeed. But, however strong the induction it cannot be certain. Hume leans on the contingency of the empirical world to show that we cannot, logically, count on the uniformity of nature. But what it could mean, to doubt the uniformity of nature? When unexplained things happen we are prepared to re-examine the whole corpus of the natural sciences to fit the events in within the uniformity of nature, which is never itself doubted. However absurd, Hume's logical position is coherent and enough to open the door to scepticism, given his presuppositions. However realism attempts to bridge the gap between subjective certainty and the world scepticism will reign.

Idealism refuses the gap, suggesting there is no external world of objects as they are in themselves with which our ideas must correlate. Berkeley argues that any 'substance' (external world) in which our impressions cohere must be without qualities and is thus incoherent[6]. He suggests that our impressions, co-ordinated by God, are all that there is. Idealism appears in a number of guises including the transcendental idealism of Kant and the continental tradition.

Both these refutations take the problem seriously and lead to rather counterintuitive conclusions. They assume the model of knowledge laid down by Descartes and move systematically to further knowledge with this criterion. Wittgenstein would be suspicious of any philosophy that has come so far adrift from the world as these answers to scepticism. His own meditations contain a peerless consideration of doubt, knowledge and certainty that lead him to state that the sceptic's position is without sense.

Treatment:

'On Certainty', Wittgenstein's final notebook, deals explicitly with the sceptical problem, beginning with a discussion of Moore's refutation. In his paper "Proof of an External World" (1939) Moore takes up Kant's famous remark that it is "*a scandal to philosophy*"[7] that no refutation of the sceptic was yet satisfactory. He begins by distinguishing his terms from

[6] 'Principals of Human Knowledge' §79/80.

Kant in respect of "things to be met with in space" and "things external to our minds". He argues that if he can prove the existence of any such thing external to my (his?) mind it must follow that there are external objects, an external world. To count as something 'external to our minds' Moore's example would need to be logically independent of perceivers. He asserts that here are two hands, which he cannot doubt. It follows that there must be at least two external objects and so an external world. His argument is valid if, indeed, he does know his premise to be true. But this is where both the sceptic and Wittgenstein would take issue.

Wittgenstein's remarks begin with Moore's use of the word 'know'. Although Moore's statements have the look of correct grammar Wittgenstein believes that Moore's propositions mislead us. Moore wants to move from his subjective certainty to the assertion of knowledge. In sections 11 and 12 of On Certainty he makes his point:

> 11. We just don't see how very specialised the use of 'I know' is.
> 12. -For 'I know' seems to describe a state of affairs guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression 'I thought I knew'.
>
> (O.C. §11/12)

Firstly Wittgenstein notes that Moore wants to certify his proposition with his feeling of certainty. But a feeling or mental state of conviction does not lie behind a claim to knowledge. '*P*' does not follow from some-one else's uttering 'I know that *P*', however certain he is. It must first be shown that he *does* know P. A case of knowledge must admit of a justification, an answer to the question "How do you know?" It needs to be demonstrated that no mistake was possible in arriving at the assertion. Knowledge needs to be objectively established but Moore gives us mere subjective assurances. Here it can be seen how Moore fails to answer the sceptic by not taking the sceptical challenge seriously. The sceptic challenges our claims to knowledge on the grounds of not having access to an objective world beyond our experiences. Moore tells us that "I know this is a hand" but the sceptic replies "I believe it only seems as if you know." To count as knowledge it must be shown that no mistake was

[7] Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, preface, B xxxix, p34.

possible, I must have a clear conception about what counts as a demonstration and what counts as a mistake. In the case of my subjective experience I have no conception at all of what could be a mistake and what evidence. It follows that my subjective experience, however certain, cannot be knowledge.

So, initially Wittgenstein holds that Moore fails to answer the sceptic. What Moore intends, Wittgenstein claims is a misuse of grammar. It might be objected that Moore's propositions seem to be grammatically in order. What makes Wittgenstein's criticism bite when we understand quite well what Moore means, what makes his operationalisation of knowing the correct one? Wittgenstein's use of the word 'grammar' extends further than the purely syntactic notion to cover something of the logic of a word's use. In section 10 he discusses this notion pointing to the idea that a proposition gets its sense from the role it plays:

> "[A]nd from this is seen that it is only in use that the proposition has its sense"
>
> (O.C. §10)

To understand this we need to look back to the Investigations and Wittgenstein's treatment of language.

Wittgenstein begins with a series of meditations aimed at the Augustinian picture of language. Wittgenstein is quite unfair to Augustine whose analysis is far richer than Wittgenstein allows. Foglin[8] rightly suggests that it is not any particular thesis Wittgenstein attacks but an underlying set of philosophical assumptions. Wittgenstein's issue lies with the thesis that words name objects and that the meaning of a word is the object it names. Wittgenstein quotes Augustine:

> When they, my elders, named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw his and grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out.
>
> (Confessions I, ch8.)

[8] Foglin, 1987, p109.

He argues this is too simple. He doesn't imply that Augustine is wrong, just that he describes *one* way in which language operates; one game among many. He writes:

> Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication, but not everything we call language is this system.
>
> (P.I. §3)

In sections 1 and 2 of the Investigations Wittgenstein describes two language games. The first involves the practices of a shopkeeper when selling apples and involves colours and numbers. The second involves a language used between builders for the ordering and fetching of various stones. The second game is meant as an example of an Augustinian language and when contrasted with the first points to the variety of uses of word overlooked by the tradition.

It might be objected that it is Wittgenstein who is being over simplistic in his use of primitive languages. There are two reasons he does this. Firstly, to make his point, he is suggesting that the second game, in virtue of its evident primativeness, is exactly what the traditional thesis asserts. If we feel this does not give an adequate account of natural language then we have already been persuaded by Wittgenstein's remarks.

The second reason is of a more methodological nature. Wittgenstein felt that when philosophy sought out the essence of something it was moving too close to the ideal. In criticising his Tractarian view in section 107 of the Investigations he remarks that ideality was the requirement of his analysis and not its result. It is the subtle presupposition that we seek out essences that leads us to overlook the complexity of the task at hand.

> We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground.
>
> (P.I. §107.)

The analogy here is that if we want to understand we cannot afford to idealise, the world we wish to understand is one of particulars. Throughout his work he uses countless examples of the everyday use of

language to correct the philosophical myopia. Language one (shopkeeper) helps to "*disperse the fog*"[9] of this traditional idealisation.

Wittgenstein's insight is that the multitude of practices we call language have no essence. He asks us to consider games[10]. There are card games, ball games and games that involve no props. There are games to play alone and games for groups; games have rules but even a solitary child playing alone (no rules) can play a game. Wittgenstein states that there is nothing at all common to these practices over and above their being games. Similarly he suggests that there is nothing common to linguistic practices over and above the use of language. Language is made up of a huge variety of language games associated by nothing more than a family resemblance[11].

Wittgenstein is aware of the tension this pronunciation will create among philosophers. He remarks in section 65 that it will be objected that he "*take*[s] *the easy way out!*" and fails to account for the essence of language or language games. But it is exactly this sort of assumption, the demand for an explanation of the essence of language, which Wittgenstein resists. Language is the relationship between games with different functions, not an entity with a single function.

Having recognised the multiplicity of language games and their functions Wittgenstein suggests philosophers give up their search for the ideality of language and look to the use rather than the meaning of a word. Wittgenstein describes the many different purposes for which language can be employed. It becomes apparent that there is a close relationship between the meaning of a word and the use it is put to; the exact meaning of a word depending on its employment as a move in a language game. We can see this point clearly when considering ambiguous uses of language. The expression, "The police were told to stop drinking at 11 o'clock." has at least two possible interpretations. It is only within the

[9] P.I. §5.
[10] P.I. §66.
[11] P.I. §67.

original context that the intended meaning can be understood. The same contextualisation applies to individual words within sentences (the use of the word *same* in this sentence!).

There must be something, though, which allows us to decide the intended employment of a word. If the word itself is without meaning then what determines the correct application of the word as a move within a game? Wittgenstein writes:

> But we *understand* the meaning of a word when we hear or say it; we grasp it in a flash, and what we grasp in this way is surely something different from the 'use' which is extended in time.
>
> (P.I. §138)

Here he shows he is aware of the problem. His imaginary interlocutor argues for the tradition; that there must be an image, a mental state or a rule to determine the correct application of a word. But there is no logical compulsion to the interpretation of a rule or an image; these theses merely push the problem back one stage. What rule is it that determines the correct interpretation of our rule? And yet our justifications must end. Wittgenstein describes the practices involved in coming to understand something in order to demonstrate the importance of training. I have been training in the philosophical language game. Despite my frequent exclamations, "Now I understand!" (and "Oh, I thought I understood.") the facts of the matter, my understanding, can only be founded in agreement in the wider philosophical community. The community of this language game provides the objective criteria for my correct use of philosophical words and concepts. I can only demonstrate the quality of this training in the *use* of the words; by playing the game. It is our training within a particular language game that allows us to '*grasp in a flash*' the use that a word is being put to and so understand its purpose.

We can see from this that the correct application of a word, and so its meaning, is founded in the practices of the linguistic community. This is not necessarily a question of rational choice:

> 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.

(P.I. §241)

For example the naming of redness gains its place from the logic of colour words. The logic or deep grammar of these concepts is, at least in part, a question of the ways in which colour is important to us, the role colour plays in determining our behaviour. It is true to say that nothing determines the meaning of my words. Non-the-less they have a function within a language game which is itself an embedded aspect of our human form of life.

I believe Wittgenstein's views about meaning amount to a refutation of the traditional view of language on the grounds of over-simplicity. Language is conceived of as a related system of linguistic practices. Understanding and meaning are a question of learning the appropriate uses of words in their particular settings, their language games. The appropriate use of a word is founded in the agreement of the linguistic community. This agreement is not a question of rational choice but depends on the logic of the language game in question, which is deeply embedded within our ways of life. This brings us to *"[T]he meaning of a word is its use in the language."*[12]

If we accept this we are closer to accepting his potentially counter-intuitive suggestions about the word 'know' in respect of Moore. Wittgenstein accepts that there are circumstances in which Moore's propositions could be given a sense[13]. There will always be a language game to justify and make sense of the strangest propositions. But within the philosophical language game that Moore plays the similarity of his expressions to those of another game give the illusion of sense. For Wittgenstein Moore cannot know, "Here is one hand."[14]

The grammatical misunderstanding of knowledge opens the door to the wider sceptical issue. Wittgenstein follows that if knowledge needs an objective ground then so does doubt. If we are to meaningfully doubt

[12] P.I. §43.
[13] O.C. §23, §622.
[14] Moore 1939, p292.

something we must have a clear idea of what it would be like for things to be otherwise. In section 24 he states the sceptic's (idealist's) position but writes:

> [W]e should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and don't know how to answer this straight off.
>
> (O.C. §24)

Here he is questioning the sceptic's entire challenge. What does it mean to doubt the existence of the external world? Wittgenstein suggests that everything speaks in favour of the external world and nothing against it, that "*Grounds for* doubt *are lacking!*"[15]. He gives us a long and thorough analysis of the grammar of doubt and knowledge to dissipate the confusion.

In section 115 Wittgenstein asserts, "*The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.*" The very fact that we must have an alternative conception against which our doubt can push assures us that some propositions are certain. Although we could turn upon those and doubt them another time we are not in a position to doubt everything. Wittgenstein writes, "[*S*]*ome propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.*"[16] The language game in which the doubt is being expressed shapes the logic of our investigations. For example in the case of scientific experiments we must suspend judgement in the outcome of the experiment but we could hardly proceed if we doubted the apparatus. The attempt to doubt *everything* attempts to doubt it's own language game and so renders itself senseless. "*If you are not certain of any fact, you are not certain of the meaning of your words either*."[17] Doubt gets its sense from the language game in which it operates.

To tie together these connected meditations we can consider the notion of grounds. Wittgenstein begins by describing the process of justification we use to authorise doubt and knowledge. He observes that we must know what a mistake might be like. To judge a mistake we must "*already judge*

[15] O.C. §4.
[16] O.C. §341.

in conformity with mankind." [18] That is, there must be considerable agreement about what would count as a justification. In the case of any justification *that* justification must come to an end[19]. He runs through the process of calculating to give us an example. What makes '12*12=144' true? Well, we can demonstrate the definition of the numerals and give a rule to follow for correct multiplication. But what then makes the interpretation of the rule correct? For Descartes we must come up with a self-evident proposition as the final ground for our calculation. Wittgenstein suggests that during our training the grounds for arithmetic were established with: "this *is how we calculate."*[20] He is suggesting that the justification end in acceptance. He observes that we begin as children by believing "*whole systems of propositions*"[21] rather than single self-evident propositions. Only after we have implicitly accepted a network of interlocking and mutually supporting beliefs can the games of doubting, knowing and justifying get started[22].

It is in this respect that Wittgenstein initially found Moore's propositions interesting. Wittgenstein contests the claim to knowledge but allows that Moore's propositions are indubitable. We do not know what would count as evidence to the contrary. These are exactly the sort of assumptions Wittgenstein finds "*at the rock bottom of* [his] *convictions."*[23] His system of mutually supporting propositions forms a picture of the world, "*the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false*."[24] In section 205 he writes:

> If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false.
>
> (O.C. §205)

This picture, which lies behind my making sense of my life, Wittgenstein suggests is an ungrounded but necessary set of assumptions. He concedes the difficulty of accepting "*the groundlessness of our*

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[17] O.C. §114.
[18] O.C. §156.
[19] O.C. §192.
[20] O.C. §212.
[21] O.C. §141.
[22] O.C. §160.
[23] O.C. §248.
[24] O.C. §94.

believing."[25] but his descriptions of the practices we are involved in reveal this prospect.

There is a danger here of interpreting this as leading to a profound relativism on the question of truth. The true is grounded against a background of assumptions and agreements, but what then of necessary truths or the propositions of arithmetic (etc.)? Are there any truths not founded in mere agreement? Wittgenstein's first response would be to point out that agreement in language games arises out of our practices. In section 204 he writes:

> [I]t is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of our language game.
>
> (O.C. §204)

This follows the notion that it is human behaviour, human practices, that found our meanings. As we saw in the section on calculating above, Wittgenstein does think mathematical truths are grounded like *this*. Wittgenstein's thinking has a parallel impact on traditional theories of both meaning and knowledge. In sections 284 and 287 he introduces naturalistic observations to suggest how our beliefs arise out of our natural experiences. Truth, then, is not a question of rational choice but instead founded in our most basic, non-theoretical world picture. There still may be a considerable charge of cultural relativism which Wittgenstein's text supports. He allows different systems to posit different truths and hints at the notion of explanatory poverty in section 286. Consider the different justifications and truths espoused by Christianity and the natural sciences within our own culture. Wittgenstein is vague about how these systems might interlock and commentators seize on this for criticism. I believe Wittgenstein would have remained content with describing the situation as it is in the world rather than attempting to make problems out of its detailed explanation.

It is important to note at this point how Wittgenstein's attack blurs its target. The meditations on the possibility of knowledge and doubt bear upon the foundational methods of Descartes. His knowledge was

[25] O.C. §166.

indubitable (and so not knowledge) and his methodological doubt radical (and so without sense). It was initially Descartes' invitation to doubt everything that gave birth to modern scepticism. As I mentioned earlier in respect of Augustine Wittgenstein's overall target is not any particular philosophical thesis but the deeply underlying presuppositions of traditional philosophy. It is not scepticism he hopes to answer but instead to clarify the confusions embedded in the thinking that leads to scepticism. In On Certainty the idealist is addressed, but traditional philosophy is in the dock.

Wittgenstein's comments begin with the observation that knowledge requires an objective ground. Given this we can see that claims of subjective certainty cannot count as knowledge. The foundational status of Descartes' first philosophy is thus questionable. The same objective grounds are required in the case of doubting, we must have some idea what a doubt would look like. Radical doubt, which doubts its own language game, is senseless; Descartes method becomes dubious. Wittgenstein describes the propositions that support judgement as a shifting network which lend mutual support to one another, rather than set of axiomatic or self-evident propositions. ("*And one might almost say that these foundation walls are carried by the whole house.*"[26]) He suggests that our grounds for knowledge are founded in a world picture, itself unfounded and at the same time indubitable (we would not know how to begin). We can see from this that Wittgenstein refuses Descartes' entire system of knowledge. Where Descartes gives special status to his immediate experience, as grounds for truth and as the criterion of knowledge, Wittgenstein makes no such distinction, indicating instead the certainty of the life-world.

Now, scepticism presupposes the Cartesian system. The sceptic relies on the subjective criterion for knowledge to block the move to knowledge of the external world. This gives the sceptic a "*false picture of doubt*"[27]. The sceptic cannot insist upon his doubts without showing us how we can

[26] O.C. §248.
[27] O.C. §249.

make sure. But the sceptics' challenge is founded on not being able to make sure; his doubt is then meaningless. Wittgenstein suggests that both the sceptic's challenge, and his presupposed system of knowledge are senseless, as such warrant no answer. Wittgenstein's re-evaluation of certainty, in our ways of life rather than experience, means I can no more doubt the existence of external objects than I can that I am thinking. Thus is the sceptic cured of his misunderstanding.

Cure?

Whether this treatment is considered effective or not depends to some large extent on the acceptability of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy as a whole. In section 109 of the Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein writes, "*And we may not advance any kind of a theory.*" or similarly, in the Tractatus:

> The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing but what can be said … and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.
>
> (T. §6.53)

These apparently anti-philosophical statements, not uncommon throughout Wittgenstein's work, lead to a strong tension. In the closing propositions of the Tractatus Wittgenstein tells us that his whole work is meaningless. Although this clearly follows from his arguments it is baffling to comprehend how we can learn from such nonsense. He ends:

> What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.
>
> (T. §7)

And yet he did not remain silent. Wittgenstein did not restrict himself to the propositions of the natural sciences and his anti-philosophical position is itself a philosophical position. Some commentators suggest this potential internal contradiction must marginalise Wittgenstein's ideas, ("*What we can't say we can't say and we can't whistle either.*"[28])

I feel a philosopher of the magnitude of Wittgenstein could not have made such an elementary error. That we experience a difficulty warrants a

[28] Ramsey, 1931, p238.

careful examination of our own understanding of his work. In the previous sections I have attempted to demonstrate Wittgenstein's method. In this section I want to defend Wittgenstein against the contradiction criticism by arguing that Wittgenstein himself meant no more than this: to demonstrate his method. I will begin by characterising Wittgenstein's attitude towards philosophy. I will then place this attitude in context of the tradition and his own work before defending it against the repercussions.

In his book 'Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy' Fann argues that the strong anti-philosophical flavour comes through Wittgenstein's position on metaphysics. Wittgenstein branded metaphysics as senseless throughout his career. But the boundaries drawn about sense in his work are not meant to outlaw metaphysics or end philosophy as, say, Carnap[29] would. Wittgenstein's project is much closer to Kant's in this respect. Both wanted to defeat scepticism by drawing the bounds of sense, Kant around reason and Wittgenstein around language. Both appreciated the urge towards philosophical contemplation as a very human pastime, both were interested in *understanding* philosophy. Drury[30] quotes Wittgenstein in conversation:

> Don't think I despise metaphysics or ridicule it. On the contrary, I regard the great metaphysical writings of the past as among the noblest productions of the human mind.

Wittgenstein had a great appreciation of the depth of philosophical puzzlement. Given this appreciation where do we get the tension?

Wittgenstein quotes Augustine's question "*Quid est ergo tempus?*"[31] as a typically deep and philosophical meditation, a question about something I know but somehow cannot say. Wittgenstein's observation is that this is superficially like a scientific or factual question, we expect to be able to answer it, to explain what time is. A scientific theory to explain the facts of time is perfectly permissible but this would not then embrace the true axis of the philosophical question. Again it is the reconstruction of

[29] Carnap, 1932.
[30] 'A Symposium on Wittgenstein' in Fann (1967) p68.

philosophy *as a science* that leads us astray. Throughout his life Wittgenstein was certainly opposed to this conception of philosophy:

> Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.
> (The world 'philosophy' must mean something whose place is above or below the natural sciences, not beside them.)
>
> (T. §4.111)

> It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones.
>
> (P.I. §109)

The nature of a philosophical puzzle is not a question of facts, not an empirical problem. Wittgenstein writes:

> A philosophical question has the form: "I don't know my way about."
>
> (P.I. §123)

He suggests that philosophy emerges from the conceptual confusion which occurs when we run up against the sensible limits of language, we become lost. We now have our tension: a delight in the deep subtleties of metaphysical questioning opposed by the impossibility of answering them. This leads to Wittgenstein's reconception of the philosophical task. Wittgenstein suggests:

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

Here he steers us away from misguided scientific analysis towards the proper task of philosophy:

> We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems … Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.
>
> (P.I. §109)

That is, the descriptive analysis of the grammar of our ordinary language. We naturally feel an urge to express the deep subtlety of our being in the world but, captivated by the surface similarities of our propositions, we attempt to give theoretical answers. These nonsensical theories become and give rise to the 'problems' of traditional philosophy. Wittgenstein

[31] Confessions XI, Ch22.

holds that the proper role of philosophy is to understand the reasons for our confusion. The problems of philosophy are made to disappear by reminding ourselves of the ordinary uses of our language.

In his introduction to his book 'Mind and World' M^{c}Dowell similarly attacks what he calls 'constructive' philosophy. He argues that we encounter distinctively philosophical 'How possible?' questions, which derive their meaning from their implicit frameworks. If we made the framework explicit we would uncover grounds for believing that the very subject matter of our question is impossible. M^{c}Dowell also advocates descriptive rather than explanatory philosophy, I cite him here to elucidate Wittgenstein's technique. In the case of scepticism we assume the Cartesian framework and theorise about the possibility of knowledge. Wittgenstein shows that by making the framework explicit we see the impossibility of the theories, further: because their foundation is senseless we see the problem disappear. It is when we are tempted to answer these metaphysical worries with an explanation that constructive philosophy is born and all sense lost.

I have described one application of Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis: the dissolution of the problem of scepticism. We also needed to take in Wittgenstein's reflections on meaning. In the case of meaning we saw the analysis of language games in order to show the poverty of the theoretical views about language. The implicit framework of rules and representations is made explicit and the impossibility of the tradition demonstrated. At the same time grammar reveals the priority of use in determining the meaning of a word. Wittgenstein suggests that philosophers concerned traditionally with meaning might do better to consider the use of words instead.

Scepticism is cured by a similar grammatical analysis, this time of the ordinary use of knowledge, doubt and certainty. Ordinary language exposes the Cartesian theory of knowledge. This framework, and the views that assume it, is demonstrated to be senseless. Thus the sceptic's challenge is undone. The grammar of this analysis reveals an alternative

notion of certainty founded in a world picture rather than subjective experience. In both cases the grammatical analysis delivers the errors of our ways. M^{c}Dowell's suggested implicit framework is gradually brought to light and the contentions of traditional, or constructive, philosophy are shown to be nonsense.

In this way we can see how the proper practice of philosophy both "*leaves everything as it is*"[32] and "*clear*(s) *up the ground of language*"[33]. It leaves everything as it is by doing away with all empirical explanation and making no factual contribution to knowledge. Science is not the business of philosophy. It clears up the ground of language by helping to make explicit the mistakes we make with our use of language. When faced with a deep metaphysical question like "What is time?" we are inclined to give a theoretical answer and posit, for example, A and B-series time[34]. Philosophy soothes our anxious confusion, "*destroys nothing but houses of cards*"[35], the illusions generated by that confusion. Which bring us to:

> The real discovery is … one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* into question. -Instead we now demonstrate a method, by examples…
>
> (P.I. §133)

So, Wittgenstein was opposed to constructive philosophy although he had great sympathy for the source of the confusion. Instead of theorise, he suggests conceptual analysis. He was not opposed to philosophy per-se, just anguished at the senseless knots it tied itself in. Grammatical analysis was the way forward.

But there is a deeper issue about the content of Wittgenstein's work. Within the pages are the makings of a theory of knowledge, theory of language, and more. It is tempting to construct positive theses from his work; so many promising avenues of thought are opened. Many commentators such as Kripke[36] or Pitcher[37] would rather overlook

[32] P.I. §124.
[33] P.I. §118.
[34] J. M. E. M^{c}Taggart. from Honderich (1995)
[35] P.I. §118.
[36] Kripke, 1982
[37] Pitcher, 1964.

Wittgenstein's restraint and boldly interpret these derivative theses, attributing them to Wittgenstein. I believe this is mistaken. Further, it is alleged to be difficult to understand Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical stance in the light of so much substantial philosophy. This too is a mistake. Three arguments make this contention more palatable, the first attempts to allow the 'discovery' of philosophical insight, the second and third attempt to deny Wittgenstein's culpability.

Firstly we can look at the notion of revealing in the Tractatus. Wittgenstein says that his propositions are without sense but believes they can serve as elucidation. They are without sense because they are the most general logical propositions. They elucidate because they reflect the structure of our language and so the world. Thus Wittgenstein seizes the bull by the horns. We would have to accept his particular concept of sense: factual discourse, and admit some distinction between good and bad nonsense. Wittgenstein's position needs considerable refining to become tenable.

Although he abandoned the picture theory and the clear-cut notion of nonsense along with logical atomism there is something of the feeling of 'revealing' left in his later work. We have seen how the meaning of a word is fixed by its use in a language game and how the language games are founded in our forms of life. We saw the logic and nature of colour-space somehow establish the grammar of colour words. Something that we have always known but can not really say *is* revealed in this way. There is some small scope here for licensing the uncovering (*alithia*?) of philosophical insight whilst carrying out the method. I believe this is a desperate move, I would rather downplay the significance of his positive ideas.

It is not clear to me that Wittgenstein ever intended a 'meaning as use' theory. These derivative theses belong to interpretation more than to Wittgenstein. Over and above his anti-theoretical remarks I do not believe he states a strict identity. In section 43 of the Investigations he writes:

> For a *large* class of cases-though not for all- in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.
>
> (P.I. §43)

I merely want to suggest that a *large* class of cases is not an identity. Similarly Wittgenstein indicates that considerations of use instead of meaning might be fruitful. At the end of section 1 we have:

> -But what is the meaning of the word "five"? No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used.
>
> (P.I. §1)

The business of theories is to prescribe normative laws and identities in explanation. In the investigations use is descriptive rather than prescriptive, the identity claim is not intended. These considerations must weaken the case for a systematic theory.

It might be argued that Wittgenstein dissolves some philosophical problems, such as the relationship between a word and its meaning, but replaces them with others. Problems arise from the nature and status of language games, their interlock and relationship to the world-picture. Wittgenstein is accused of being vague about his positive contribution; further, that the posits of this contribution are the clear symptoms of his theses. Yet if we remember his method this vagueness is no criticism. Wittgenstein does not swap old problems for new, he demonstrates the alleviation of all such difficulties. He is deliberately vague in the Investigations about the definition of a language game for he is positing no such entity. It has been suggested[38] that the English notion is grounded in a liberal translation on the part of Anscombe[39]. 'Language game' is an attempt to capture set of practices with essentially vague boundaries, a question of conceptual clarification. Interlock between individual games is more a question of flow within a body of relations. Wittgenstein uses these terms to grasp at deep issues but his concepts remain linguistic and descriptive; they do not refer to entities as the concepts of a scientific theory might. In the absence of a constructive

[38] Fann, 1969, p99 FN.
[39] Fann notes Wittgenstein wrote 'sprachen' rather than 'sprachenspiel'.

theory Wittgenstein's terminology lacks the commitment which would demand clarification.

The style of the texts (Tractatus aside) and the biographical reports of the man himself do not support the notion of systematicity. Fann writes that he once took a swing at a student for suggesting he was systematic[40]. The prose of the Investigations and On Certainty are more in the style of repeated meditation, worries going over in Wittgenstein's mind being expressed on the paper. Wittgenstein's writings could sympathetically be read as the journey of a troubled mind through the landscapes of philosophy. Fann indicates a similarity of style, both in exposition and method[41], in the work of Augustine and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein was passionately caught up in the philosophical problems of his time and the evolution and growth of his thought throughout his notebooks is clear. These are, perhaps, his own confessions.

On this point I would like to return to section 133 of the Investigations:

> Instead we now demonstrate a method, by examples…
>
> (P.I. §133)

I believe that Wittgenstein's monumental contribution to the ongoing debate in philosophy, the private language argument and other minds for example, is very much anterior to his presentation of his method. Wittgenstein resisted the publication of his philosophy exactly because it would be misunderstood and interpreted as a system of theories. He believed that much of what he wrote would be turned into dogma, even by the best of his students. He felt that his thinking would suit some future age and feared that, "*The seed I am most likely to sow is a certain jargon.*"[42] These are proud claims but I think that something of the truth of them can be seen in modern philosophy. We can best alleviate the tension in his work if we consider the potential derivative 'theories' merely as the *examples* for his *method*. They are not, in themselves, internally important to the thrust of Wittgenstein's originality, not the intended point

[40] Fann, 1969, p101 FN.
[41] See P.I. §1 and §90 for examples. Augustine considers use.
[42] Wittgenstein's Lectures in the Spring of 1939, quoted in Fann, (1969).

of his writing. The real value lies in attending to what Wittgenstein is doing in the texts rather than what he is saying. Perhaps we could say that it is the *use* of Wittgenstein's philosophy rather than its *meaning* that is pertinent.

Even if we concede that the derivative theories were not Wittgenstein's intention we still have a final hurdle to overcome. If we asked Wittgenstein what the proper method of philosophy was he would *explain* that it involved conceptual clarification. This, along with Wittgenstein's other core views, is undeniably a substantial philosophical position. If we must really advance "*…no kind of theory...*"[43] how can Wittgenstein justify having written at all? We can understand this by attending to two possible uses of the word theory. In respect of our criticism 'theory' refers to a set of core beliefs or suppositions, the final justification of our position. These suppositions amount to the framework that gives our discourse its sense. We have already seen how Wittgenstein is sensitive to this point. His notion of the world picture as the unfounded presupposition of our language games parallels the relationship between *this* notion of theory and its discourse. Our criticism suggests that Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical position is senseless but I charge that Wittgenstein would agree, given the above operationalisation of 'theory'.

The dictionaries[44] define a theory as a systematic explanation of phenomena. Both the dictionaries and Wittgenstein tend towards a more scientific understanding of the term. Theories lay down normative laws to govern predictive and explanatory opportunities. I believe the texts (Wittgenstein's use) support this second meaning of 'theory'. We have already seen how Wittgenstein differentiates philosophical enquiry from science and the mistake of constructive philosophy. I have suggested from biography that Wittgenstein was thorough but non-systematic. His suggestions are not normative law-like relations but descriptions, he describes language *as it is* rather than legislating for what *it must be*. In this respect his style is the thorough description of linguistic phenomena

[43] P.I. §109.
[44] Honderich, 1990.

rather than systematic explanation of empirical phenomena. If Wittgenstein's remarks are understood as opposing constructive theories rather than core theories then he cannot be accused of outright nonsense.

I have attempted to give a sufficiently detailed description of the Wittgensteinian method in practice. The dissolution of scepticism gives a wide enough introduction to come to some understanding of the workings of grammatical analysis. I have argued that this method is the work that Wittgenstein set out to share in his writing. The alleged tensions within his texts about the purpose and status of philosophy only arise when we disregard Wittgenstein's own direction. If we construct theories from his writing we construct philosophical conundrums such as the contradiction problem. This is exactly his point, that philosophical theory construction leads to nonsense. To accept the method, on its own merits, as Wittgenstein's real contribution to philosophy, and to value the associated examples as interesting accompaniments, resolves the tension. If we use the Wittgensteinian methods on his own work the problems disappear.

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